

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in Colorado Are Living Near Chemical Dangers

The Center for Effective Government graded states based on the dangers faced by people of color and residents with incomes below the poverty line living within one mile of dangerous facilities, compared to white and non-poor people in these areas. **Colorado scored poorly with a “D” grade.**

Nationally, 7.5 percent of the population lives within one mile of a hazardous facility.

Key Findings

- Nearly 280,000 Colorado residents (5.6 percent of the total population) live within one mile of a facility storing large amounts of extremely hazardous chemicals. These “fenceline communities” face potential chemical leaks and explosions on a daily basis.
- Children of color under 12 are twice as likely to live in fenceline communities as white children.
- **Poor Latino children are almost three times more likely to live in fenceline communities** compared to white children who are not poor.

Chemical dangers are real, and incidents are happening across Colorado.

In 2015, the Boulder Scientific chemical plant in Mead had a fire that erupted during chemical processing. The chemical fire burned for a few hours and injured two workers. Chemical fires like these can start a chain reaction and ignite explosive chemicals or cause the release of toxic gases.

Colorado has several chemical manufacturing and distribution facilities that keep large volumes of chemicals on site. The state also has food manufacturing facilities that use **anhydrous ammonia** refrigeration systems. Anhydrous ammonia is a toxic, deadly gas that can travel several miles from its source. A major release could endanger thousands of nearby residents. Fertilizer distributors also store this gas for use on farmland.

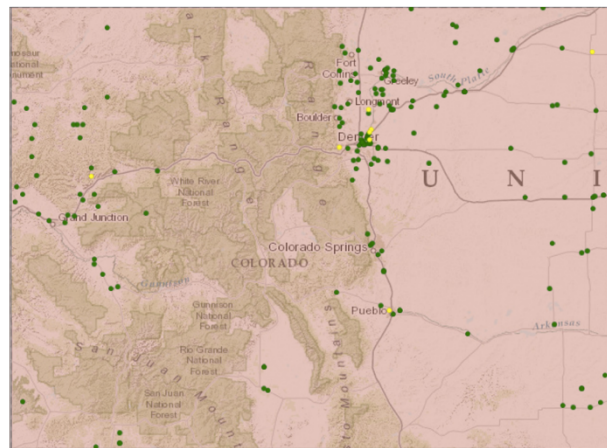
Colorado also has petroleum refineries and natural gas processing plants that are linked to the recent fracking boom in the state. These store highly combustible chemical mixtures capable of causing significant damage.

Altogether, **Colorado’s 179 high-risk facilities store up to 80 million pounds of toxic and flammable chemicals.** Each receives shipments of dangerous chemicals, which travel by rail or truck, putting additional communities in danger of catastrophic disasters.

Are people of color and low-income residents of Colorado safe from chemical hazards?

The percentage of Colorado residents living in fenceline zones (5.6 percent) is less than the national average of 7.5 percent. However, poor residents and people of color are significantly more likely to live near chemical dangers than white residents. This contributed to Colorado earning a “D” in both the Poverty and People of Color grades.

For example, over eight percent of children of color under 12 live in fenceline communities, compared to four percent of white children, **making them twice as likely to live near hazardous facilities.** Similarly, children under age 12 in poverty are 1.7 times more likely to live near hazardous facilities than non-poor children in the same age group.



[Click here to open an interactive map of your neighborhood.](#)

Poor children of color, however, face the highest likelihood of danger. **Poor Latino children are almost three times more likely to live near a hazardous facility than white children who are not in poverty.** Black children are two and a half times more likely. Living in the shadow of an industrial facility increases stress on poor communities as they worry about the potential for a catastrophic disaster and daily exposures to toxic emissions. Living near these facilities can also decrease home values, meaning many poor families can't afford to move to safer neighborhoods if they want to do so.

Many children do not escape these dangers at school. Nine percent of Latino children go to school within one mile of a hazardous facility, compared to around five percent of white children – meaning they are 1.7 times more likely to go to schools these plants than white children.

Inequities in Likelihood of Living in a Fenceline Community

Racial Inequities			Income (Poverty) Inequities		
	Score	Grade		Score	Grade
Percentage of People of Color Who Live in Fenceline	8.1%	C	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	8%	C
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.8 times more likely	D	Likelihood of Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to those not in poverty)	1.5 times more likely	D
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	8.6%	C	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	9.3%	C
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	2.1 times more likely	D	Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.7 times more likely	D
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	7.9%	B	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	8.8%	C
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.5 times more likely	C	Likelihood of Children Receiving Free Lunch to Attend Schools in Fenceline (compared to children not receiving free lunch)	1.4 times more likely	D
Percentage of Elderly of Color Who Live in Fenceline	8%	C	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	7.4%	C
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	1.6 times more likely	C	Likelihood of Elderly Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly people not in poverty)	1.4 times more likely	C
People of Color Grade		D	Poverty Grade		D
Overall Grade: D					

What you can do to protect your community from dangerous chemicals.

Colorado residents like you can help. You can organize people in your community and educate others about these dangers. You can learn about your local zoning process (if your state gives local governments zoning authority) and whether it protects community members from nearby industrial plants that use hazardous chemicals – and share what you learn with your friends and neighbors. You can attend public meetings and planning hearings and urge decision makers to think carefully about the sites chosen for new industrial facilities, and you can write, call, and meet with other state, county, and city officials to send the message that **all** Colorado residents deserve to be protected from chemical dangers.

You can also demand that the federal government require facilities to switch to safer chemicals and alternatives whenever feasible and urge the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Colorado residents can push local governments to require buffer zones around new and expanded chemical facilities to ensure homes and schools are not built nearby.

Table 1: Percentage of Population Who Live in Fenceline Communities, by Age and Race

	Black	Latino	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander/ Native Hawaiian	White Not Hispanic	All Races
All Ages	7.7%	8.9%	6.8%	5.1%	4.5%	5.6%
0-17	7.7%	9.4%	5.7%	4.6%	4.1%	6.0%
18-64	7.5%	8.7%	7.0%	5.1%	4.5%	5.5%
65+	9.5%	8.2%	8.7%	6.3%	4.9%	5.4%
Total # in fenceline	14,712	92,613	3,123	7,416	157,367	279,069
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.7	2.0	1.5	1.1	---	---

Table 2: Percentage of Poor Population Who Live in Fenceline Communities, by Age and Race

	Black	Latino	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander/ Native Hawaiian	White Not Hispanic	All Races
All Ages	10.2%	11.0%	6.8%	5.1%	5.6%	8.0%
0-17	10.0%	11.6%	5.1%	5.6%	5.1%	9.1%
18-64	10.2%	10.5%	7.8%	4.7%	5.6%	7.4%
65+	13.0%	9.6%	5.7%	7.6%	6.4%	7.4%
Total # in fenceline	5,223	27,659	760	825	17,836	52,640
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.8	2.0	1.2	1.1	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.5	1.3	Just as likely	1.0	1.3	1.5
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	2.3	2.5	1.5	1.2	1.3	---

Table 3: Percentage of Children Who Attend Public School in Fenceline Communities, by Grade and Race

	Black	Latino	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander/ Native Hawaiian	White Not Hispanic	All Races
All Grades	5.3%	9.0%	5.6%	4.3%	5.4%	6.5%
Pre-K - 2	7.8%	9.7%	5.9%	5.1%	5.5%	7.0%
3-7	5.6%	8.6%	5.3%	4.4%	5.3%	6.4%
8-12	3.2%	8.9%	5.6%	3.7%	5.3%	6.2%
Total # in fenceline	2,125	25,118	373	1,261	25,849	56,079
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	Just as likely	1.7	Just as likely	1.2 times less likely	---	---

Find the Full Report at [ForEffectiveGov.org](https://www.foreffectivegov.org)