

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in Idaho 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. **Idaho scored in the middle with a “C” grade.**

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

Key Findings

- Over 82,000 Idaho residents (5.3 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 1.6 times more likely to live in fenceline communities than white children.
- **Poor black children are almost seven times more likely to live near hazardous facilities than white children above the poverty line.**

Chemical dangers are real, and incidents are happening in Idaho.

Over the past five years, the J.R. Simplot plant in Pocatello had at least 17 reported incidents. The facility manufactures chemicals and stores up to **26 million pounds of anhydrous ammonia gas** at a single time. Anhydrous ammonia is a toxic, deadly gas that can travel several miles from its source. A major release could put nearby residents in serious danger.

Idaho’s 63 high-risk facilities include additional chemical manufacturing and warehousing, along with food manufacturing and cold storage facilities, which also use anhydrous ammonia in their refrigeration systems.

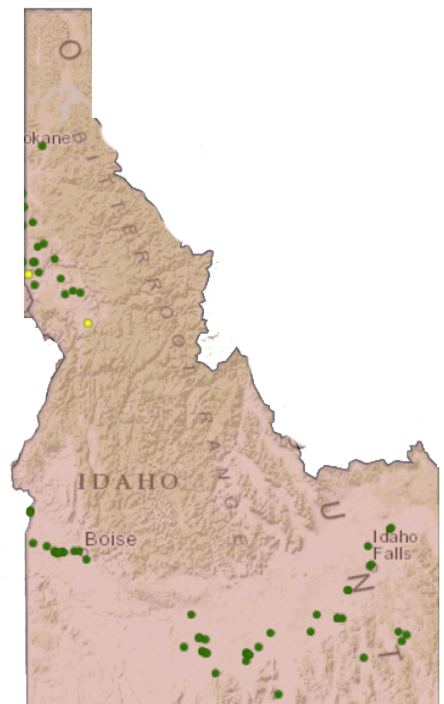
Several facilities use **chlorine gas**, another toxic gas that was used as a chemical weapon in World War I. Paper mills use chlorine gas for bleaching purposes. Municipal water treatment facilities and wastewater treatment plants also use chlorine for water purification. Like anhydrous ammonia, the gas can travel several miles if released and put entire neighborhoods in danger.

Each facility receives or ships chemicals, which travel by rail or truck and put additional communities in danger of a catastrophic disaster.

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

The percentage of Idaho residents living in fenceline communities (5.3 percent) is less than the national average of 7.5 percent. However, **poor residents and people of color are significantly more likely to be in danger than white residents.** This contributed to Idaho earning a “C”.

For example, **nearly eight percent of children of color under 12 live in fenceline communities, compared to five percent of white children – meaning they are 1.6 times more likely to live near chemical dangers.** Black children are



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over twice as likely. Similarly, **children in poverty under 12 are 1.7 times more likely to live in fenceline communities than non-poor children.**

Being poor and a child of color, however, increases this likelihood even more. **Poor black children are almost seven times more likely to live near hazardous facilities than white children above the poverty line.** Asian and Pacific Islander children are over three 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.

Idaho doesn't have as large a concentration of facilities as many other states. Its population is also almost 90 percent white. What may be driving these inequality figures is a concentration of facilities near poor people and communities of color.

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	7.4%	C	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	7.3%	C
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.5 times more likely	C	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	7.8%	C	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	8.5%	C
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.6 times more likely	B	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	5%	A	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	4.9%	A
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.2 times more likely	B	Likelihood of Children Receiving Free Lunch to Attend Schools in Fenceline (compared to children not receiving free lunch)	Just as likely	B
Percentage of Elderly of Color Who Live in Fenceline	6.6%	B	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	6.4%	C
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	1.3 times more likely	B	Likelihood of Elderly Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly people not in poverty)	1.3 times more likely	C
People of Color Grade		C	Poverty Grade		C
Overall Grade: C					

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

Idaho 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** Idaho 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 Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Idaho 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	9.6%	8.0%	5.6%	7.0%	4.9%	5.3%
0-17	10.4%	8.2%	5.8%	8.5%	4.7%	5.4%
18-64	9.3%	7.8%	5.7%	6.7%	5.0%	5.4%
65+	7.5%	8.7%	4.1%	5.0%	4.9%	5.0%
Total # in fenceline	808	14,097	1,068	1,526	64,017	82,652
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	2.0	1.6	1.1	1.4	---	---

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	22.6%	10.0%	7.0%	9.1%	6.4%	7.3%
0-17	29.6%	10.6%	7.5%	13.6%	7.1%	8.4%
18-64	19.7%	9.4%	7.4%	7.1%	6.1%	6.8%
65+	5.6%	8.4%	1.4%	4.1%	6.4%	6.4%
Total # in fenceline	453	4,998	377	373	11,094	17,578
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	3.5	1.6	1.1	1.4	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	4.1	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	4.8	2.1	1.5	1.9	1.4	---

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	3.7%	5.7%	2.7%	3.8%	4.3%	4.5%
Pre-K - 2	3.2%	7.0%	3.8%	4.1%	4.0%	4.5%
3-7	4.3%	4.5%	2.4%	4.5%	3.5%	3.7%
8-12	3.5%	6.0%	2.3%	3.0%	5.3%	5.3%
Total # in fenceline	107	2,619	100	178	9,461	12,617
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.2 times less likely	1.3	1.6 times less likely	1.1 times less likely	---	---

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