

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in Nebraska 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. **Nebraska scored poorly with a “D” grade.**

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

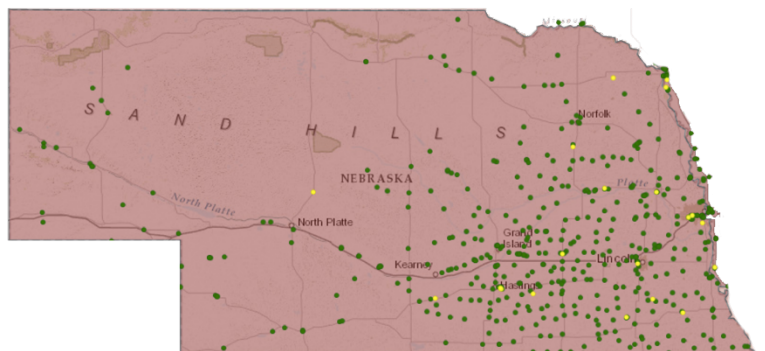
Key Findings

- Over 200,000 Nebraskans (one in nine) live within one mile of a facility storing large amounts of extremely hazardous chemicals. These “fenceline communities” face the possibility of a chemical leak, fire, or explosion on a daily basis.
- **Of all the states in the nation, Nebraska has the highest percentage of children of color attending public schools near dangerous facilities.**
- **Poor Latino children are two-and-a-half times more likely to live in fenceline communities than white non-poor children.**

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

In 2014, the Cargill meat processing plant in Schuyler leaked over 21,000 pounds of anhydrous ammonia gas. Luckily no one was injured. **Anhydrous ammonia** is a toxic, deadly gas that can travel several miles from its source, potentially putting entire communities in danger.

The Cargill plant and other food manufacturers use anhydrous ammonia in their refrigeration systems, even though safer alternatives exist. Anhydrous ammonia is also a popular fertilizer and is sold by several distributors across the state.



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

Chemical dangers are not isolated to farming communities. Municipal water treatment facilities often use **chlorine gas** for water purification. This deadly gas, if leaked, can also travel several miles from its source. Many residents are not aware that the facility that provides them with clean water may also store thousands of pounds of this dangerous chemical.

Nebraska has 457 high-risk facilities in total, together storing up to three-quarters of a billion pounds of toxic and flammable chemicals. Each receives shipments of dangerous chemicals, which travel by rail or truck, putting additional communities in danger of a catastrophic disaster.

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

Nebraska ranks fourth among all states for the percentage of the population that lives within one mile of a hazardous facility. However, not everyone faces the same likelihood of danger. **Children of color under age 12 are almost twice as likely to live in fenceline communities as white children.** Latino children are almost two-and-a-half times more likely. The proximity to hazardous facilities means that these children face acute dangers as well as daily exposure to toxic chemicals in their air and water.

Poor children of color are also more likely to live in danger. For instance, **poor Latino children are two-and-a-half times more likely to live in fenceline communities compared to non-poor white children.** These children already face racial and income barriers: living next to hazardous facilities exposes them to acute dangers as well as possible daily

exposure to toxic chemicals in their air and water. Additionally, nearby industrial facilities can decrease home values, meaning many poor families may not be able to afford to move to safer neighborhoods.

Many children do not escape these dangers at school. Two hundred and eighty-five public schools are located within one mile of a hazardous facility in Nebraska, putting more than 68,000 students in danger. A major chemical release near a school would be an unimaginable tragedy.

Inequities in Likelihood of Living in a Fenceline Community

Racial Inequities	Score	Grade	Income (Poverty) Inequities	Score	Grade
Percentage of People of Color Who Live in Fenceline	17.6%	F	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	15%	F
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.7 times more likely	C	Likelihood of Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to those not in poverty)	1.4 times more likely	C
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	18.1%	F	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	16.2%	F
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.9 times more likely	D	Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.5 times more likely	C
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	23.3%	F	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	26.5%	F
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	Just as 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	12.6%	D	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	10.9%	D
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)	1.1 times more likely	B
People of Color Grade		D	Poverty Grade		D
Overall Grade: D					

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

Nebraskans 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* Nebraskans 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 Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality and federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Nebraskans 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	12.6%	22.6%	13.3%	12.3%	10.1%	11.5%
0-17	13.5%	22.4%	11.3%	12.1%	9.5%	11.8%
18-64	12.5%	23.0%	15.0%	12.4%	10.5%	11.7%
65+	8.5%	18.9%	7.9%	12.3%	9.6%	9.8%
Total # in fenceline	10,030	38,297	2,089	4,220	147,953	205,163
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.2	2.2	1.3	1.2	---	---

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	16.3%	24.3%	15.3%	11.2%	12.2%	15.0%
0-17	17.1%	23.2%	12.4%	11.1%	11.1%	15.7%
18-64	15.8%	25.5%	17.9%	11.3%	13.1%	15.2%
65+	13.3%	23.9%	1.4%	10.3%	10.3%	10.9%
Total # in fenceline	4,339	10,859	916	671	17,120	34,377
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.3	2.0	1.2	1.1	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.5	1.1	1.3	1.1 times less likely	1.2	1.4
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.7	2.5	1.5	1.1	1.2	---

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	9.4%	32.6%	15.4%	12.8%	22.3%	22.6%
Pre-K - 2	10.9%	36.2%	15.8%	13.3%	23.4%	24.2%
3-7	9.6%	31.0%	17.8%	13.5%	23.3%	23.2%
8-12	7.9%	31.2%	12.5%	11.6%	20.6%	20.8%
Total # in fenceline	1,894	16,634	668	893	47,134	68,667
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	2.4 times less likely	1.5	1.4 times less likely	1.7 times less likely	---	---

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