

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in New York 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. **New York scored above average with a “B” grade but still has room for improvement.**

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

Key Findings

- Over half a million New Yorkers (2.8 percent of the total population) live within one mile of a facility storing large amounts of extremely hazardous chemicals.
- **Poor children under age 12 are one-and-a-half times more likely to live near dangerous chemical facilities than children living above the poverty line.**
- 171 New York public schools are located within one mile of a hazardous facility, putting nearly 90,000 students in danger.

Chemical dangers are real, and incidents are happening in New York.

In 2013, the PeroxyChem chemical manufacturing facility leaked over 2,000 pounds of anhydrous ammonia. This toxic gas can be fatal at certain exposure levels and can travel several miles from its source. A major release would endanger the lives of nearby residents.

At least 67 New York facilities store high quantities of **anhydrous ammonia**. Many are food manufacturing and distribution facilities that use the toxic gas as a refrigerant, even though safer alternatives (like carbon dioxide) can replace it. Other chemical hazards include oil and gas distribution facilities, plastics manufacturing, and electrical utilities.

Municipal water treatment plants also present chemical hazards. Many use **chlorine gas** in water purification rather than safer alternatives. Chlorine gas can also be deadly and spread quickly from its source – qualities that made it a dangerous chemical weapon during World War I. Many residents are unaware that the facility that provides them with clean drinking water could also experience a catastrophic chemical release.

New York’s 163 high-risk facilities are dotted across the state in both rural and urban areas. They also receive shipments of chemicals that travel by rail or truck, putting additional communities in danger.

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

Compared to most states, New York has a relatively small proportion of its total population living in fenceline communities (2.8 percent). The state also has a smaller percentage of people of color and people in poverty living in fenceline communities, contributing to an “A” score in each of those areas.

Additionally, unlike most states, people of color in New York are not significantly more likely to live in fenceline communities than white residents. In fact, some communities of color – such as Asians and Pacific Islanders – are significantly *less* likely. This contributes to New York earning an “A” on every people of color measure in our scorecard.



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

People in poverty, however, are more likely to live in fenceline communities than those not living in poverty. Poor children under age 12, for example, are one-and-a-half times more likely to live near chemical hazards than non-poor children. **Poor black children are 1.7 times more likely to live in these areas than white children not in poverty.**

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.

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	2.2%	A	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	3.5%	A
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.5 times less likely	A	Likelihood of Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to those not in poverty)	1.3 times more likely	C
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	2.8%	A	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	4%	A
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.1 times less likely	A	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	2.4%	A	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	4%	A
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.8 times less likely	A	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	1.6%	A	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	2.6%	A
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	2.1 times less likely	A	Likelihood of Elderly Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly people not in poverty)	1.1 times less likely	A
People of Color Grade		A	Poverty Grade		B
Overall Grade: B					

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

New Yorkers 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** New York 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 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And New Yorkers 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	2.6%	2.1%	3.1%	1.0%	3.3%	2.8%
0-17	3.3%	2.6%	2.6%	1.3%	3.1%	2.9%
18-64	2.5%	2.0%	3.5%	1.0%	3.4%	2.8%
65+	1.9%	1.5%	1.8%	0.8%	3.3%	2.8%
Total # in fenceline	77,468	72,641	2,209	14,782	362,934	535,906
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.3 times less likely	1.6 times less likely	1.1 times less likely	3.3 times less likely	---	---

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	4.0%	2.5%	3.0%	1.3%	4.5%	3.5%
0-17	4.9%	3.0%	2.3%	1.5%	4.2%	3.9%
18-64	3.7%	2.3%	3.7%	1.2%	4.8%	3.5%
65+	2.1%	1.3%	0.3%	0.9%	3.6%	2.6%
Total # in fenceline	26,917	22,177	601	3,345	47,596	102,257
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.1 times less likely	1.8 times less likely	1.5 times less likely	3.5	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.8	1.3	1.1 times less likely	1.3	1.4	1.3
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.3	1.3 times less likely	1.1 times less likely	2.5 times less likely	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	3.1%	2.1%	4.0%	1.2%	4.3%	3.3%
Pre-K - 2	3.6%	2.5%	3.1%	1.1%	4.5%	3.5%
3-7	3.6%	2.4%	4.6%	1.2%	3.8%	3.2%
8-12	2.4%	1.6%	4.2%	1.2%	4.6%	3.2%
Total # in fenceline	15,369	13,705	604	2,814	54,677	88,961
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.4 times less likely	2 times less likely	1.1 times less likely	3.6 times less likely	---	---

Find the Full Report at ForEffectiveGov.org