

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in Oklahoma 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. **Oklahoma 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 230,000 Oklahomans (6.5 percent) 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.
- **Poor Latino children are almost twice as likely to live near dangerous facilities as non-poor white children.**

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

In 2012, the Medford natural gas processing plant unintentionally released over three million pounds of flammable chemicals, including propane and ethane. This resulted in environmental damage and forced 53 people to shelter in place.

Oklahoma has several other gas processing plants dotted across the landscape, both in rural and urban areas. The state also has a handful of petroleum refineries, including the ChemTrade Refinery in Tulsa that stores up to 960,000 pounds of fuming **sulfuric acid** (a byproduct of the refining process). Fuming sulfuric acid can create acid droplets that irritate the eyes and lungs and is also an explosive hazard.

Another danger comes from water treatment facilities that use **chlorine gas** for water purification. Many are located in major cities and sometimes within residential areas. Chlorine gas is highly toxic and can travel quickly from its source – properties that made it a deadly chemical weapon during World War I.

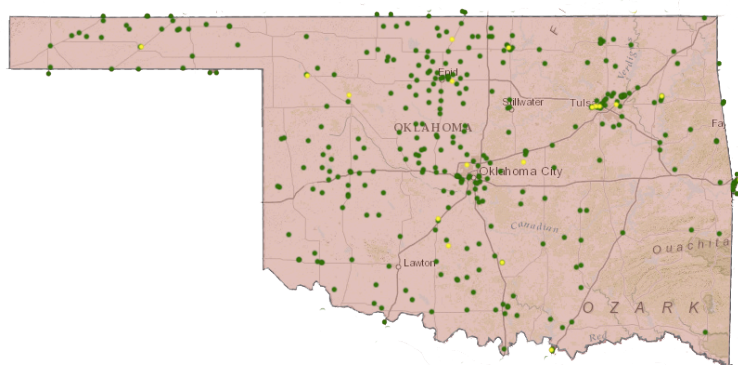
Oklahoma’s 322 high-risk facilities together store up to three-quarters of a billion pounds of toxic and flammable substances. These facilities receive shipments of chemicals, which travel by rail or truck, putting additional communities in danger of a catastrophic disaster.

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

Black and Latino children in Oklahoma are 1.7 times more likely to live in fenceline communities than white children. Many of these children also attend schools located near hazardous facilities. Nearly one in ten children of color attends a school within one mile of a chemical facility.

Poor children in Oklahoma, especially poor children of color, also face greater likelihoods of danger. For example, **poor Latino children are more than twice as likely to live in fenceline communities as white children who aren’t poor.**

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.



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

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	7.6%	C	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	8.2%	C
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.3 times more likely	B	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	8%	C	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	8.6%	C
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.4 times more likely	B	Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.4 times more likely	B
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	9.3%	C	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	10.6%	C
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.1 times more likely	B	Likelihood of Children Receiving Free Lunch to Attend Schools in Fenceline (compared to children not receiving free lunch)	1.1 times more likely	C
Percentage of Elderly of Color Who Live in Fenceline	6.7%	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)	1.2 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		C	Poverty Grade		C
Overall Grade: C					

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

Oklahoma 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* Oklahoma 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 Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and the federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Oklahoma 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	9.2%	9.4%	4.9%	8.7%	6%	6.5%
0-17	9.3%	9.6%	4.7%	8.4%	5.6%	6.6%
18-64	9.0%	9.3%	5.2%	9.0%	6.2%	6.7%
65+	9.7%	9.6%	4.0%	7.0%	5.5%	5.7%
Total # in fenceline	23,456	31,627	12,785	6,136	150,652	238,602
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.5	1.6	1.2 times less likely	1.5	---	---

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	9.5%	11.2%	5.9%	10.9%	7.4%	8.2%
0-17	9.3%	11.6%	5.7%	9.1%	6.6%	8.3%
18-64	9.6%	10.7%	6.2%	11.3%	8.1%	8.4%
65+	10.5%	11.3%	5.0%	13.1%	5.7%	6.4%
Total # in fenceline	7,513	10,690	3,494	1,221	24,017	50,805
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.3	1.5	1.3 times less likely	1.5	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.6	1.9	Just as likely	1.9	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	11.0%	11.3%	6.4%	8.7%	8.8%	9.0%
Pre-K - 2	9.9%	11.4%	6.1%	10.9%	7.8%	8.4%
3-7	11.2%	12.0%	6.4%	8.5%	8.5%	9.0%
8-12	11.6%	10.2%	6.5%	7.0%	9.6%	9.4%
Total # in fenceline	6,977	10,754	6,789	1,230	30,990	60,762
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.3	1.3	1.4 times less likely	Just as likely	---	---

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