

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

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

Key Findings

- More than 2.8 million Texans (one in nine) lives within one mile of a facility storing large amounts of extremely hazardous chemicals. **Two-thirds of Texans living within these “fenceline communities” are people of color.**
- **Children of color under age 12 are roughly twice as likely to live in the shadow of a hazardous chemical facility compared to white children in Texas.**
- **Poor Latino children are more than twice as likely to live near facilities as white children not in poverty.**

Chemical dangers are real, and nowhere is this clearer than Texas.

Over the past decade, Texas has been notorious for industrial incidents involving toxic, flammable, and explosive chemicals. These include the West fertilizer explosion that killed 15 people in 2013 and the DuPont chemical leak at the end of 2014 that killed four workers in a facility outside Houston.

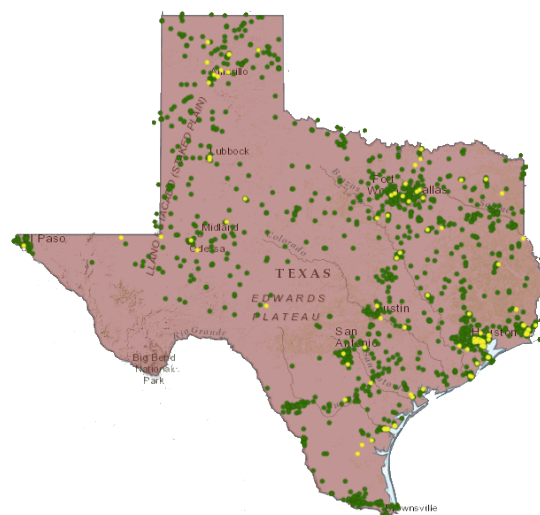
Texas’ 1,428 high-risk facilities are dotted across the state. They include everything from chemical manufacturing plants and oil refineries in cities and suburbs to rural oil and gas wells and fertilizer storage facilities like the one that exploded in West. Municipal water treatment plants and food processing plants are also common in the state.

These facilities use and store a variety of chemicals, including **anhydrous ammonia**, which is sold as a fertilizer and is also used in commercial refrigeration. Water treatment plants and other industrial facilities store **chlorine gas**, a deadly substance that can be used as a chemical weapon. A leak from one of these plants could sicken and kill surrounding neighbors before they have time to evacuate. Oil refineries in the state also use and store significant quantities of **hydrofluoric acid**, a highly toxic chemical that threatens the health and safety of workers and could expose nearby communities to extreme danger should a leak or explosion occur.

But the plants themselves aren't the only risk. **Companies ship these dangerous chemicals** to the facilities, often by train or by truck, and accidents in transit can also lead to fatal releases.

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

Two-thirds of the people living in fenceline communities are people of color. Almost 15 percent of Latinos and 13 percent of blacks live near these plants, compared to only eight percent of white residents. **Nearly 14 percent of kids of color**



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

under age 12 live near potentially dangerous facilities, compared to only about eight percent of white kids in this age group, making them nearly twice as likely to live in these areas. These children face acute dangers and daily exposures to toxic chemicals that put them at a distinct disadvantage because young children are much more susceptible to chemical hazards than adults.

Poor children under age 12, especially poor children of color, also face unequal chemical dangers; for example, **Latino children in poverty are more than twice as likely to live near a dangerous facility 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.

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	13.9%	D	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	14.5%	D
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	13.7%	D	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	14.9%	F
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.8 times more likely	C	Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.4 times more likely	C
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	14.9%	D	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	15.8%	D
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.5 times more likely	D	Likelihood of Children Receiving Free Lunch to Attend Schools in Fenceline (compared to children not receiving free lunch)	1.3 times more likely	C
Percentage of Elderly of Color Who Live in Fenceline	15.1%	F	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	14%	F
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	1.8 times more likely	C	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		D	Poverty Grade		D
Overall Grade: D					

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

Texans like you can help. You can organize people in your community and educate others about these dangers. You can learn about the lack of local zoning in your state and how that makes it more difficult to protect 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* Texans 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 Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Texans 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	12.9%	14.7%	11.3%	10.5%	8.2%	11.3%
0-17	12.6%	14.4%	11.7%	9.5%	7.6%	11.6%
18-64	12.8%	14.8%	11.2%	10.8%	8.3%	11.3%
65+	14.1%	16.3%	11.0%	11.3%	8.6%	10.8%
Total # in fenceline	372,224	1,404,185	14,132	108,222	921,241	2,838,847
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.6	1.8	1.4	1.3	---	---

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	14.6%	16.5%	13.5%	14.7%	9.8%	14.5%
0-17	14.3%	16.2%	13.9%	14.7%	9.0%	14.8%
18-64	14.8%	16.5%	13.6%	14.7%	10.2%	14.3%
65+	15.5%	18.2%	10.2%	14.8%	9.1%	14.0%
Total # in fenceline	102,313	412,774	3,759	18,345	101,763	640,102
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.5	1.7	1.4	1.5	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.4
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.8	2.0	1.7	1.8	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	12.6%	16.1%	11.0%	10.3%	9.7%	13.4%
Pre-K - 2	13.1%	16.3%	12.6%	9.3%	9.0%	13.5%
3-7	12.6%	16.3%	8.9%	10.1%	8.9%	13.2%
8-12	12.2%	15.6%	11.7%	11.2%	11.0%	13.4%
Total # in fenceline	81,341	419,017	2,395	19,540	147,929	679,016
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.3	1.7	1.1	1.1	---	---

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