

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in Wisconsin 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. **Wisconsin scored on the failing end and was one of just two states with an “F” grade.**

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

Key Findings

- More than 600,000 Wisconsinites (one in 10) 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 age 12 are twice likely to live in the shadow of a hazardous chemical facility compared to white children.**
- **Poor Latino children are three times more likely to live near facilities than white children not in poverty.**

Chemical dangers are real, and Wisconsin has experienced recent industrial incidents.

Wisconsin has witnessed several industrial incidents in recent years. In one example, the Beck Aluminum facility in Racine released highly toxic chlorine gas in 2013, injuring one person. Thankfully, the gas did not escape into the surrounding area. More than 50 percent of the community within one mile of the facility is made up of people of color, and poverty rates in several nearby neighborhoods are above 15 percent.

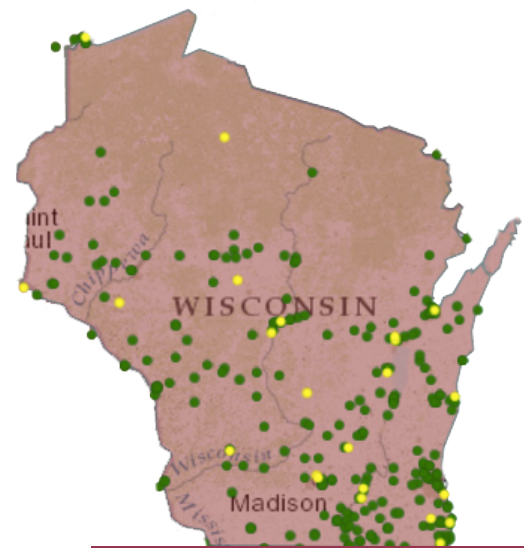
Wisconsin’s 265 high-risk facilities are scattered across the state, but most plants are concentrated near Milwaukee, Madison, and in the Fox River Valley. They include everything from chemical manufacturing plants and food production facilities in cities and suburbs to rural water treatment and fertilizer distribution facilities.

These facilities use and store a variety of chemicals, including **anhydrous ammonia**, which is used in commercial refrigeration and as a fertilizer. 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.

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 Wisconsin safe from chemical hazards?

More than 22 percent of Latinos and 17 percent of African Americans live near chemical and other industrial plants, compared to only nine percent of white residents. **Over 18 percent of kids of color under age 12 live near potentially dangerous facilities, compared to about nine percent of white kids in this age group, making them twice as likely to**



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live in these areas. More than 21 percent of children of color attend public schools close to a risky industrial facility, while 15 percent of white students do. 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 also face unequal chemical dangers; 17 percent live in a fenceline community, compared to 10 percent of non-poor children. **Poor Latino children fare even worse, being three times more likely to live near a dangerous facility than 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	18.1%	F	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	15.9%	F
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.9 times more likely	D	Likelihood of Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to those not in poverty)	1.6 times more likely	D
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	18.2%	F	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	17.2%	F
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	2 times more likely	D	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	21.4%	F	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	20.8%	F
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.4 times more likely	C	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	14.9%	F	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	11.4%	F
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	1.7 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		F	Poverty Grade		F
Overall Grade: F					

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

Wisconsinites 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** Wisconsinites 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 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Wisconsinites 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	17.4%	22.3%	8.9%	15.0%	9.4%	10.9%
0-17	17.5%	21.8%	7.5%	15.7%	8.8%	11.3%
18-64	17.7%	22.7%	9.7%	14.6%	9.8%	11.1%
65+	13.5%	20.6%	7.6%	15.5%	8.8%	9.1%
Total # in fenceline	57,973	74,962	4,168	19,523	436,390	604,427
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.8	2.4	1.1 times less likely	1.6	---	---

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	20.2%	25.8%	11.3%	19.3%	12.5%	15.9%
0-17	19.8%	25.6%	11.2%	21.3%	11.5%	16.9%
18-64	20.6%	26.1%	11.7%	18.1%	13.3%	16.0%
65+	17.2%	25.7%	8.3%	20.4%	10.3%	11.4%
Total # in fenceline	25,816	23,692	1,517	4,570	56,075	115,063
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.6	2.1	1.1 times less likely	1.5	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.3	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.6
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	2.2	2.8	1.2	2.1	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	19.2%	25.7%	10.0%	20.3%	15.2%	16.9%
Pre-K - 2	16.7%	27.8%	9.2%	18.4%	14.4%	16.5%
3-7	17.7%	25.7%	10.0%	19.5%	14.6%	16.3%
8-12	22.6%	23.5%	10.7%	22.7%	16.3%	17.7%
Total # in fenceline	16,390	22,678	1,109	6,441	96,990	147,145
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.3	1.7	1.5 times less likely	1.3	---	---

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