

# The LOUISVILLE CHARTER

FOR SAFER CHEMICALS



## A PLATFORM

for CREATING a SAFE and HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT  
THROUGH INNOVATION

**HISTORY:** In the area of Louisville, Kentucky, known as “Rubbertown,” 11 industrial facilities have historically released millions of pounds per year of toxic air emissions. The surrounding community is predominantly Black. In May 2004, Louisville organizers convened a broad coalition of grassroots, labor, health and environmental justice groups whose common goal was to pass government policies that protect human health and the environment from exposure to unnecessary harmful chemicals. This initiated a year-long collaborative process to create the original Louisville Charter For Safer Chemicals, which served as a shared platform for transforming the chemical industry.

**NOW IN 2021,** our network has grown, and we've continued to clarify our vision. The charter has been updated to more explicitly confront the chemical industry's massive contribution to the climate crisis and provide principled guidance for advancing environmental justice in communities disproportionately impacted by harmful and cumulative chemical exposures, while avoiding false solutions.



A ROADMAP to INFORM POLICY,  
AVOID FALSE SOLUTIONS, and CENTER  
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE in our movement



ENDORSED BY 100 LOCAL  
and NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
convened by Coming Clean



UPDATED to zero in on the  
CHEMICAL INDUSTRY'S GROWING  
CONTRIBUTION TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS



Learn more at [louisvillecharter.org](https://louisvillecharter.org)

**FROM THE CITY OF LOUISVILLE TO THE FARTHEST REACHES OF THE ARCTIC**, we are exposed to hazardous industrial, agricultural, and household chemicals and carry these poisons in our bodies. Our air, water and soil, our homes, and the food we eat are all contaminated. Diseases linked to these chemicals are on the rise, including birth defects, infertility, asthma, neurological problems, and some forms of cancer. At the front lines of this chemical assault -- at the fencelines of polluting facilities, in workplaces handling hazardous materials, in pesticide-laden agricultural fields, and in the wombs of mothers -- the burden is greatest.

Justice is overdue for people of color, low-income people, Tribes and Native/Indigenous communities, women, children and farmworkers, who experience disproportionate impacts from cumulative sources. This chemical burden is unprecedented in human history and represents a major failure of the current chemical management system.

**The chemical industry alone is set to be the single largest driver of global oil consumption by 2030.** The industry is the largest consumer of fossil fuel-based energy among industrial sectors and uses fossil fuels as feedstock for chemical production, making it one of the top greenhouse gas (GHG)-intensive industries in the world. In order to fully address and mitigate the impacts of climate change, there needs to be a transformational and innovative initiative to significantly reduce and replace the use of fossil fuels in every part of the chemical production industry and the reduction and replacement of chemicals like fluorinated gases that are dangerous GHGs on their own.

Fundamental, comprehensive reform is necessary to protect people, the environment, and the food web from cumulative effects.

That reform will require a new vision that meets the needs of society while restoring and protecting health and the systems that support us. It will require a transformation in our thinking and a change in the direction of government and market priorities. It will require action to phase out fossil fuel dependence, the most dangerous feedstocks, and hazardous chemicals; to innovate safer alternatives, and to protect high-risk and highly exposed communities. It will require building power among the populace to demand and enforce comprehensive change and recognizing the co-leadership of communities that bear the greatest burdens from toxic pollution, climate change, and economic inequality in shaping the assertive solutions we need to tackle the climate crisis and environmental racism, as well as toxic chemical pollution.

Cleaner and safer energy, feedstocks, chemicals, products, and production processes are feasible. Leading companies are developing and using these technologies, providing a roadmap for a new approach to production that supports life, health, and sustainable local economies. While innovative companies are adopting new technologies, policy change at every level, and corporate, private and institutional action--from all sectors-- is necessary to transform entire energy and chemical markets and ensure more local control and local economic benefit. Scientists, economists, health professionals, laborers, students, local leaders, the business community, academics, non-profit organizations large and small, elected officials, those who bear the greatest burdens from toxic chemical pollution,

climate change, and income inequality, and many others will need to act together in principled partnership toward objectives that forge comprehensive solutions to deeply entrenched problems and divisive and static ways of thinking and acting.

## TO MOTIVATE OUR EFFORTS, WE:

- Imagine every baby born free of harmful chemicals in their bodies.
- Imagine our food and water free of toxic chemicals.
- Imagine our homes and the products we buy free of toxic chemicals.
- Imagine that all the above items are recognized as an essential part of human dignity – the inherent, equal and inalienable worth of every person – and are fundamental human rights.
- Imagine good jobs in alternative energy and safer chemicals and benefits to local economies.
- Imagine reversing the rising trends of diseases linked to chemicals, diseases like birth defects, infertility, asthma, neurological problems and cancer that are all too common now.
- Imagine a world free of racial discrimination where fenceline communities, low-income people, people of color, Tribes and Native/Indigenous peoples are not disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals, nor unjustly burdened with the cumulative impacts of exposure to multiple pollutants and health stresses.
- Imagine reversing the devastating effects of climate change that are common across the country and the world, and building an economy powered by renewable energy.

Fundamental reform is possible. We can protect children, workers, communities, and the environment. We can shift market and government actions to phase out fossil fuels and the most dangerous chemicals. We can spur the economy by developing safer alternatives.

By investing in safer chemicals, we will protect peoples' health and create healthy, sustainable jobs. One of the first steps to creating a safe and healthy environment is new action in our nation's chemical management policies and addressing the adverse role of current chemical production and practices in new climate policies.

**The following ten planks, taken collectively, constitute a roadmap to achieve this vision.**

See also:

-  [POLICY BACKGROUND PAPERS](#)
-  [OUR GUIDE FOR USING THE CHARTER TO CREATE CHANGE](#)
-  [WAYS TO TAKE ACTION IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE CHARTER](#)

To achieve our vision, any reform must:

## **1. Address the Significant Impacts of Chemical Production and Use on Climate Change**

Significantly reduce, replace and/or eliminate the use of fossil fuels and production of greenhouse gases in every part of the chemical production industry including: (1) the use of fossil fuels as feedstock for products, such as plastics, pesticides, and the use of chemicals as feedstock for additives in fossil fuels; (2) the massive use of fossil fuels for energy production to manufacture chemicals; and (3) the production of chemicals that are significant greenhouse gases on their own, such as fluorinated gases that contribute to and exacerbate climate change.

## **2. Prevent Disproportionate Exposures and Hazards, and Reduce Cumulative Impacts on Environmental Justice Communities**

Adopt policies and practices that remedy the disproportionate chemical hazards and exposures faced by communities of color, Tribes and Native/Indigenous communities, and low-income communities, and that address combined burdens of multiple pollutants, multiple sources, and accumulation over time with vulnerabilities that exist in a community. Break down and end discriminatory practices and policies that result in disproportionate and cumulative impacts in these communities. To this end, grassroots, fenceline and environmental justice communities must be at the table when developing and advancing chemical policies at all levels.

## **3. Require Safer Substitutes and Solutions for a Non-Toxic Economy**

Eliminate hazardous chemical use, production, and emissions and replace them with demonstrably safer alternatives by: (1) redesigning chemical products and systems; (2) altering production processes; (3) substituting with safer chemicals; (4) limiting output to produce chemicals shown to be necessary and safe throughout their lifecycle; and (5) rewarding innovation. Green Chemistry Principles need to shape innovation in a revamped chemical sector that transitions from petroleum-based chemical feedstock production to bio-based and low-hazard platform chemicals. Achieving a non-toxic economy requires political will and a shift in power that puts the health of people and the planet above the entrenched political lobbying of the chemical industry. It also requires a just transition for workers in the impacted sectors.

## **4. Use Scientific Data to Support Health-Protective Policies and Practices**

Require chemical manufacturers, importers, and businesses to provide credible independent and verifiable scientific data for all new petrochemicals and energy-related pollutants to inform principles, policies, and practices to effectively protect human health, especially vulnerable populations, and the environment. When appropriate, use scientific data, applied to chemical classes rather than one chemical at a time - including epidemiology, whole animal studies, cellular and mechanistic information, and physical chemical hazard traits - to identify potential hazards for early actions and regulatory decisions that expand health protections for workers, families, and communities.

## **5. Take Urgent Action to Stop Production and Recover Chemicals that are Unsafe and/or Accumulate in the Environment and People**

Phase out, ban and recover chemicals that present immediate threats to safety due to flammability or potential to explode; do not break down or are slow to degrade (persistent); accumulate in people and the food chain (bioaccumulative); are highly mobile in the environment and threaten drinking water supplies; and/or contribute to climate change. Chemicals and classes of chemicals that have one or more of these properties warrant immediate action.

## **6. Act with Foresight to Protect Health and Prevent Pollution**

Act to prevent harm when credible evidence shows that a substance or class of substances is potentially hazardous and/or harm is occurring or is likely to occur, even when information is incomplete regarding the exact nature and magnitude of the harm, in order to safeguard communities, workers, consumers, and others from exposure. Limit or stop the manufacturing and use of chemicals in the market where scientific data shows harm to human health or the environment.

## **7. Take Immediate Action to Protect, Restore and Strengthen Communities**

Ensure that when communities or workers are exposed to levels of chemicals that pose an immediate health or safety hazard, immediate action is taken to eliminate these exposures or risks. Communities and workers that have been harmed by chemical exposures, or that face ongoing legacy exposures, must be fully restored and supported in their growth beyond restoration.

## **8. Ensure the Public and Workers Fully Have the Right-To-Know, Participate and Decide**

Provide meaningful involvement for the public and workers in the decisions that impact their health because of the potential harm from toxic chemicals. Remove barriers to public information and participation. Disclose all the chemicals in products, make the names and quantities of chemicals produced, used, released, and exported publicly available and provide public/worker access to corporate and government decision-making about chemical hazards.

## **9. Incentivize Responsible Business & Safer Chemicals**

Businesses that act responsibly by providing three-party-verified, safer, and healthier chemicals, materials, products, and services should be prioritized and incentivized. Subsidies should be curtailed for companies that continue to pollute and produce chemicals that are harmful to human health and the environment. Harmful business practices, which in turn causes incredible damage to local, state and national economies, should become the financial responsibility of those companies.

## **10. Build an Equitable and Health-Based Sustainable Economy**

Build an equitable values-based economy that transitions us from short-term profit at all cost to one which both advances a non-toxic economy and centers this transition on the needs of small and medium enterprises; advances local economies; supports communities of color, Tribes and Native/Indigenous communities, and low-income community-owned businesses; supports new corporate forms inclusive of worker ownership and livable wages; and ensures a just workplace.