**NEWS RELEASE**

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May 1, 2014

**Chemical Disasters & Environmental Racism**

**New Report Documents Black & Latino Communities at**

**Higher Risk for Chemical Catastrophe**

(Washington, DC) The [**Environmental Justice and Health Alliance (EJHA),**](http://www.louisvillecharter.org/ChemicalSecurityandEJ.shtml) a national coalition of grassroots groups working on toxic chemical exposures that impact communities of color, released a new report today in collaboration with the [**Center for Effective Government (CEG)**](http://www.foreffectivegov.org/node/13013) and [**Coming Clean**](http://www.comingcleaninc.org). The report - *”Who's in Danger? A Demographic Analysis of Chemical Disaster Vulnerability Zones”* - uses data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Census to demonstrate an association between lower average housing values, incomes, and education levels, and greater Black, Latino, and low-income populations living within chemical disaster “vulnerability zones” of 3,433 industrial facilities across the U.S. The danger is much greater for Black & Latino communities than for the U.S. as a whole - the very definition of an unequal or disproportionate danger.

“How can it be that since 1987, when the issue was first researched and published in [***Toxic Wastes and Race,***](http://www.ucc.org/about-us/archives/pdfs/toxwrace87.pdf) and two decades later in 2007 in [Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty](http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/environment/toxic-waste-20.html), that people of color today are more, not less, in harm’s way from toxic chemicals and chemical catastrophe 27 years later?” asks **Robert Bullard, PhD, Dean at the** [**Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs,**](http://tsu.edu/academics/colleges__schools/publicaffairs/) **Texas Southern University** in the Houston area. “This is one of the most urgent human rights and civil rights issues of our times, and this new report documents this tragic fact.”

“Our government has allowed these facilities to be disproportionately located in communities of color and has allowed chemical corporations and the officials who are supposed to be protecting us to tragically fail workers and surrounding communities,” explains **Michele Roberts**, a co-author of the report and national Co-Coordinator of the **EJHA**. “Sadly, we have witnessed too many tragic catastrophes such as what happened in West, TX last year, with 15 people killed; or in Elk River, WV, with toxic, contaminated water coming out of people’s faucets in their homes; or Richmond, CA, where 15,000 were sent to hospitals from a Chevron refinery explosion. People of color communities are treated as if they are disposable human beings. This is environmental injustice and racism.”

“We examined 3,433 chemical facilities nationwide that operate in several common industries and use or store extremely hazardous chemicals, and then looked at the communities where these facilities are located,” notes **Paul Orum**, the principal researcher and a co-author of the new report. “Using data filed by the facilities with EPA, and then supplementing it with U.S. Census information, we found that the populations near these facilities – who live every day in danger – have lower average housing values and incomes and are much more likely to be Black or Latino than the population of the whole U.S.”

“Mossville, Louisiana is our home, and founded by a former slave over a hundred years ago,” says **Dorothy Felix** of **Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN)**. **“**We used to have clean air and water and a healthy quality of life. Now, with the 15 toxic industrial facilities, we not only live with chronic chemical pollution, but with the fear that at any time, day or night, one or more of those plants could blow up or catch on fire. Recently, the Axial plant caught fire and people just driving by on the Interstate became ill and had to be rushed to the hospital and children were made to shelter in place at school.”

“When a chemical facility explodes or catches fire, some of the most toxic substances made by man can be dispersed into a community, and, depending on the chemical, stay in the air, water, and soil for quite some time,” says **Wilma Subra, PhD,** with the **Subra Company** in Louisiana, a toxicologist who has worked with many communities living near chemical plants. “Some of these chemicals - like chlorine, hydrofluoric acid, vinyl acetate, and many others - are not only immediately harmful to life and health but are linked to respiratory injury, cancer and other chronic health problems.”

“If any of the facilities near the Houston Ship Channel exploded like the chemical plant in West, TX did, thousands could be severely injured or die from the chemicals,” adds **Juan Parras**, Executive Director of [**Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s.)**](http://www.tejasbarrios.org/)**.** “Even with the West tragedy, the state of Texas has done nothing. This report confirms that large numbers of people of all colors are in terrible danger from lack of protections from chemical and oil plants.”

“Here in Richmond, CA, 15,000 people had to go to the hospital when the Chevron Refinery exploded and caught on fire three years ago,” said **Dr. Henry Clark** of the **West County Toxics Coalition**. “All of the various investigations since then, every single one, has concluded that the community is still not safe from the same thing happening all over again. You better believe they would not have built this refinery in the wealthy white communities near by.”

“The most recent incident in West Virginia is just one in a long legacy of chemical disasters, and the disproportionate burden is clear. In the last six years alone, another Bhopal was nearly eclipsed and now we are dealing with the largest chemical drinking water contamination in U.S. history. How many more preventable incidents will we have to endure before our government takes action? This report really lays out the situation and the action authorities must take to prevent chemical disasters.” adds **Maya Nye,** President of [**People Concerned About Chemical Safety**](http://www.peopleconcernedaboutchemicalsafety.org/) (West Virginia).

“The interactive maps in the report are a tool for residents, industry, and government agencies to find which communities and schools are in the danger zones around these chemical facilities,” says **Sean Moulton**, director of Open Government Policy, [**Center for Effective Government.**](http://www.foreffectivegov.org/) “We're hoping parents, teachers, and school administrators will become more engaged and will join us in asking for much stronger protections from chemical disasters.”

“Last year, President Obama issued an [Executive Order](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/01/executive-order-improving-chemical-facility-safety-and-security) for an interagency task force that would gather information and make recommendations to him,” explains **Richard Moore**, executive director of the [**Los Jardines Institute**](https://www.facebook.com/los.ji.92) and national co-coordinator of the **EJHA**. “EPA, Homeland Security, and OSHA have been holding “listening sessions” across the country in some of the communities identified in the report, and people are consistently asking for action to prevent more chemical disasters. We know that there are things that can be done. For example, here in Albuquerque, one water treatment facility was able to transition to safer chemicals, so as to avoid storing very dangerous chlorine. Using Inherently Safer Technologies (IST) is something that Vice President Joe Biden and other officials have identified as a priority step for reducing this threat.”

The **Environmental Justice and Health Alliance (EJHA)** is part of the [**Coming Clean Collaborative**](http://www.comingcleaninc.org/) a national network striving to reform the chemical and energy industries so they are no longer sources of harm, and is also a member of the [**Coalition to Prevent Chemical Disasters**](http://preventchemicaldisasters.org/).

Click [here](http://www.ej4all.org/whos-in-danger-report) for the full report and other information on chemical disasters and environmental justice.

**Background and more info**

The first-of-its-kind analysis presented in the report documents a pattern previously observed in the location of toxic waste sites - that dangerous chemical facilities disproportionately endanger people of color and low income people, who are greatly overrepresented in chemical facility vulnerability zones and even more over represented in the “fenceline zones” nearest the facilities. The report analyzed five demographic indicators (home value, household income, race and ethnicity, education level, and poverty rate) and finds that:

* Residents of the fenceline zones closest to the facilities have average home values 33% below the national average and average incomes 22% below the national average;
* The percentage of Blacks in the fenceline zones is 75% greater than for the U.S. as a whole, and the percentage of Latinos is 60% greater;
* The percentage of adults in the fenceline with less than a high school diploma is 46% greater than for the U.S. as a whole, but the percentage with a college or other post-high school degree is 27% *lower*;
* The poverty rate in the fenceline zones is 50% higher than for the U.S. as a whole.

In response to President Obama’s August 2013 Executive Order on Chemical Facility Safety and Security, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are preparing recommendations for the White House on policies to prevent more disasters like the April 2013 explosion in West, TX that killed 15 people and leveled an entire neighborhood.

The report shows that many safer alternatives to the most dangerous chemicals are already in use by some facilities, and presents key policy recommendations for the White House, federal agencies, and Congress to protect communities and workers, including:

* Make information on chemical hazards *and alternatives* widely available;
* Ensure that communities and workers are fully engaged in prevention planning;
* Require companies to assess whether they could use safer chemicals or processes, and require them to convert whenever safer alternatives are feasible.

**Available for Interviews**

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***Spanish-Language Interviews Available Upon Request***

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