

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

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

Key Findings

- Over 3.8 million Californians (one in ten) live within one mile of a facility storing large amounts of extremely hazardous chemicals. **Nearly three-quarters of California residents living within these “fenceline communities” are people of color.**
- **Children of color under 12 are almost twice as likely to live in fenceline communities as white children.**
- **Latino children in poverty are more than twice as likely to live near facilities as white children not in poverty.**

Chemical dangers are real, and incidents are happening all across California.

California residents understand the threat of chemical disasters. In 2012, the Chevron refinery in Richmond had a significant fire that created a plume of toxic chemicals and rained ash on surrounding neighborhoods. Around 15,000 people sought medical treatment and 20 were hospitalized. Luckily, no one was killed.

Refineries are just one of several types of dangerous industrial facilities in California. Many are related to agriculture, from food manufacturing facilities to cold storage and distribution centers, which use **anhydrous ammonia** refrigerants. Anhydrous ammonia is a toxic gas that can travel several miles from its source; contact can burn eyes and lungs and can be fatal. Many fertilizer distributors also store anhydrous ammonia for use as a fertilizer.

Other common facilities include electrical generation, chemical manufacturing, and products manufacturing. They are dotted across both rural and urban areas of California. In total, **California’s 883 high-risk facilities store up to one and a half billion pounds of toxic and flammable chemicals.**

Each receives shipments of dangerous 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 California safe from chemical hazards?

In California, roughly 13 percent of children of color under age 12 live in fenceline communities, compared to about seven percent of white children – meaning they are 1.8 times more likely to live near chemical dangers. **Latino children are twice as likely to live in fenceline communities.**



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

Fourteen percent of poor children under 12 live near hazardous facilities, earning California an “F” in this measure. These children are 1.4 times more likely to live near hazardous facilities than non-poor children. However, being poor and a child of color increases this likelihood even more. **Poor Latino children, for example, are more than twice as likely to live in fenceline communities as white children who are not in poverty.**

Additionally, over 1,100 public schools are located within one mile of a hazardous chemical facility, putting nearly 700,000 California students in danger. More than 80 percent of those students are children of color.

The percentage of California’s elderly poor living in close proximity to these dangerous facilities is particularly high, resulting in an “F” grade in this measure. Living in the shadow of an industrial facility increases stress on poor communities as they worry about the potential for a catastrophic accident 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	12.6%	D	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	13.1%	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)	1.3 times more likely	C
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	12.9%	D	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	14.4%	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	B
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	12.5%	D	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	13.9%	D
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.7 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	12.4%	D	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	11.8%	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		D	Poverty Grade		D
Overall Grade: D					

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

Californians 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** Californians 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 California Environmental Protection Agency and the state-level OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Californians 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	12.2%	14.2%	10.4%	9.1%	7.4%	10.5%
0-17	12.1%	14.3%	11.2%	9.1%	7.2%	11.4%
18-64	12.0%	14.1%	10.2%	9.0%	7.5%	10.4%
65+	13.0%	14.7%	9.9%	9.7%	7.2%	9.2%
Total # in fenceline	261,551	1,988,431	28,834	461,881	1,089,807	3,883,507
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.6	1.9	1.4	1.2	---	---

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	12.7%	15.9%	12.0%	10.4%	8.5%	13.1%
0-17	12.3%	16.0%	12.3%	12.4%	8.9%	14.4%
18-64	12.9%	15.7%	11.5%	9.7%	8.4%	12.5%
65+	13.2%	17.0%	16.6%	10.8%	8.9%	11.8%
Total # in fenceline	65,072	505,443	7,966	62,945	122,954	769,834
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.5	1.9	1.4	1.2	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.7	2.2	1.6	1.4	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	10.8%	14.2%	8.8%	7.5%	7.3%	11.2%
PreK - 2	10.5%	14.3%	7.6%	7.4%	6.8%	11.2%
3-7	10.1%	14.1%	7.4%	7.1%	6.6%	10.9%
8-12	11.5%	14.2%	10.5%	8.0%	8.2%	11.5%
Total # in fenceline	42,288	465,022	3,563	54,724	116,175	696,977
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.5	1.9	1.2	Just as likely	---	---

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