

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in Delaware 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. **Delaware scored a “C” grade.**

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

Key Findings

- More than 56,000 Delawareans (one in 15) 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 12 are twice as likely to live in the shadow of a hazardous chemical facility compared to white children in Delaware.**
- **Poor black children are about two times more likely to live near facilities than white children not in poverty.**

Chemical dangers are real, and several recent incidents have occurred in Delaware.

Delaware has seen several recent industrial incidents involving toxic, flammable, and explosive chemicals. In one example from August 2015, a chemical leak at PBF Energy's Delaware City Refinery sent three workers to the hospital. The plant produces gasoline.

Delaware's 25 high-risk facilities are dotted across the state but are largely concentrated in the Wilmington-Delaware City corridor. They include everything from chemical manufacturing plants and oil refineries in cities and suburbs to rural food production and distribution facilities. Electric utilities with dangerous chemicals on-site are also common in the state.

These facilities use and store a variety of chemicals, including **vinyl chloride**, which is used to make PVC plastics. The chemical is highly toxic, extremely flammable, and a potent cancer-causing substance, and it frequently contaminates air and water. Because of this, vinyl chloride poses a significant, ongoing exposure hazard to nearby communities, as well as the danger of a catastrophic incident. Food storage and production facilities in the state also use toxic **anhydrous ammonia** as a refrigerant.

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.



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

Over 10 percent of black residents live in fenceline communities, compared to about five percent of white residents. **More than nine percent of kids of color under age 12 live near potentially dangerous facilities, compared to fewer than five percent of white kids in this age group, making them twice as likely to live in these areas.** More than 13 percent of children of color attend public schools close to a risky industrial facility, and about 11 percent of white students do, a

lower level of inequality than in many other states. All of 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 are just as likely to live near an industrial facility in Delaware as non-poor kids, with almost seven percent of both groups living in a fenceline community. However, poor children of color fare significantly worse; **poor black children, for example, are almost twice as likely as non-poor white kids to live near a dangerous facility.** 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	Score	Grade	Income (Poverty) Inequities	Score	Grade
Percentage of People of Color Who Live in Fenceline	9.2%	C	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	7%	B
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)	1.1 times more likely	B
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	9.2%	C	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	6.8%	B
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)	Just as likely	A
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	13.2%	D	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	14.6%	D
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.2 times more likely	B	Likelihood of Children Receiving Free Lunch to Attend Schools in Fenceline (compared to children not receiving free lunch)	1.2 times more likely	C
Percentage of Elderly of Color Who Live in Fenceline	8.8%	C	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	7.7%	C
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	2.1 times more likely	D	Likelihood of Elderly Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly people not in poverty)	1.6 times more likely	D
People of Color Grade		D	Poverty Grade		C
Overall Grade: C					

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

Delawareans 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** Delawareans 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 Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Delawareans 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	10.4%	7.9%	4.5%	6.2%	4.9%	6.4%
0-17	10.5%	7.7%	1.3%	5.3%	4.8%	6.9%
18-64	10.4%	8.1%	4.7%	6.9%	5.1%	6.6%
65+	10.1%	7.0%	8.6%	3.8%	4.3%	5.1%
Total # in fenceline	19,261	5,894	132	1,912	28,242	56,649
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	2.1	1.6	1.1 times less likely	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	9.0%	5.3%	5.1%	3.7%	5.8%	7.0%
0-17	8.8%	5.3%	0.0%	4.9%	6.2%	7.5%
18-64	8.8%	5.4%	7.4%	3.5%	5.6%	6.6%
65+	11.7%	2.4%	6.5%	2.8%	6.3%	7.7%
Total # in fenceline	3,177	935	18	76	2,679	7,240
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.5	1.1 times less likely	1.1 times less likely	1.6	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.2 times less likely	1.7 times less likely	1.1	1.8 times less likely	1.2	1.1
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.9	1.1	1.1	1.3 times less likely	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	14.0%	12.3%	13.9%	8.3%	11.3%	12.3%
Pre-K - 2	11.7%	8.3%	10.5%	6.5%	10.3%	10.3%
3-7	13.1%	11.8%	11.9%	7.2%	12.9%	12.7%
8-12	16.4%	17.1%	19.5%	11.0%	10.4%	13.2%
Total # in fenceline	5,575	2,177	82	382	7,060	15,697
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.4 times less likely	---	---

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