

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

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

Key Findings

- More than 1.5 million Illinoisans (one in eight) live within one mile of a facility storing large amounts of extremely hazardous chemicals. **Roughly half of Illinois residents living within these “fenceline communities” are people of color.**
- **Children of color under age 12 are almost two times more likely to live in the shadow of a hazardous chemical facility compared to white children in Illinois.**
- **Poor Latino children are over 2.5 times more likely to live near facilities than white children not in poverty.**

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

Illinois has witnessed several industrial incidents in recent years. In one example, an explosion and fire at the Blue Island Phenol chemical plant in suburban Chicago released propane, propylene, and toxic benzene gases in December 2013, injuring two workers and causing five nearby businesses to evacuate their employees. Benzene is a known cancer-causing chemical.

Illinois’s 938 high-risk facilities are scattered across the state, with high concentrations in and around Chicago and St. Louis’ Illinois suburbs. They include everything from chemical manufacturing plants, food production facilities, and water treatment plants in cities and suburbs to rural ethanol production plants and fertilizer distribution facilities.

These facilities use and store a variety of chemicals, including **anhydrous ammonia**, which is sold as a fertilizer and is also used in commercial refrigeration. Water treatment plants and other industrial facilities store **chlorine gas**, a deadly substance that can be used as a chemical weapon.

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 Illinois safe from chemical hazards?

About half of the people living in fenceline communities are people of color. Over 20 percent of Latinos and 15 percent of black residents live near these plants, compared to only 10 percent of white residents. **More than 17 percent of kids of color under age 12 live near potentially dangerous facilities, compared to only nine percent of white kids in this age group, making them almost twice as likely to live in these areas.** These children face acute dangers and daily exposures



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

to toxic chemicals that put them at a distinct disadvantage because young children are much more susceptible to chemical hazards than adults.

Poor children also face unequal chemical dangers; for example, **poor Latino children are over 2.5 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	16.9%	F	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	16.4%	F
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)	1.4 times more likely	C
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	17.4%	F	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	17%	F
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.9 times more likely	D	Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.4 times more likely	C
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	17.4%	F	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	20.4%	F
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.3 times more likely	C	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	15.1%	F	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	13.2%	F
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	1.5 times more likely	C	Likelihood of Elderly Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly people not in poverty)	1.2 times more likely	B
People of Color Grade		F	Poverty Grade		D
Overall Grade: D					

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

Illinoisans 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** Illinoisans 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 Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Illinoisans 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	15.0%	20.4%	15.4%	12.3%	10.0%	12.5%
0-17	15.4%	20.5%	16.5%	10.2%	8.9%	12.8%
18-64	15.0%	20.5%	15.1%	13.2%	10.3%	12.7%
65+	14.4%	19.7%	14.7%	11.0%	10.0%	11.1%
Total # in fenceline	266,697	415,018	4,131	73,951	793,109	1,571,195
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.5	2.0	1.5	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	16.4%	21.7%	17.6%	18.3%	13.3%	16.4%
0-17	16.7%	22.1%	19.0%	11.7%	12.3%	17.0%
18-64	16.4%	21.5%	15.7%	20.7%	14.0%	16.5%
65+	14.7%	20.4%	29.8%	15.9%	11.0%	13.2%
Total # in fenceline	87,973	91,060	1,000	13,121	94,316	291,084
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.4	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.4
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.7	2.3	1.8	1.9	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	16.4%	20.3%	15.7%	9.0%	13.6%	15.5%
Pre-K - 2	16.4%	21.2%	18.2%	7.6%	13.7%	15.9%
3-7	16.6%	21.3%	14.6%	8.2%	13.4%	15.7%
8-12	16.2%	18.5%	14.9%	10.8%	13.8%	15.1%
Total # in fenceline	59,630	101,162	935	8,235	141,287	318,954
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.2	1.5	1.1	1.5 times less likely	---	---

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