

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

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

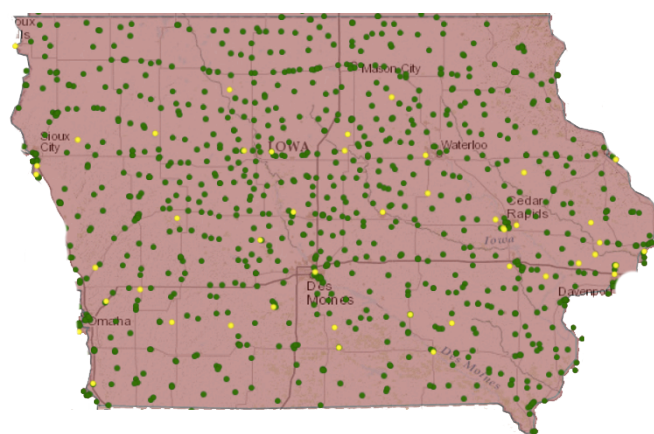
Key Findings

- More than 370,000 Iowans (one in eight) 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.
- **Black and Latino children are nearly two times more likely to live in fenceline communities compared to white kids.**
- **Poor Latino children are over two times more likely to live near facilities than white children not in poverty.**

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

Iowa has witnessed several industrial incidents in recent years. In one example, the Cargill meat packing plant in Ottumwa released more than 19,000 pounds of toxic anhydrous ammonia in 2014. Incredibly, only one worker was injured, and the gas did not escape into the surrounding community.

Iowa’s 875 high-risk facilities are scattered across the state. They include everything from chemical manufacturing plants and food production facilities 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 used in commercial refrigeration and as a fertilizer.



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

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 Iowa safe from chemical hazards?

More than 20 percent of Latinos and black residents live near chemical and other industrial plants, compared to fewer than 12 percent of white residents. **Nearly 19 percent of kids of color under age 12 live near potentially dangerous facilities, compared to about 11 percent of white kids in this age group.** And while Iowa does better than most other states on the likelihood of children of color attending public schools in these areas compared to white kids, far too many children of all races go to school near risky industrial facilities. This includes 27 percent of Latino children and 26 percent of white kids. 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 also face unequal chemical dangers; almost 18 percent live in a fenceline community, compared to 12 percent of non-poor children. **Poor Latino children fare even worse, being over two 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			Score	Grade	Income (Poverty) Inequities			Score	Grade
Percentage of People of Color Who Live in Fenceline	19.1%	F			Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	18.3%	F		
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.6 times more likely	C			Likelihood of Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to those not in poverty)	1.5 times more likely	D		
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	18.7%	F			Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	17.7%	F		
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.6 times more likely	C			Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.5 times more likely	C		
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	22.2%	F			Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	27.1%	F		
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.2 times less likely	A			Likelihood of Children Receiving Free Lunch to Attend Schools in Fenceline (compared to children not receiving free lunch)	1.1 times less likely	B		
Percentage of Elderly of Color Who Live in Fenceline	19.1%	F			Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	13%	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)	1.1 times more likely	B		
People of Color Grade				D	Poverty Grade				D
Overall Grade: D									

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

Iowans 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** Iowans 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 Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the state-level OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Iowans 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	20.5%	20.8%	21.5%	14.2%	11.8%	12.6%
0-17	19.5%	20.9%	23.3%	12.9%	11.2%	12.6%
18-64	21.0%	20.8%	21.1%	14.7%	12.1%	12.9%
65+	21.3%	20.5%	17.2%	13.9%	11.3%	11.5%
Total # in fenceline	17,419	31,806	1,840	7,771	308,767	374,416
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.7	1.8	1.8	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	20.2%	22.6%	20.5%	18.8%	17.2%	18.3%
0-17	18.9%	22.9%	19.7%	12.4%	15.7%	17.7%
18-64	21.5%	22.2%	20.0%	19.9%	18.7%	19.4%
65+	16.0%	20.9%	33.0%	30.5%	12.4%	13.0%
Total # in fenceline	6,331	8,958	522	1,582	47,360	67,241
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.1	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	Just as likely	1.1	1.1 times less likely	1.4	1.5	1.5
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.8	2	1.8	1.7	1.5	---

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	18.9%	27.0%	20.8%	14.3%	25.8%	25.1%
Pre-K - 2	21.0%	30.7%	21.2%	15.4%	27.5%	27.0%
3-7	20.0%	26.9%	24.9%	15.0%	26.9%	26.0%
8-12	16.1%	23.5%	16.8%	12.7%	23.5%	22.8%
Total # in fenceline	4,786	12,382	432	1,630	100,973	122,962
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white students	1.4 times less likely	Just as likely	1.2 times less likely	1.8 times less likely	---	---

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