

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in New Mexico 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. **New Mexico scored above average with a “B” grade but still has room for improvement.**

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

Key Findings

- More than 35,000 New Mexico residents (1.7 percent of the total population) live within one mile of a facility storing large amounts of extremely hazardous chemicals. **Over half of New Mexico residents living within these “fenceline communities” are people of color.**
- Children of color are 1.4 times more likely to attend schools near hazardous facilities than white children.
- Poor children are 1.3 times more likely to attend schools near hazardous facilities than non-poor children.

Chemical dangers are real, and incidents are happening in New Mexico.

In 2013, the Leprino Foods Company in Roswell leaked 434 pounds of **anhydrous ammonia**, injuring 16 workers. This toxic gas can be fatal and can travel several miles from its source. The Leprino Foods Company site – which stores up to 87,000 pounds of anhydrous ammonia – is located three miles from Mountain View Middle School. A chemical leak that reached the school would be disastrous.

Food manufacturing and storage facilities like Leprino Foods use anhydrous ammonia as a refrigerant, even though safer alternatives exist. Fertilizer distributors also sell the gas as a fertilizer.

Other chemical hazards in New Mexico come from oil refineries, oil and gas terminals, and chemical manufacturing facilities. Additionally, urban areas have water treatment facilities that use **chlorine gas**, another deadly chemical. Many residents are unaware that the facility that provides them with clean water may also be putting them in danger.

New Mexico’s 60 facilities are scattered across the state, with a slight cluster around Albuquerque. These facilities also receive shipments of chemicals that travel by rail or truck, putting additional communities in danger.



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

Compared to most states, New Mexico has a relatively small percentage of its total population (1.7 percent) living within one mile of a high-risk facility. The state has fewer facilities than its neighbors and less concentration around major urban areas.

This may help explain New Mexico’s above-average grade on our scorecard. However, New Mexico is not without industrial hazards. The state stores significant quantities of **nuclear waste** and has natural gas fracking wells. But it has a small concentration of the chemical manufacturing facilities and petroleum refineries capable of causing catastrophic chemical leaks and explosions.

Children of color face roughly the same likelihoods of living in fenceline communities as white children; poor children also face about the same likelihoods of living in these areas as those above the poverty line. However, when it comes to studying near hazardous facilities, children of color fare worse. Children of color overall are 1.4 times more likely to

attend schools located within one mile of a hazardous facility; **Native Americans are three and a half times more likely.**

In total, 23 New Mexico public schools are located within one mile of a hazardous facility, putting over 9,000 students in danger.

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	1.8%	A	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	1.6%	A
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	Just as likely	A	Likelihood of Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to those not in poverty)	1.1 times less likely	A
Percentage of Children of Color Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	1.8%	A	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	1.6%	A
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.1 times less likely	A	Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.2 times less likely	A
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	2.9%	A	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	3.1%	A
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.4 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	1.6%	A	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	1.6%	A
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	Just as likely	B	Likelihood of Elderly Poor People to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly people not in poverty)	Just as likely	A
People of Color Grade		B	Poverty Grade		B
Overall Grade: B					

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

New Mexico residents 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** New Mexico residents 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 New Mexico Environment Department and the state-level OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And New Mexico residents 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	1.9%	1.7%	1.8%	2.4%	1.7%	1.7%
0-17	2.2%	1.7%	2.1%	2.9%	1.9%	1.8%
18-64	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	2.3%	1.7%	1.7%
65+	1.9%	1.6%	1.6%	2.7%	1.6%	1.6%
Total # in fenceline	732	16,261	3,384	707	14,000	35,340
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.1	Just as likely	1.1	1.4	---	---

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	2.0%	1.5%	1.6%	1.6%	1.8%	1.6%
0-17	1.7%	1.5%	1.8%	0.4%	2.0%	1.6%
18-64	2.0%	1.5%	1.5%	1.3%	1.8%	1.6%
65+	5.1%	1.6%	1.4%	8.7%	1.5%	1.6%
Total # in fenceline	212	3,563	1,044	66	1,669	6,558
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.1	1.2 times less likely	1.1 times less likely	1.1	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.1	1.2 times less likely	1.2 times less likely	1.6 times less likely	Just as likely	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.2	1.2 times less likely	Just as likely	1.1 times less likely	Just as likely	---

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	1.5%	2.3%	7.2%	1.5%	2.1%	2.7%
Pre-K - 2	1.5%	1.5%	8.2%	1.3%	1.5%	2.2%
3-7	1.0%	1.3%	7.1%	1.2%	1.6%	1.9%
8-12	1.9%	4.1%	6.6%	1.9%	2.9%	3.9%
Total # in fenceline	96	4,694	2,407	66	1,759	9,085
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white children	1.4 times less likely	1.1	3.5	1.4 times less likely	---	---

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