

Low-Income Residents and People of Color in Oregon 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. **Oregon scored in the middle with a “C” grade.**

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

Key Findings

- Nearly 300,000 Oregon residents (7.8 percent of the total population) 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 age 12 are one-and-a-half times more likely to live in fenceline communities than white children.**
- **Poor Latino children are over twice as likely to live near chemical hazards as white children who are not in poverty.**

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

In 2014, the Hermiston Foods plant leaked 1,500 pounds of anhydrous ammonia, causing 179 people to evacuate or shelter in place. Anhydrous ammonia is a toxic gas that can be fatal and can travel several miles from its source. A major release would endanger the lives of nearby residents.

Anhydrous ammonia is the most commonly reported chemical in Oregon facilities. It is used by food manufacturers and warehouses as a refrigerant. It is also sold as a nitrogen fertilizer; Oregon has several fertilizer distribution facilities that store significant quantities of this toxic gas.

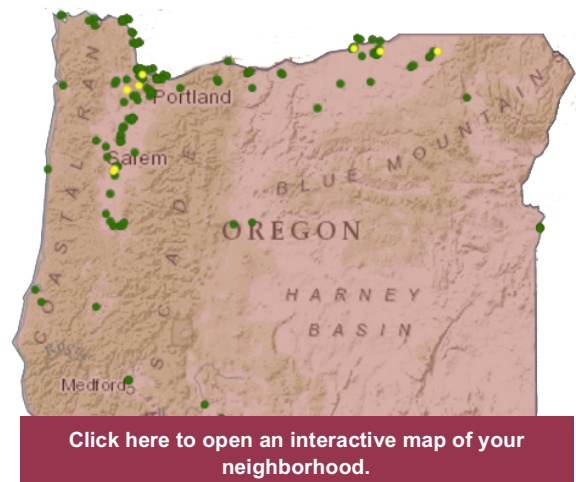
Oregon’s 109 high-risk facilities also include paint and resin manufacturing, pulp mills, and rail terminals, each of which store large quantities of hazardous chemicals. There is a higher concentration of such facilities in urban areas.

These dangerous chemicals must travel to the facilities by train or by truck, and accidents in transit can also lead to fatal releases.

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

Children of color under age 12 are one and a half times more likely to live near chemical hazards. The proximity to hazardous facilities means that these children face acute dangers as well as daily exposure to toxic chemicals in their air and water. Elderly people of color are also more likely to live in fenceline communities. They face their own health and mobility challenges that make responding to chemical disasters difficult.

Poor children, especially poor children of color, also face increased likelihoods of danger; for example, **poor Latino children are more than twice as likely to live in fenceline communities as white children who are not in poverty.** 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.



Additionally, **127 Oregon public schools are located within one mile of a hazardous facility, putting 60,000 public school children in danger.**

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	10.4%	C	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	9.6%	C
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.5 times more likely	B	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	10.9%	C	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	10.6%	C
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.5 times more likely	B	Likelihood of Poor Children Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to children under 12 not in poverty)	1.3 times more likely	B
Percentage of Children of Color Who Attend Public Schools in Fenceline	13%	D	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	12.6%	D
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)	Just as likely	B
Percentage of Elderly of Color Who Live in Fenceline	7.9%	C	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	7.5%	C
Likelihood of Elderly of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to elderly whites)	1.2 times more likely	B	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		C	Poverty Grade		C
Overall Grade: C					

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

Oregon 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** Oregon 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 Oregon Environmental Quality Commission and the state-level OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And Oregon 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	11.0%	12.2%	7.8%	7.1%	7.1%	7.8%
0-17	10.5%	12.4%	9.6%	7.0%	6.9%	8.2%
18-64	11.3%	12.2%	7.4%	7.3%	7.4%	8.0%
65+	10.3%	10.2%	5.3%	5.8%	6.4%	6.5%
Total # in fenceline	7,366	55,296	3,579	11,271	211,082	297,208
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.5	1.7	1.1	1.0	---	---

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	10.3%	14.4%	9.0%	7.6%	8.2%	9.6%
0-17	10.3%	14.9%	11.6%	10.7%	7.5%	10.5%
18-64	10.1%	14.2%	8.0%	6.9%	8.6%	9.5%
65+	13.4%	10.4%	5.5%	3.9%	7.3%	7.5%
Total # in fenceline	2,349	18,230	1,162	2,118	33,384	59,284
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.3	1.8	1.1	1.1	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.1 times less likely	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.3
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.5	2.1	1.3	1.1	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	8.9%	15.4%	10.4%	7.3%	9.6%	10.8%
Pre-K - 2	8.5%	14.4%	11.8%	6.4%	8.8%	10.1%
3-7	9.8%	15%	9.3%	6.5%	9.1%	10.4%
8-12	8.2%	16.5%	10.6%	8.7%	10.6%	11.7%
Total # in fenceline	1,193	18,514	965	1,884	34,583	60,167
Likelihood of attending schools in fenceline, compared to white children	1.1 times less likely	1.6	1.1	1.3 times less likely	---	---

Find the Full Report at ForEffectiveGov.org