

## Low-Income Residents and People of Color in West Virginia 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. **West Virginia received a “C” grade.**

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

### Key Findings

- More than 85,000 West Virginians (4.8 percent) 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.
- **Native American children are nearly twice as likely to live in these areas as white children.**
- **Poor Latino children are one-and-a-half times more likely to live near facilities than white children not in poverty.**

### Chemical dangers are real, and West Virginia has experienced recent industrial incidents.

West Virginia has witnessed several industrial incidents in recent years. In January 2014, a chemical leak at a Freedom Industries storage facility along the Elk River poisoned the drinking water of 300,000 residents, including those in the state capital of Charleston. The toxic chemicals involved are used to wash and prepare coal. One year earlier, the Axiall chemical manufacturing plant in Proctor in the northern part of the state suffered a series of chlorine releases that injured a total of six workers.

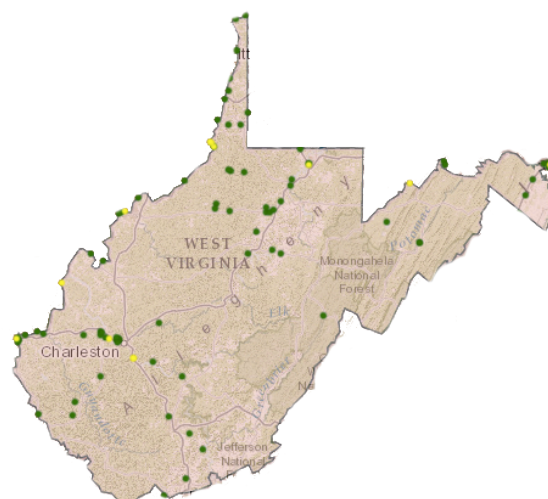
**West Virginia’s 78 high-risk facilities are scattered across the state, with most of them located outside Charleston and along the Ohio River.** They include everything from chemical manufacturing plants in suburbs and small towns to rural oil and gas extraction facilities, many of which involve fracking.

These facilities use and store a variety of chemicals, including **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 West Virginia safe from chemical hazards?

West Virginia does better than neighboring states when it comes to the proximity of communities of color and low-income residents to risky industrial facilities, but some inequalities still exist. **For example, nine percent of Native American children live near potentially dangerous facilities, compared to fewer than five percent of white kids, making them almost twice as likely to live in these areas.** These children face acute dangers and daily exposures to



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

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, especially poor children of color, also face unequal chemical dangers; for example, **poor Latino children are one-and-a-half times more likely to live near facilities than white children 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.

### 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	5.7%	B	Percentage of Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	5.8%	B
Likelihood of People of Color to Live in Fenceline (compared to whites)	1.2 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	5.9%	B	Percentage of Poor Children Under 12 Who Live in Fenceline	6.6%	B
Likelihood of Children of Color Under 12 to Live in Fenceline (compared to white children under 12)	1.2 times more likely	B	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	7.6%	B	Percentage of Children Receiving Free Lunch Who Attend Schools in Fenceline	6.7%	B
Likelihood of Children of Color to Attend Public Schools in Fenceline (compared to white children)	1.2 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	5.3%	B	Percentage of Elderly Poor People Who Live in Fenceline	4.6%	B
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)	Just as likely	A
<b>People of Color Grade</b>		<b>C</b>	<b>Poverty Grade</b>		<b>C</b>
<b>Overall Grade: C</b>					

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

West Virginians 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** West Virginians 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 West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and federal OSHA to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections to spot problems before they cause disasters. And West Virginians 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
<b>All Ages</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>4.7%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>4.7%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>
0-17	5.5%	4.5%	9.0%	3.7%	4.7%	4.8%
18-64	6.9%	4.8%	4.7%	4.1%	4.7%	4.8%
65+	6.2%	5.5%	2.9%	3.1%	4.5%	4.6%
<b>Total # in fenceline</b>	<b>3,305</b>	<b>979</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>78,878</b>	<b>85,748</b>
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites	1.4	Just as likely	1.1	1.2 times less likely	---	---

**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
<b>All Ages</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>
0-17	5.6%	6.1%	0.0%	3.4%	6.1%	6.2%
18-64	7.7%	7.7%	3.7%	6.0%	5.7%	5.8%
65+	3.2%	8.9%	2.1%	1.4%	4.6%	4.6%
<b>Total # in fenceline</b>	<b>1,090</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>16,374</b>	<b>18,658</b>
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.2	1.2	1.6 times less likely	1.1	---	---
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to same race not in poverty	1.1	1.8	1.7 times less likely	1.5	1.3	1.3
Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites not in poverty	1.5	1.6	1.3 times less likely	1.2	1.3	---

**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
<b>All Ages</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>
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18-64	7.7%	7.7%	3.7%	6.0%	5.7%	5.8%
65+	3.2%	8.9%	2.1%	1.4%	4.6%	4.6%
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Likelihood of living in fenceline, compared to whites in poverty	1.2	1.2	1.6 times less likely	1.1	---	---

**Find the Full Report at [ForEffectiveGov.org](https://www.ForEffectiveGov.org)**