



LOUISIANA BUCKET BRIGADE

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HEALTH AND POLLUTION IN LOUISIANA – FACT SHEET WHAT ABOUT THE PUBLIC HEALTH COSTS OF POLLUTION?

LOUISIANA – HOW DO WE STACK UP?

Louisiana is 2nd in the nation for benzene pollution; benzene is a known carcinogen

Louisiana is 2nd in the nation for cancer mortality.

Louisiana is 4th in the nation for hazardous air pollution from the petrochemical industry.

Louisiana is 8th in the nation for carcinogenic air pollution from the petrochemical industry.

The five most polluted parishes in the state are Ascension, St. Charles, Calcasieu, Jefferson, and East Baton Rouge.

Louisiana, along with California and Texas, are home to nearly half of the country's 153 refineries. One-quarter of the nation's petrochemicals are produced in Louisiana (Energy Information Administration, 2002).

Louisiana is 32.5% African American. However, of the Louisiana residents living within three miles of a refinery, 51.5% are African American. (US Census) African Americans in Louisiana bear a disproportional amount of pollution from refineries.

CHEMICALS OF CONCERN

Benzene – 644,896 lbs. of Benzene were released into the air by industry in Louisiana in 2001.

When inhaled, benzene can cause short term respiratory effects, long term hematological effects, immunological effects, neurological effects, reproductive effects, developmental effects, genotoxic effects, and cancer.

Since most benzene exposure occurs well below 61 parts per million (ppm) - the lowest level at which benzene can be smelled - people are usually unaware that they are even being exposed.

Sulfur Dioxide - One pollutant released abundantly by the petrochemical industry in Louisiana is Sulfur Dioxide. In 2001, industry reported releasing 276,834 tons into Louisiana's air.

Prolonged exposure to sulfur dioxide (SO₂), even in small quantities, can cause increased risk of bronchitis, emphysema, nose bleeds, nervous system disorders, numerous respiratory problems, disruption of the thyroid gland, and, in women, menstrual disorders. (Toxicology Data Network)

Ambient SO₂ concentrations trigger general increases in mortality (for pulmonary and respiratory diseases) in the affected area. "At low levels of exposure ... effects on mortality (total, cardiovascular and respiratory) and on hospital emergency admissions for total respiratory causes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), have been consistently demonstrated." (World Health Organization, Guidelines for Air Quality, 2000)

SYNERGISTIC EFFECTS OF CHEMICALS

Doctors will often tell you not to mix medications. Chemicals mixing in the air pose a similar problem. In combination, chemicals often have added or increased effects on people that are exposed to them. For example, Sulfur Dioxide and particulate matter (like small dust like particles of petroleum coke dust), are more dangerous combined than alone. “High levels of particulates appear to worsen the effect of sulfur dioxide, and long-term exposures to both pollutants leads to higher rates of respiratory illness.”

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/airmon/heappage.htm>

REFINERY POLLUTION HARMS HEALTH

A health symptom survey in New Sarpy, La (next to what was then the Orion, now Vallero Refinery) concluded:

“As the Orion Refining Corporation has reported substantial releases of chemicals known to cause many of these health effects, and environmental sampling has confirmed the presence of chemicals in the St. Charles Terrace subdivision, it is common sense to conclude it is likely that chemical releases from Orion and possibly other plants in the immediate area are the source of these health effects. Further, based on this study and other data, it would appear important to make all attempts to reduce the chemical exposures to this community, and conduct frequent monitoring of the chemical releases generated at the nearby plants, including short-term intermittent releases.” (Meeks and Orris, Petrochemical Production and Community Health in New Sarpy, La, 2002)

POLLUTION IS PREVENTABLE

Much of the pollution from the petrochemical industry is preventable. The report *Oil Refineries Fail To Report Millions of Pounds of Harmful Emissions*, prepared for Representative Henry Waxman (D - CA) in 1999, concludes that our “refineries could be cleaned up, if only they would try,” and that “under the Leak Detection and Repair rules, all detected leaks must be repaired... In many cases, this can be as simple as tightening a valve with a wrench.”

STATE AGENCIES ARE NOT PROTECTIVE OF HUMAN HEALTH

Department of Health and Hospitals

DHH has failed to protect the citizens from environmental hazards, as the contaminated drinking water case of Myrtle Grove indicates:

“For at least five years, 1997 to 2001, wells at the Myrtle Grove Trailer Park off Bayou Jacob Road poured polluted water into the saucepans, wading pools and water glasses of some 300 residents here. The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals first detected the contamination in 1997 but, through what state officials called ‘human error,’ failed to tell people here about it.” (New York Times, May 5, 2003; Toxic Water Numbers Days of a Trailer Park)

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

According to the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s 2002 Report, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality consistently fails to bring polluting facilities into compliance with either state or federal clean air rules. In 2002 LDEQ did not issue any enforcement action on 25% of the air quality violations it discovered. Furthermore, the LDEQ had not collected a total of \$11 million in fines they assessed against polluters in Louisiana. Between 1999 and 2001, \$4.5 million out of \$6 million total fines assessed went uncollected.