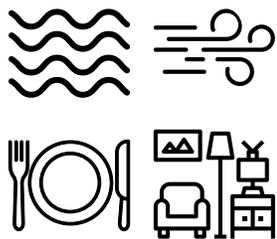


SAFER NOT SICKER

The EPA must put our health first.

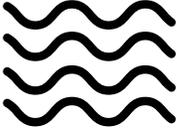
TERRIBLE TOXICS: A SITUATION REPORT



*As EPA Weakens Safeguards,
Polluting Companies Put
Americans' Health at Risk*

SAFER 
NOT SICKER
The EPA must put our health first.

Table of Contents

	7	THE FOOD WE EAT
	8	MERCURY
	10	PESTICIDES
	13	HOMES & CONSUMER PRODUCTS
	14	PHTHALATES
	16	LEAD (in Paint/Soil)
	19	THE WATER WE DRINK & USE
	20	PFAS “Forever Chemicals”
	22	LEAD (in Water)
	24	ARSENIC
	26	TCE (Trichloroethylene)
	29	THE AIR WE BREATHE
	30	PM 2.5 (Fine Particulate Matter / Soot)
	32	GROUND-LEVEL OZONE (Smog)
	34	BENZENE
	36	FORMALDEHYDE
	38	VINYL CHLORIDE
	40	CUMULATIVE & COMMUNITY EXPOSURE
42	THE BOTTOM LINE	



Americans Want to be Safer, Not Sicker

How the Trump EPA's Rollbacks Are Increasing Exposure to Toxic Pollution and Affecting Everyday Life.

Every American faces a daily, often invisible, baseline of toxic exposure—in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the products we use, and the places where we live, work and play.

Most of this pollution is unseen, which is why we depend on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to make us safer, not sicker—by reducing our exposures, holding polluters accountable, and protecting public health and the environment.

Over the past year, however, EPA's current leadership has abandoned EPA's mission by weakening existing safeguards and delaying enforcement, despite a clear scientific record supporting stronger standards. This is not business as usual. It is a politically driven shift away from EPA's core mission: protecting people and the environment from preventable toxic harm. Moreover, it has involved a virtually irreversible restructuring of the EPA with loss of critical staff which will impair the Agency's functionality for years to come.

At the Environmental Protection Network, we know this work intimately. We are former EPA scientists, engineers, lawyers, economists, and policy experts who spent our careers implementing the environmental laws that protect public health and our environment. We understand how regulations are built, and what happens when they are dismantled.

This dismantling is happening across numerous EPA rules and programs amidst an onslaught of competing stories, equally urgent and important. Even those following closely may struggle to see how these scattered regulatory actions add up to a coordinated assault on our health.



This report

In this report, we have outlined the Top 12 toxic pollutants by how you encounter them: through air, water, food, and in our homes, workplaces, and consumer products. Organized by exposure pathways, it connects well-documented health harms to specific decisions by the current EPA leadership allowing more pollution into our air, water, food, homes, and workplaces.

This is not an exhaustive list and does not cover pollution like greenhouse gases (GHG), which also can exacerbate health conditions and increase exposure to toxic pollutants. But it is a window into some of the most consequential toxic pollution exposures Americans face and the policy choices increasing that risk.

Taken together, these rollbacks tell a clear story: political leadership is steering the agency away from its responsibility to protect human health and the environment. The bottom line is simple: making Americans safer is a choice and EPA's current leadership has chosen to make Americans sicker.



THE FOOD WE EAT

Dietary toxics from bioaccumulation and agricultural residues



THE FOOD WE EAT

Dietary toxics from bioaccumulation and agricultural residues

MERCURY

Scale of Exposure

Nearly all Americans have detectable mercury in their bodies caused by methylmercury in coal power plant emissions, wastewater, and coal ash that deposit into air, water, and soil; mainly exposing people through eating contaminated fish (prompting advisories in all 50 states) and inhaling polluted air.

Health Harms



Neurological

Reduced IQ in children
Impaired memory/attention in children
Delayed language and motor skills
Learning disabilities and behavioral problems



Cardiovascular

Increased heart disease and elevated blood pressure

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Pregnant women
- Fetuses and infants
- Children
- Subsistence fishers
- Tribal communities with high fish consumption
- Workers in industrial settings

Areas with greatest exposure



Ohio

Ohio river valley



Pennsylvania

Ohio river valley



West Virginia

Ohio river valley



Michigan

Great lakes region



Florida

Everglades



All 50 States

Fish advisories

MERCURY

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Tightened Smokestack Filters:** May 2024 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards amendments cut non-mercury toxics by 67% and lignite coal mercury emissions 70% via better controls.
- **Curbed Wastewater Dumping:** May 2024 Steam Electric Effluent Limitations Guidelines required coal plants to treat mercury-laden discharges before releasing into rivers.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Extending Wastewater Deadlines:** Pushing coal plant mercury treatment requirements to 2034, allowing continued dumping into rivers and lakes.
- **Repealing Smokestack Standards:** Finalizing June 2025 repeal of 2024 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards updates, reverting to weaker 2012 limits.
- **Waivers for Coal Plants:** Granting 71 coal-fired units two-year waivers from stronger mercury and toxics controls.
- **Downplaying Community Risks:** Delaying environmental justice focus for downstream neighborhoods and Tribal fishing areas.

Reverting to 2012 standards lets coal plants dodge compliance costs at greater expense to pregnant women, children, Tribal communities, and fishing regions who face heightened brain damage risks from eating mercury-tainted fish.



THE FOOD WE EAT

Dietary toxics from bioaccumulation and agricultural residues

PESTICIDES

Scale of Exposure

Most Americans have measurable pesticide residues in their blood from eating treated produce, breathing sprayed air, or touching treated surfaces, as many U.S. households use pesticides annually indoors and outdoors, while billions of pounds are applied to crops across the country.

Health Harms



Neurological

Nervous system damage (e.g., organo-phosphates)



Endocrine

Hormone disruption and endocrine effects



Cancer



Respiratory

Respiratory irritation



Reproductive

Developmental and reproductive effects

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Farmworkers and applicators
- Children
- Rural and agricultural communities in high spray areas
- Consumers with high dietary pesticide residues

Areas with greatest exposure



California

Central Valley



Midwest farm states

Corn, soy, wheat



Southeastern agricultural regions

Mississippi Delta, South Georgia

Florida's vegetable belt;



Multi-family units

Areas with high indoor pesticide use

Key Pesticides of Concern:

- **Dicamba:** A drift-prone herbicide that can irritate skin, eyes, and the respiratory system while also causing significant off-target crop damage and weed-resistance concerns.
- **Glyphosate:** Glyphosate is a common weed killer used on tens of millions of acres in the U.S. that can leave residues in food and water and is controversial because it is linked by many scientists to cancer and other long-term health problems, especially with frequent exposure.
- **Organophosphates (OPs):** Organophosphate pesticides like chlorpyrifos can seriously harm the brain and nerves, especially in babies and children, can cause dangerous poisonings in workers and nearby communities, and are therefore considered too risky for many uses.
- **Neonicotinoids:** A popular replacement for the OPs, these pesticides can seriously harm bees and other helpful insects and may also affect the developing brains and bodies of babies and children.
- **Paraquat:** A weed killer that many countries have banned because it can drift farther than once thought and expose nearby farms, schools, and neighborhoods, and contact with it is strongly linked to higher rates of Parkinson's disease and other serious brain disorders.

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Banned Chlorpyrifos on Food:** August 2021 revoked all food tolerances (effective 2022), halting use on fruits/veggies after court order based upon child brain development risks, but the effort was blocked by an appeals court ruling.
- **Revoked Organophosphate Tolerances:** 2023-2024 canceled most food uses for 14 nerve-damaging organophosphates (e.g., malathion, diazinon) due to health dangers.
- **Tightened Neonicotinoid Labels:** 2020-2024 required bee protections, no-drift buffers, and lower residues for pollinator-killing neonics on crops.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Reapproving Dicamba:** Registering dicamba for genetically engineered crops (February 2026) despite drift damaging neighbors' fields and exposing communities.
- **Delaying Paraquat Restrictions:** Demanding two years of user monitoring data instead of canceling drift-prone paraquat uses causing off-site contamination.
- **Ignoring Endocrine Science:** Failing to factor in new research on hormone disruption.
- **Overlooking Chemical Cocktails:** Sticking to single-chemical reviews while ignoring kids' cumulative exposures in farm areas.
- **Prioritizing Farm Output:** Elevating crop yields above farmworker and rural family health protections.
- **Approving PFAS Pesticides:** Has approved 5 PFAS containing pesticide ingredients since 2025 risking expanded contamination of soil and water in the long-term.
- **Rushing Reviews:** Taken 5,000+ action on pending approvals since January 2025 via process "optimizations," likely bypassing a full and vigorous review process.

These choices put more toxic pesticides into the air, soil, and food supply—raising risks for farmworkers and rural families breathing spray drift, and for everyone eating food with higher pesticide residues, especially children and pregnant people.



HOMES & CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Indoor toxics from household materials and personal care products



HOMES & CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Indoor toxics from household materials and personal care products

PHTHALATES

Scale of Exposure

Most Americans have measurable levels of multiple phthalates in their bodies from everyday contact; eating food from plastic packaging, breathing dust from vinyl flooring, or absorbing them through personal care products and medical devices. A [2024 New York University-led study](#) estimated that phthalate-related diseases cost \$66.7 billion in a single year.

Health Harms



Endocrine

Hormone disruption (particularly testosterone and thyroid)
Early puberty
Obesity and insulin resistance



Reproductive

Reduced fertility and sperm quality
Birth defects affecting male reproductive development



Neurological

Developmental effects in children
Neurodevelopmental effects

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Pregnant women
- Fetuses and infants
- Children
- Workers in plastics manufacturing
- Hospital patients exposed through medical devices
- Communities with high cumulative chemical burdens

Areas with greatest exposure



Urban & industrialized

metropolitan areas where consumer and building products, vehicle emissions, and plastics production concentrate exposures



Fenceline communities near plastics production



Communities near Superfund sites

Homestead Air Force Base, FL (Miami-Dade County), Love Canal, NY, East Chicago, IN, Puerto Rico Superfund Cohort Sites, Calvert City, KY

PHTHALATES

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Found Unreasonable Phthalate Risks:** December 2024 finalized TSCA risk evaluations for DINP/DPHP showing consumer risks from toys/flooring, with cumulative assessments of seven phthalates.
- **Prioritized Phthalates for Review:** 2019-2024 designated seven high-priority phthalates (e.g., DBP, DEHP, DCHP) under TSCA, launching safety probes leading to risk findings.
- **Advanced Cumulative Science:** IRIS and TSCA processes confirmed phthalates' combined hormone effects, informing voluntary industry phaseouts in children's products.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Delaying Risk Management Rules:** Postponing bans or phaseouts after finding unreasonable risks for all seven assessed phthalates, prolonging exposures from everyday plastics and lotions.
- **Narrowing Assessments:** Shrinking the scope of “conditions of use” to exclude consumer products, dodging full exposure accounting.
- **Relying on Worker Gear:** Opting for PPE over source elimination even where worker risks are confirmed, burdening employees instead.
- **Excluding Consumer Risks:** Claiming “no unreasonable risk” to the public despite evidence, blocking TSCA restrictions on phthalate-containing products.

These changes leave millions of Americans, particularly children and pregnant women, more exposed to endocrine-disrupting chemicals.



HOMES & CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Indoor toxics from household materials and personal care products

LEAD (in Paint/Soil)

Scale of Exposure

Lead paint hazards remain in approximately 34.6 million U.S. homes built before 1978, with deteriorating paint creating toxic dust and chips that children inhale and ingest through normal hand-to-mouth contact. Soil contamination from decades of leaded gasoline, industrial emissions, and paint chips affects nearly 1 in 4 households, particularly in urban areas.

Health Harms



Neurological

IQ loss and attention disorders in children

Behavioral problems and reduced impulse control

Learning disabilities and developmental delays

Hearing problems



Cardiovascular

High blood pressure and kidney damage in adults



Cancer

Potential links to cancers of the lung, stomach, brain, and kidneys

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Infants and young children
- Pregnant women and fetuses
- Residents of pre-1978 housing
- Low-income families in older urban neighborhoods
- Workers in renovation, demolition, and recycling industries

Areas with greatest exposure



Pre-1978 housing stock



Cities

Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Newark, Philadelphia, St. Louis



Industrial legacy sites

Chicago, IL; Indianapolis, IN; Philadelphia, PA; Detroit, MI; New Orleans, LA



Communities

near former lead smelters or Battery recycling facilities

LEAD (in Paint/Soil)

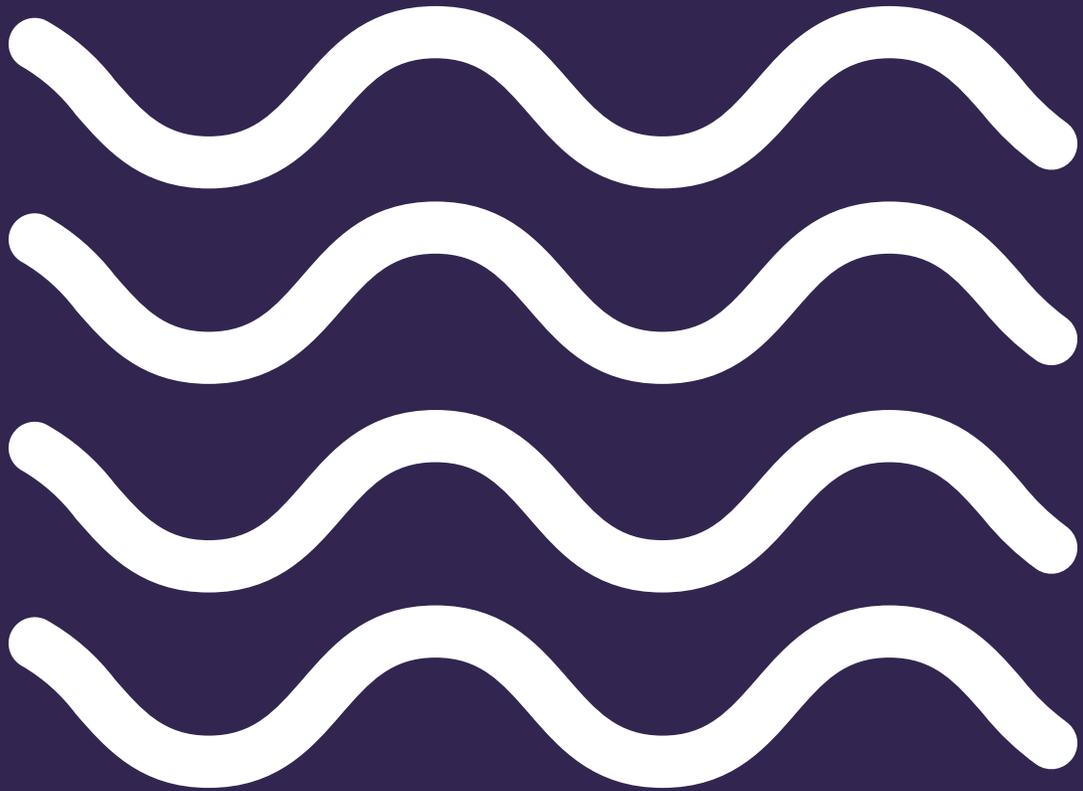
Previous EPA Protections:

- **Mandated Safe Paint Practices:** 1992 rule required sellers and landlords to disclose lead paint in pre-1978 homes; 2008 Renovation, Repair, and Painting (RRP) Rule enforced dust-safe work practices during repairs to prevent lead exposure.
- **Lowered Soil Cleanup Triggers:** Established 400 ppm residential screening level in 1994, tightened to 200 ppm in 2024 guidance to trigger more contaminated soil removals and protect children playing outside.
- **Lowered Dust Hazard Standards:** 2024 rule cut clearance levels for lead dust post-renovation, requiring more thorough cleanup to protect children from contaminated homes.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Weakening Soil Cleanup Triggers:** Issued October 2025 Residential Soil Lead Directive tripling the removal management level from 200 ppm to 600 ppm, meaning families previously eligible for federal soil cleanup are now told their contaminated properties are “acceptable” at levels three times higher than current science supports. This now also applies to schools and daycare sites where children play.
- **Increasing Lead Dust Hazards:** Proposed reconsideration or weakening of Renovation, Repair, and Painting (RRP) Rule enforcement as part of broad deregulatory agenda, potentially easing safe work practices that prevent lead dust contamination during home repairs and renovations.
- **Delaying Enforcement:** Reducing inspections and penalties for contractors who fail to follow lead-safe work practices, leaving families exposed to preventable contamination.

These changes disproportionately affect low-income families in older housing who cannot afford private remediation. Children playing in yards with soil at 600 ppm, three times the previous threshold, face ongoing neurological harm.



THE WATER WE DRINK & USE

Contaminants in tap water, groundwater, and surface water supplies



THE WATER WE DRINK & USE

Contaminants in tap water, groundwater, and surface water supplies

PFAS “Forever Chemicals”

Scale of Exposure

PFAS chemicals are so widespread that about 172 million Americans have them in their drinking water, and nearly everyone in the U.S., including newborn babies, has PFAS in their blood from multiple sources like water, food, consumer products, and indoor dust.

Health Harms



Cancer
Kidney
Testicular



Immune
Reduced immune response
Decreased vaccine effectiveness



Reproductive
Increased preterm births
Pregnancy complications
Low birth weights
Reduced fertility for men & women



Organ damage
Liver damage



Endocrine
Thyroid disease
Hormone disruption



Metabolic
Elevated cholesterol

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Communities near military bases, airports, and industrial facilities
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Infants and young children

Areas with greatest exposure



Michigan
Most contaminated state



North Carolina
Cape Fear River basin



New Jersey
Gloucester County, South Jersey



Pennsylvania
Bucks and Montgomery Counties, near military installations



California
Fresno, Southern California



New England
All



Military bases
450+ nationwide



Communities
Near PFAS manufacturing sites

PFAS “Forever Chemicals”

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Set Drinking Water Limits:** In April 2024, EPA finalized the first national standards for six PFAS, capping PFOA and PFOS at 4 parts per trillion (nearly zero allowed) and the others at 10 parts per trillion. This protects about 100 million people from contaminated tap water.
- **Started Water Testing Nationwide:** In January 2023, EPA required water suppliers to test for 29 PFAS chemicals, uncovering hotspots and guiding cleanup efforts.
- **Blocked Reuse of Old PFAS:** In January 2024, EPA banned making or using 329 long-dormant PFAS without review, in an effort to prevent new pollution from these phased-out chemicals.
- **Issued Cleanup Guidance:** Released 2024 interim guidance urging destruction or safe disposal of PFAS-contaminated wastes, including sewage sludge applied for farmland use, but offered no enforceable national ban or limits.
- **Required Factories to Report PFAS:** An October 2023 rule forced polluters to disclose all PFAS use and waste, no more hiding tiny amounts, starting with 2024 reports.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Delaying PFOA/PFOS Water Standards:** Extending compliance two years to 2031, postponing filters for tainted tap water serving millions.
- **Eliminating Standards for Four PFAS:** Rescinding limits and Hazard Index for PFHxS, PFNA, PFBS, and GenX, exposing more people to unregulated chemicals.
- **Challenging Rules in Court:** Filing motions to vacate four PFAS drinking water standards, amplifying uncertainty for water systems.
- **Approving PFAS Pesticides:** Registering fluorinated pesticides that degrade very slowly, introducing new food/soil exposures (five approved).
- **Easing PFAS Reporting:** Delaying TSCA reporting to 2026 and exempting importers of PFAS-containing products from reporting, hiding people’s exposure to these PFAS.
- **Halting Biosolids Limits:** Delaying risk assessment of health risks posed by applying PFAS-contaminated sewage sludge to farm fields, preventing future regulation of this practice.
- **Slowing Release Disclosures:** Pausing enforcement of the 2023 facility Toxic Release Information (TRI) reporting, reducing oversight of emissions.

These actions create confusion for utilities, delaying treatments and prolonging risks, contradicting EPA’s own scientific determinations about PFAS health risks.



THE WATER WE DRINK & USE

Contaminants in tap water, groundwater, and surface water supplies

LEAD (in Water)

Scale of Exposure

Around 185 million Americans (56%) are served by water systems with detectable lead via ~9 million remaining lead service lines. There is no safe level of exposure, and ~500,000 children under age 6 have elevated blood lead levels.

Health Harms



Neurological

IQ loss and attention disorders in children
Behavioral problems and reduced impulse control
Learning disabilities & hearing problems



Cardiovascular

High blood pressure
Cardiovascular disease in adults



Organ damage

Kidney damage



Cancer

Potential links to cancers of the lung, stomach, brain, and kidneys.

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Infants and young children
- Pregnant women and fetuses
- Residents of pre-1978 housing
- Residents of cities with aging water infrastructure
- Workers in renovation, demolition, and recycling industries

Areas with greatest exposure



Pennsylvania

Largest number of lead service lines



Ohio

Legacy industrial contamination



Michigan

Flint legacy



Illinois

Chicago (Cook County) has the nation's largest known inventory of lead service lines



Wisconsin

Milwaukee and older housing in Racine and Green Bay



Cities

Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Jackson, MS, Milwaukee, Newark, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, Washington D.C.

LEAD (in Water)

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Tightened Drinking Water Limits:** The 2024 Lead and Copper Rule Improvements set a 10-year deadline to replace all lead service lines nationwide and lowered the action level from 15 ppb to 10 ppb.
- **Required Proactive Replacement:** Mandated utilities to inventory lead pipes and create replacement plans rather than waiting for high test results.
- **Expanded Testing:** Required testing at schools and childcare facilities served by water systems.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Delaying Lead Pipe Replacement:** Delayed release of billions in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding for lead pipe replacements (e.g., \$3B+ stalled as of late 2025), pausing inventory and removal projects nationwide.
- **Extending Compliance Deadlines:** Granting extensions to utilities for meeting the 10-year replacement requirement, allowing continued use of lead service lines.
- **Weakening Monitoring Requirements:** Proposing to reduce testing frequency and loosen sampling protocols that identify lead contamination.

These delays mean millions of families, particularly children in low-income communities, continue drinking water contaminated with a neurotoxin that permanently damages developing brains.



THE WATER WE DRINK & USE

Contaminants in tap water, groundwater, and surface water supplies

ARSENIC

Scale of Exposure

Millions of Americans have detectable levels of this known human carcinogen in their blood and urine from arsenic pollution caused by coal power plants contaminating groundwater; primary risk is to rural communities relying on unregulated private wells not covered by the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Health Harms



Cancer

Lung, bladder, and skin cancers



Cardiovascular

Cardiovascular disease



Endocrine

Diabetes



Dermatological

Skin lesions
Hyper-pigmentation



Neurological

Developmental and cognitive harm in children



Immune

Immune system suppression

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Children
- Fetuses
- Private wells users
- Households lacking filtration systems
- Some Tribal communities
- Agricultural regions with legacy pesticide contamination

Areas with greatest exposure



Maine

Portland-South Portland



Nevada

Reno-Truckee Meadows



Michigan

Port Huron



Arizona

Tucson Metro



California

Fresno Metro



Agricultural regions

With legacy pesticide contamination (Southeast)

ARSENIC

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Updated Air Emission Standards:** Tightened 2024 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards cut arsenic releases from coal smokestacks, reducing fallout into drinking water sources.
- **Limited Wastewater Discharges:** 2024 Steam Electric rule required treatment of heavy metal-laden coal plant wastewater, curbing arsenic flows into rivers used for drinking and fishing.
- **Strengthened Coal Ash Rules:** Expanded 2015 safeguards for closing unlined ash ponds and monitoring groundwater, preventing arsenic leaching from toxic waste dumps.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Repealing Power Plant Emission Limits:** Repeal of 2024 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards update, loosening controls on arsenic from coal plant smokestacks that deposit into water supplies.
- **Delaying Coal Ash Cleanups:** Postponing monitoring and removal of toxic coal ash ponds, loaded with arsenic leaking into groundwater and rivers, until 2032.
- **Extending Wastewater Discharges:** Pushing coal plant toxic water treatment deadlines to 2034, allowing arsenic and other poisons to keep flowing into streams used for drinking.
- **Stalling Drinking Water Updates:** Failing to update the 2001 arsenic drinking water standard (10 ppb) despite 2019 studies showing health risks below this level.
- **Uneven Funding for Filters:** Distributing infrastructure cash patchily, shortchanging rural and Tribal water systems treating arsenic.
- **Ignoring Private Wells:** Leaving unregulated private wells and very small water systems, currently untested for arsenic, without federal safeguards.

Millions remain exposed to preventable cancer risk, particularly private well users in Maine, Michigan, Wisconsin, and agricultural regions.



THE WATER WE DRINK & USE

Contaminants in tap water, groundwater, and surface water supplies

TCE (Trichloroethylene)

Scale of Exposure

This known human carcinogen is one of the most widespread groundwater contaminants in the U.S., often leaking into drinking water supplies from industrial solvents, dry cleaning operations, military sites, and hundreds of Superfund cleanup locations.

Health Harms



Cancer

Kidney, liver, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma cancers



Neurological

Increased Parkinson's disease risk



Reproductive

Fetal heart defects
Low birth weight



Organ damage

Liver toxicity



Immune

Immune system suppression

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Pregnant women
- Fetuses and infants
- Residents relying on private wells
- Communities near contaminated industrial or military sites
- Workers using degreasing solvents

Areas with greatest exposure



California

Superfund and aerospace sites



New York

Long Island vapor intrusion cases



Michigan

Noted TCE plumes in Washtenaw County, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo



North Carolina

Camp Lejeune military site



Arizona

Superfund plumes under Tucson and Phoenix industrial corridors

TCE (Trichloroethylene)

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Banned Nearly All TCE Uses:** December 2024 TSCA rule prohibited manufacturing, processing, and consumer/commercial uses (most within 1 year), with worker protections for limited industrial holdovers.
- **Finalized Unreasonable Risk Finding:** January 2023 revised determination deemed TCE risky across 52 uses, following 2020 evaluation and peer review.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Postponing TCE Ban:** Repeatedly delaying the 2024 rule's effective date, pushing key prohibitions to May 2026 and beyond.
- **Extending Wastewater Dumping:** Granting industries until December 2026 to stop releasing TCE into sewers and waterways, prolonging contamination.

Workers in factories face ongoing cancer and nervous system risks, and groundwater stays tainted without faster action.



THE AIR WE BREATHE

Atmospheric toxics from power plants, industrial facilities, vehicles, and indoor sources



THE AIR WE BREATHE

Atmospheric toxics from power plants, industrial facilities, vehicles, and indoor sources

PM 2.5 (Fine Particulate Matter / Soot)

Scale of Exposure

85 million Americans live in areas with unhealthy year-round PM 2.5 particle pollution – mainly from vehicle exhaust, power plant smokestacks, and industrial emissions — that enters the bloodstream through inhaled air and is linked to over 50,000 premature deaths yearly.

Health Harms



Cardiovascular

Heart attack
Stroke



Respiratory

Asthma attacks
Respiratory distress



Cancer

Lung cancer



Reproductive

Preterm birth
Low birth weight



Neurological

Impaired cognitive functioning



Metabolic

Metabolic disorders

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Children
- Elderly
- Outdoor workers
- People with chronic disease
- Overburdened Communities

Areas with greatest exposure



Arizona

Phoenix



California

Bakersfield, Fresno, Los Angeles



Illinois

Chicago



Michigan

Detroit



Ohio

Cleveland



Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh



Texas

Houston

PM 2.5 (Fine Particulate Matter / Soot)

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Tightened Annual Limit:** 2024 rule cut PM2.5 air quality standard from 12.0 to 9.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, preventing ~4,500 premature deaths yearly.
- **Curbing Power Plant Pollution:** 2024 rules for coal/gas plants cut ~770 tons direct PM2.5 by 2028.
- **Improved Daily Limit:** 2024 rulemaking kept 35 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ daily max (2 bad days/year) with better tracking.
- **Required State Cleanup Plans:** Set deadlines for states to plan local PM2.5 reductions.
- **Used Expert Science Reviews:** Drew on independent advisors and 600+ studies.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Rolling Back PM2.5 Standard:** Petitioning federal court to vacate the 2024 standard (9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), seeking return to 12 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ which according to EPA's own analysis could result in approximately 4,500 more deaths and 1 million more cases of asthma-related health complications annually by 2032.
- **Freezing Enforcement:** Froze enforcement of the new PM2.5 standard via Jan 2025 regulatory freeze.
- **Delaying Nonattainment Designations:** Missing legal deadlines for designating “nonattainment areas,” delaying local cleanup plans.
- **Zeroing Out Lives Saved:** Dropping monetary value of lives saved, illnesses prevented, and lost workdays from cost-benefit analyses for air rules—considering only industry costs for the first time in EPA history.
- **Ignoring Science:** Dismissed expert science advisors on the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) and Science Advisory Board (SAB) members Jan 2025; delaying reconstitution but expected to do so with less unbiased public health and academic expertise and more industry insiders.
- **Repealing Power Plant Rules:** Repeal of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) standards will increase PM2.5 as a co-pollutant, increasing levels by ~1,000 tons.

By refusing to implement the 2024 rule and missing statutory deadlines, EPA is choosing regulatory delay over health protection.



THE AIR WE BREATHE

Atmospheric toxics from power plants, industrial facilities, vehicles, and indoor sources

GROUND-LEVEL OZONE (Smog)

Scale of Exposure

More than 125 million Americans, an increase of 25 million in recent years, live in areas with persistent unhealthy ground-level ozone levels, mainly formed from vehicle exhaust, power plant emissions, and industrial pollutants reacting in sunlight, irritating the lungs when breathed in.

Health Harms



Respiratory

Asthma attacks
Respiratory distress
Reduced lung function
Long-term lung capacity decline



Societal

Increased hospitalizations
Missed work/school



Cardiovascular

Heart attack
Stroke

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Children and adolescents
- Older adults with respiratory or cardiovascular disease
- Outdoor workers
- Residents of urban or industrial areas

Areas with intrinsic ozone issues due to vehicle use:



California

Los Angeles, San Joaquin Valley



Texas

Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth



Illinois

Chicago metro

Areas suffering from downwind ozone:



Florida

Miami, Tampa



New York

NYC, Long Island



Washington DC

Metro area including MD and VA suburbs



East Coast

Much of Atlantic seaboard, all of New England

GROUND-LEVEL OZONE (Smog)

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Blocked Upwind State Pollution:** Expanded “Good Neighbor Plan” to curb smog drifting across state lines, rejecting plans from 21 states for weak controls on power plants and industry.
- **Followed Expert Science Advice:** New studies showed smog harms health even below current limits, and a science panel urged tightening the standard to 55-60 ppb. EPA leadership agreed a fresh review was needed but never finalized any changes.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Scrapping Good Neighbor Plan:** Has proposed revocation and paused enforcement, letting upwind states keep sending smog across state borders; approving weaker cleanup plans from 8 states.
- **Repealing Power Plant GHG Standards:** Repeal of GHG rules that cut smog-building nitrogen oxides by ~49,000 tons yearly.
- **Delaying Industry Smog Controls:** Extending oil/gas industry deadlines for cutting smog chemicals from early 2026 to March 2029 (leak detection, flares).
- **Easing Smog Tracking:** Loosening state air monitoring rules for smog-forming chemicals.
- **Ignoring Science:** Dismissed expert science advisors on the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) and Science Advisory Board(SAB) members; delaying reconstitution but expected to do so with less unbiased public health and academic expertise.

These changes mean millions of Americans in downwind states, particularly children, outdoor workers, and people with asthma, face more exposure to respiratory irritants from sources they cannot control.



THE AIR WE BREATHE

Atmospheric toxics from power plants, industrial facilities, vehicles, and indoor sources

BENZENE

Scale of Exposure

Hundreds of thousands to millions of residents living near petrochemical corridors are exposed to this known human carcinogen, mainly through breathing contaminated air from oil refineries and chemical plants (via process vents, equipment leaks, storage tanks, and flaring), plus gasoline vehicle exhaust. Note: Benzene is both an air and water contaminant

Health Harms



Cancer

Acute Myeloid Leukemia and other blood cancers
Lymphomas



Bone marrow & Blood cell

Bone marrow suppression
Reduced red blood cell production
Long-term damage to blood cell formation

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Children
- Pregnant women
- Industrial workers
- Fence-line communities near petrochemical facilities

Areas with greatest exposure:



California

Los Angeles, Bay Area



Texas

Houston ship channel



Louisiana

“Cancer Alley” along Mississippi River



Pennsylvania

Industrial and Chemical Corridors in Allegheny, Philadelphia and Delaware Counties



Ohio

Ohio River Valley

BENZENE

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Cut Oil & Gas Leaks:** The 2023 Oil & Gas Methane Rule slashed 16 million tons of smog-forming VOCs, along with 590,000 tons of toxic air pollutants like benzene through 2038 via better leak detection and flare controls.
- **Locked Major Plants to Strict Controls:** The 2024 “Once In, Always In” Rule required ongoing tight benzene limits even if emissions fell, preventing reclassification loopholes.
- **Tightened Refinery Rules:** The 2024 Petroleum Refinery Sector Rule added fence-line monitors (triggering fixes above 9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) and faster leak repairs at refineries.
- **Added Coke Plant Monitors:** The 2024 Coke Oven Rule required benzene tracking just outside plant fences near communities.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Scrapping “Once In, Always In” Policy:** Proposing to rescind rule keeping major benzene emitters under strict controls, letting big plants reclassify as small sources with looser rules.
- **Rolling Back Air Hazards Rules:** In March 2025, the Trump EPA announced it would reconsider certain hazardous air pollutant standards (NESHAPs) and consider delaying compliance for affected industries, a move that could also weaken or delay refinery benzene protections that communities rely on.
- **Weakening Chemical Plant Standards:** Reconsidering 2024 National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants updates for refineries/chemicals, raising benzene action levels and delaying real-time community monitoring.

Weakening these protections directly increases cancer risk for the hundreds of thousands of people, especially children, living in the shadow of refineries and chemical plants.



THE AIR WE BREATHE

Atmospheric toxics from power plants, industrial facilities, vehicles, and indoor sources

FORMALDEHYDE

Scale of Exposure

Nearly all Americans face some exposure to formaldehyde, a known human carcinogen and top indoor air pollutant, from pressed wood, furniture, and building materials off-gassing into air, with ~22 million in manufactured/mobile homes at especially elevated risk through breathing contaminated indoor air.

Note: Formaldehyde is a contaminant of both air and consumer products found in homes.

Health Harms



Cancer

Nasopharyngeal cancer
Leukemia (chronic exposure)



Respiratory

Asthma exacerbation & chronic bronchitis
Airway inflammation & respiratory irritation
Eye, nose, & throat irritation (short-term exposure)

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Children
- People with asthma
- Residents of manufactured or mobile homes
- Residents of older or poorly ventilated housing
- Workers in manufacturing and construction
- Communities exposed to high traffic or wildfire smoke

Areas with greatest exposure:



Texas

Petrochemical sector, vehicle emissions



California

Traffic emissions, wildfire smoke



Louisiana

“Cancer Alley” (St. John the Baptist, St. James, Iberville, and East Baton Rouge Parishes)



North Carolina

Manufactured housing industry

FORMALDEHYDE

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Implemented Wood Emission Standards:** The 2016 TSCA Title VI rule, effective after 2018, cut formaldehyde from plywood/MDF/particleboard ~80-90%, reducing indoor air levels in homes/furniture by 20-50%.
- **Found No Safe Exposure Level:** January 2025 risk evaluation determined formaldehyde poses cancer risks from chronic inhalation at any detectable level, particularly in homes, schools, and workplaces, using a health benchmark of 0.0057 ppm and concluding even tiny amounts increase cancer risk with no true safe threshold.
- **Advanced Underlying Science:** 2024 finalized IRIS Toxicological Review (peer-reviewed by National Academies) reaffirmed formaldehyde as inhalation carcinogen, informing TSCA finding (suspended 2019, unsuspending 2021).

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Weakening Formaldehyde Cancer Protections:** While still declaring formaldehyde poses an unreasonable risk from acute exposures, the EPA's updated draft risk memorandum proposes doubling previous exposure allowances by claiming levels at or below 0.3 ppm protect against cancer and chronic non-cancer effects, despite its own IRIS assessment showing cancer risks at all levels.
- **Downplaying Cancer Risk:** Emphasizing short-term irritation while downplaying long-term cancer findings; limiting which studies can be considered in TSCA reviews.
- **Delaying rules:** Postponing rules that would limit formaldehyde in manufactured homes, schools, and other buildings where children spend time.
- **Repealing Accident Safeguards:** Proposing repeal of 2024 Risk Management Program updates endangering communities near hundreds of formaldehyde-handling facilities among the 12,500 high-risk facilities nationwide.

Because Americans spend most time indoors, where formaldehyde off-gasses from furniture, insulation, and wood products, these policy shifts directly increase exposure to a chemical linked to cancer and chronic respiratory disease.



THE AIR WE BREATHE

Atmospheric toxics from power plants, industrial facilities, vehicles, and indoor sources

VINYL CHLORIDE

Scale of Exposure

Concentrated near PVC manufacturing and petrochemical facilities, where people are mainly exposed by breathing contaminated air and, in some cases, from polluted soil and drinking water. Exposure to this known human carcinogen impacts hundreds of thousands to millions of residents in fence-line communities. Note: Vinyl chloride is both an air and water contaminant.

Health Harms



Cancer

Brain and lung cancers
Liver angiosarcoma (rare liver cancer)
Long-term exposure increases cancer risk



Neurological

Nerve Damage



Organ damage

Liver damage



Immune

Immune system effects

Most Affected

Especially Vulnerable:

- Fence-line communities near PVC manufacturing facilities and petrochemical corridors
- Workers in plastic production
- Communities near hazardous rail routes
- Children

Areas with greatest exposure:



Texas

Houston Ship Channel, largest refinery/petrochemical concentration



Louisiana

“Cancer Alley” along Mississippi River



West Virginia

Chemical production zones around Kanawha County and along the Ohio River.



Ohio

Ohio River Valley, East Palestine rail corridor



Kentucky

PVC complex in Marshall County

VINYL CHLORIDE

Previous EPA Protections:

- **Prioritized for TSCA Review:** Designated vinyl chloride as a high-priority chemical in December 2024 to kick off a full risk evaluation covering manufacturing and PVC uses.
- **Tightened Plant Emissions:** Finalized 2024 NESHAP updates for PVC and chemical manufacturing facilities, slashing emissions through better leak detection, process vents, and wastewater controls; cutting cancer risks by about 70%.

What Current EPA Leadership Is Doing to Increase Exposure:

- **Undermining Emission Safeguards:** Granting two-year exemptions from hazardous air pollutant (HAP) rules covering fenceline monitors and equipment leak detection at 25 vinyl chloride/PVC facilities and directly signaling openness to repealing the strengthened 2024 PVC emission standards.
- **Repealing Accident Safeguards:** Proposing repeal of Risk Management Program (RMP) enhancements despite 215 chemical incidents in 2025, increasing risks for the communities living near the ~300-500 vinyl chloride handlers among the 12,500 high-risk facilities nationwide.
- **Delaying Data Reporting:** Extending TSCA deadlines to May 2026 for vinyl chloride health/safety studies.
- **Delaying Risk Scoping:** Final vinyl chloride TSCA draft scoping document was due June 2025, but has not yet been produced.
- **Narrowing EJ Analysis:** Reducing focus on fenceline community impacts.

These decisions keep vinyl chloride pollution higher around PVC and plastics facilities, raising lifelong cancer risks for workers and families living near plants, rail lines, and accident-prone chemical corridors.

CUMULATIVE & COMMUNITY EXPOSURE

The Multiplier Effect

The most urgent finding in this analysis is not the individual chemicals, it is the **compounded harm when multiple EPA rollbacks happen simultaneously in the same communities.**

When multiple EPA rollbacks occur at once, communities don't experience additive harm. They experience **cumulative harm.**

This compounded harm is further exacerbated by the systematic dismantling of the EPA infrastructure designed to protect these very populations, including:

- **Terminating Justice40 Mandates:** The administration officially rescinded the policy requiring 40% of federal investment benefits to flow to disadvantaged and overburdened communities, effectively diverting resources away from the most polluted corridors.
- **Shutting Down EJ Headquarters and Regional Offices:** EPA has shuttered the national Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights (OEJECR) along with all 10 regional EJ offices, eliminating the primary federal advocates and contact points for frontline residents nationwide.
- **Canceling Vital Community Grants:** EPA rescinded more than \$1.7 billion in previously approved DEI and Environmental Justice grants, with the agency stating the funding was “no longer aligned with agency priorities”. This leaves local monitoring and cleanup projects in overburdened areas without necessary resources.



Louisiana's Cancer Alley

Approximately 1 million residents along an 85-mile corridor face simultaneous exposure to:

- PM 2.5 (from refinery and petrochemical emissions)
- Ground-level ozone (from petrochemical emissions)
- Benzene (from refineries) — increases cancer risk
- Vinyl chloride (from PVC manufacturing) — increases cancer risk
- Formaldehyde (from petrochemical facility emissions) — increases cancer risk
- Many other chemicals not detailed in this report

When EPA weakens standards on all five pollutants at once, residents don't face five separate health burdens. They face a multiplied, cumulative health burden. Children breathe a chemical cocktail daily.

CUMULATIVE & COMMUNITY EXPOSURE: The Multiplier Effect



Ohio River Valley Coal Country

Approximately 2 million residents across 4 states in this corridor face:



- PM 2.5 (from coal-fired power plants)
- Mercury (bioaccumulating in fish from coal plant emissions)



- Ground-level ozone (from fossil fuel combustion)

When EPA weakens coal plant standards and delays mercury and arsenic controls, residents face compounded respiratory and neurological exposure.



Agricultural Communities

Families in California's Central Valley and Midwest face:

- Pesticides (airborne and in soil from agricultural application)
- PM 2.5 (from agricultural burning and dust storms)
- Arsenic (in groundwater and rice crops)

When EPA delays pesticide reviews while weakening PM 2.5 standards, agricultural communities' cumulative exposure multiplies.

Who Bears the Highest Burden?

- Fence-line communities near petrochemical corridors
- Agricultural communities are reliant on pesticide-intensive farming
- Low-income urban neighborhoods with older housing and high traffic
- Tribal communities with limited infrastructure
- Communities of color have historically been zoned near industrial facilities

THE BOTTOM LINE

The current Administration promised to make life easier for industry by rolling back and delaying regulations, and they are delivering on that promise every day, at the expense of your health and that of the environment, in general. These rollbacks are not isolated technical adjustments. They represent a systematic pattern of weakened protection across multiple chemicals, pathways, and communities — all happening at once, scattered across dozens of technical rulemakings with different timelines that obscure the full picture, even for those paying close attention.

Children exposed to lead in 2026 will carry permanent neurological damage. Communities living near refineries in 2026 will experience elevated cancer rates. Pregnant women exposed to PFAS in 2027 will face increased risks of adverse pregnancy outcomes.

These are choices. Safer is a choice.

For more than 50 years, EPA's bedrock mission has been protecting Americans from preventable toxic harm. The question now is whether the agency will return to that mission — or continue down a path of deregulation that leaves millions more Americans exposed to preventable disease.

SAFER 
NOT SICKER
The EPA must put our health first.



**Environmental
Protection Network**

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Mercury

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3. Truthout. “EPA Repeals Regulations for Mercury and Toxic Air Pollutants From Power Plants.” February 20, 2026. <https://truthout.org/articles/epa-repeals-regulations-for-mercury-and-toxic-air-pollutants-from-power-plants/>. (Confirms repeal of 70% lignite Hg reductions and 67% toxics controls; reverts to 2012 standards.)
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Pesticides

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3. IR-4 Project. “Pollinator Protection Data Informs EPA Neonicotinoid Risk Assessments (2020).” June 1, 2020. <https://www.ir4project.org/news/pollinator-protection-epa-risk-assessments-2020/>. (2020-2024 neonicotinoid restrictions: buffers, pollinator protections, reduced max application rates per acre.)

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6. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Insecticide Strategy (Final) to Reduce Exposure of Federally Listed Species. PDF, April 28, 2025. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2025-04/insecticide-strategy-final_0.pdf. (Broad mitigations for insecticides: buffers, drift/runoff controls; part of “process optimizations.”)

Lead in Soil

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2. Harvard Environmental & Energy Law Program. EPA Raised Some Screening Levels for Lead in Soil. Updated October 2025 (July 31, 2024). <https://eelp.law.harvard.edu/tracker/epa-lowered-screening-level-for-lead-in-soil-for-first-time-in-30-years/>. (Tripling soil lead threshold from 200 to 600 ppm; standardized despite multi-source exposure risks.)

3. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Lead in Pre-1978 Housing (American Healthy Homes Survey II). Accessed 2026. <https://www.epa.gov/lead/i-thought-lead-based-paint-had-been-phased-out-how-many-homes-still-contain-lead-based-paint>. (34.6 million U.S. homes or 29.4% pre-1978 contain lead-based paint; deteriorating sources of dust/chips.)

4. Indiana University Newsroom / AGU. “At Least 1 in 4 US Residential Yards Exceeds EPA’s New Soil Lead Screening Level.” June 25, 2024. <https://news.iu.edu/live/news/36716-at-least-1-in-4-us-residential-yards-exceeds-epas>. (~1 in 4 households or ~29M exceed 200 ppm; ~40% exceed 100 ppm from urban multi-sources.)
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Phthalates

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2. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. “EPA Releases Draft TSCA Risk Evaluations for Phthalates DBP and DEHP.” June 9, 2025. <https://www.epa.gov/chemicals-under-tsca/epa-releases-draft-tsca-risk-evaluations-phthalates-dbp-and-dehp-public>. (Unreasonable risks to workers/consumers: 20 COUs for DBP, 13 worker/20 environmental for DEHP; includes toys and flooring exposures.)
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5. Environmental Science & Technology. “Chemicals Used in Plastic Materials: An Estimate of the Attributable Disease Burden in the United States in 2018.” January 10, 2024. <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.2c08364>. (NYU-led study: phthalates contribute \$66.7B in disease costs from preterm birth, reduced sperm count, obesity.)
6. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Phthalates. Last modified December 30, 2025. <https://www.epa.gov/assessing-and-managing-chemicals-under-tsca/phthalates>. (Narrowed consumer conditions of use; no unreasonable risk for most despite cumulative exposure modeling.)

Cumulative & Community Exposure

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3. Inside EPA. “EPA Rescinds Millions in EJ Grants, Citing Alignment with New Agency Priorities.” March 10, 2025. <https://insideepa.com/daily-news/epa-rescinds-millions-ej-grants>. (Documents the cancellation of local grant funding intended for air monitoring, lead abatement, and water filtration in fenceline communities.)
4. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “The Shocking Hazards of Louisiana’s Cancer Alley.” August 3, 2025. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/the-shocking-hazards-of-louisianas-cancer-alley>. (Cancer Alley: ~1 million residents along 85-mile corridor exposed to PM2.5, ozone, benzene, 1,3-butadiene from 150+ petrochemical plants; cancer risks 11x underestimated.)
5. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “Industrial Air Pollution in ‘Cancer Alley’ is 11 Times Higher than Previously Modeled.” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. October 2025. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2025.cancer-alley-monitoring>. (Field monitoring study proving that standard EPA modeling (AirToxScreen) underestimates local benzene and ethylene oxide concentrations by a factor of 11.)
6. Moms Clean Air Force. “The Petrochemical Hazards of Louisiana’s Cancer Alley Could Not Be Clearer.” February 22, 2026. <https://www.momscleanairforce.org/petrochemical-hazards-of-cancer-alley/>. (Benzene, formaldehyde, vinyl chloride/chloroprene carcinogens; elevated leukemia and nasopharyngeal cancers.)
7. PSE Healthy Energy. “New Data Tool Maps Air Pollution from Petrochemical Facilities in Gulf Coast and Ohio River Valley.” December 11, 2024. <https://www.psehealthyenergy.org/new-data-tool-maps-air-pollution-from-petrochemical-facilities-in-gulf-coast-and-ohio-river-val>. (Ohio River Valley: 774 facilities emit PM2.5 precursors causing ~1,500 premature deaths in 2020; ~27,556 people within 3 miles per facility.)
8. Environmental Justice for All. Life at the Fenceline: Understanding Cumulative Health Hazards in Environmental Justice Communities. 2023. <https://ej4all.org/life-at-the-fenceline>. (Cumulative toxics including PM2.5, pesticides, arsenic in fenceline communities like Houston, Central Valley, Louisville; impacts on cancer, respiratory, birth outcomes.)
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10. Human Rights Watch. ‘We’re Dying Here’: The Fight for Life in a Louisiana Fossil Fuel Sacrifice Zone. January 25, 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/01/25/were-dying-here/fight-life-louisiana-fossil-fuel-sacrifice-zone>. (Cancer Alley Black residents face 2x cancer risk from air toxics including PAHs, VOCs, benzene; disproportionate community burden.)

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The EPA must put our health first.

