

New Report Finds Petrochemical Expansion Targets Texas's Most Vulnerable Communities – Again

“Green Light to Pollute in Texas” exposes the impact of petrochemical buildout and federal rollbacks on fenceline communities

For Immediate Release

Houston, TX, November 5, 2025 – A new statewide analysis released today by the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at Texas Southern University warns that a wave of new petrochemical development across Texas is deepening environmental inequality and placing low-income, Black, and Hispanic neighborhoods at even greater risk.

The report, *Green Light to Pollute in Texas: Proposed Buildout of Petrochemical Facilities Targets Most Vulnerable Communities, Again*, examines 89 new or expanding petrochemical facilities across five regions - Port Arthur/Beaumont, Greater Houston, the Coastal Bend, the Southern Coast, and Inland Texas. The report evaluates the particulate matter exposure, toxic air releases, proximity to risk management facilities, and socio-demographic indexes within a three-mile radius of each site using EPA EJScreen 2.2. These indicators assess exposure to harmful air pollutants and proximity to hazardous facilities, while capturing social vulnerability based on race, income, language, and education level.

The findings show that nine out of ten petrochemical facilities are proposed in Texas counties with higher demographic vulnerability (in the form of higher numbers of people of color, or higher numbers of people in poverty, or both) than other areas of the state or the nation—in neighborhoods where residents are already living with significantly higher pollution and health risks than most communities in the country.

Residents living near the petrochemical facilities breathe some of the most polluted air in the country. One of the five proposed facilities is in areas that rank among the worst 10% nationwide for particulate matter exposure. The picture is even more alarming for toxic air releases as nearly half (46%) of facilities are in communities ranked among the nation's top 10% for air toxics.

Earlier [studies](#) show Black and Latino Americans face increased risk of experiencing chemical disasters because there are disproportionately home to industrial facilities that release deadly toxins through fires, explosions, leaks, and spills. Overall, 93% of facilities in our study are located near other high-risk facilities covered by federal [Risk Management Plans](#) (RMP), compounding health, and safety dangers for nearby residents. Texas already holds the dubious record as having the largest number of RMP facilities in the country and the largest number of reported [chemical incidents](#), disproportionately impacting Latino communities. These incidents adversely affect nearby residents in a variety of ways, including road closures, shelter-in-place orders, emergency room visits, and increased cancer risks.

“For more than three decades, environmental scholars have documented how race and poverty predict where polluting industries place their facilities. I documented this facility siting pattern in [Dumping in Dixie](#) in 1990. Yet, this new petrochemical buildout shows that we are not addressing this injustice. Instead, we are reproducing environmental and health inequity in Texas’s most vulnerable communities, while federal protections erode around them,” states Robert D. Bullard, the lead author of the report and often considered the “[father of environmental justice](#).” Petrochemical development is intensifying existing environmental and health burdens in already overexposed communities.

Race remains the strongest predictor of where new petrochemical facilities are located. While 30% of the facilities are located near communities with poverty rates above the national average, more than half (51%) of all facilities are in communities with a higher share of people of color than the national average. “This is not progress. It’s a policy regression. While communities near petrochemical plants face a worsening health crisis and shorter lives, policymakers are paving the way for even more pollution instead of treating it as the public health emergency it is,” states Houston community leader and founder of Raices Collab, Erandi Trevino.

Only 9% of counties in Texas will host these proposed new or expanding projects. The lion’s share of facilities is clustered in Harris and Jefferson Counties. In Jefferson County, 90% of the facilities are proposed in communities that rank among the most overburdened in the nation, enduring worse particulate matter, toxic air releases concentration of risk management facilities, and deeper social vulnerability than 75% of the United States. The per capita burden (e.g., the proportion of polluting facilities per person in the Golden Triangle) is extraordinarily high. School children in Jefferson County already experience some of the [worst air toxics exposure](#) in the nation.

The study clearly shows that having a petrochemical plant as a next-door neighbor does not create an “economic renaissance” or bring economic prosperity to the residents who live on the fence line with these polluting facilities. Conversely, residents who live closest to these facilities face elevated health threats from both pollution and poverty, compared with the general population. Having so many industrial facilities clustered in Port Arthur-Beamont has not brought about an “economic renaissance” for its fenceline residents. Port Arthur is one of the most economically disadvantaged cities in Texas, with a poverty rate of [27.2 percent](#) in 2021.

The federal environmental protection and regulatory landscape shifted dramatically under the Second Trump Administration. Using rapid-fire [executives orders and directives](#), the administration tilted federal policies toward less protection, less federal regulatory oversight, less chemical safety, less pollution monitoring, less environmental and health impact assessment, less science-based decision-making, less clean energy, and more fast-tracking and streamlining permitting, more oil, gas, and petrochemical facility siting, more fossil energy, more exemptions, and licenses to pollute. Nowhere are these dynamics clearer than in Texas, where the

petrochemical buildout has concentrated in already overburdened and economically marginalized communities.

Green Light to Pollute Texas exposes the implications of the continued buildout of petrochemical facilities and how it disproportionately impacts low-income people and communities of color living near these polluting industries. Fenceline communities—long treated as sacrifice zones—are calling on all levels of government to reject new petrochemical and plastics plants. And like fenceline community residents over the decades who have borne a disproportionate burden of petrochemical pollution, residents whose neighborhoods are slated for this new buildout are also calling for urgent action to protect their health and their environment and invest in green infrastructure, green jobs, and clean energy—and not allow their communities to become environmental “sacrifice zones.”

About the Bullard Center

The *Robert D. Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice* at Texas Southern University was established to address the systemic inequities and structural racism that drive disproportionate environmental and climate impacts in Black and other communities of color. The Center combines research, advocacy, and education to advance a vision of equitable and sustainable futures for all. [READ MORE HERE](#).

Media Contact:

DeJonique G. Baptiste, Assistant Director of Communications
Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice
dejonique.baptiste@tsu.edu