

EPA cracks down on toxins threatening those living near chemical plants

April 9 2024, by Ernie Mundell



Are you one of the estimated 104,000 Americans who lives within six miles of factories that spew organic chemicals into the air?

New rules issued Tuesday by the Environmental Protection Agency might make your life healthier, agency officials said.

The new rules "will significantly reduce toxic air pollution from chemical plants, including [ethylene oxide](#) [EtO] and chloroprene," the agency said in a statement. "Once implemented, the rule will reduce both EtO and chloroprene emissions from covered processes and equipment by nearly 80%."

Exposure to both chemicals has long been linked to higher risks for lymphoma, leukemia, [breast cancer](#) and liver cancer.

Other chemical emissions affected by the new rules include benzene, 1,3-butadiene, ethylene dichloride and vinyl chloride, all of which have also been linked to increased cancer risk.

"In addition, the rule will reduce smog-forming [volatile organic compounds](#) by 23,700 tons a year," the EPA said.

Many of these chemicals are emitted into the air by about 200 chemical plants across the country that make synthetic [organic chemicals](#) or a range of polymers and resins, the EPA said.

Factories that create such airborne emissions also tend to cluster in certain areas of the United States, with lower-income Americans and people of color often living in close proximity.

"Today marks a victory in the pursuit for [environmental justice](#), with the final rule poised to significantly reduce the [toxic air pollution](#) that harms communities in Texas's Gulf Coast, Louisiana's Cancer Alley and throughout the U.S.," Patrice Simms, vice president for Healthy Communities at the nonprofit advocacy group Earthjustice, said in the EPA statement.

"This is about whether a child gets leukemia or whether a mother develops breast cancer," Simms told CNN. "It's about neurological impairment, respiratory disease, heart attacks and stroke. In a very real sense, for many, this is a question of life and death."

Key to the new rules is what's known as "fenceline monitoring," which requires companies to track and report levels of certain toxins that may be leaking from their plants. These fenceline rules cover "processes and equipment that make, use, store or emit EtO, chloroprene, benzene, 1,3-butadiene, ethylene dichloride or vinyl chloride," the agency said.

The deadline for compliance with the new rules ranges between 90 days (from the date rules go into effect) to two years, depending on the preparation time companies need to comply, the EPA said.

"For all six pollutants, owners and operators must find the source of the pollution and make repairs if annual average air concentrations of the chemicals are higher than a specified action level at the fenceline," the agency said.

Fenceline monitoring data will be available to everyone in the community at the EPA's [WebFIRE](#) webpage.

"We promised to listen to folks that are suffering from pollution and act to protect them," said EPA Administrator Michael Regan. "Today we deliver on that promise with strong final standards to slash pollution, reduce cancer risk and ensure cleaner air for nearby communities."

More information: Find out more about air pollutants' effect on your health at the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences](#).

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