

Center for Health, Environment & Justice

PRESS RELEASE

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Concerned For Your Child's Asthma? Pollution Near Schools May Be The Problem

EPA Sits On Important School Siting Regulations With 20,000 Schools in Dangerous Locations

Falls Church, VA – The nation's focus has returned to the safety of our schools with the second article by USA TODAY in a series on school siting. Working closely with the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ), USA TODAY examined the environmental danger of a school located in the shadow of one of our nation's largest oil refineries. Wyandotte Early Education Center serves local 4 year-olds, whose developing lungs are particularly susceptible to the sulfuric acid, naphthalene, ammonia and benzene that the Exxon Mobil plant belches into the surrounding air.

The refinery has already been fined by the EPA for failing to monitor and control sulfur gasses that can cause respiratory illness as part of \$6.1 million dollars in penalties levied against ExxonMobil last week. Meanwhile, local doctors like Charmaine Venters, director of a local clinic operated by Louisiana State University take note of unusually high rates of asthma and respiratory illness among students.

"Asthma is a direct result of air pollution and asthma is the number one reason for school absences", said Lois Gibbs, Executive Director of CHEJ. "Industries that are permitted to release toxics into the air must be monitored very carefully and, if in violation, brought into compliance immediately. Too often the industry gets away with violations over and over again without serious penalties. We protect our children by law with seat belts, car seats, bike helmets, and from negligent and abusive parents- toxic pollution should be no different." CHEJ recommends adopting the following **model laws for states and as guidelines for the EPA** http://www.childproofing.org/school_siting_model_legislation.htm

In December, 2007 President Bush signed Subtitle E of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, instructing the EPA to develop the nation's first-ever school siting guidelines to give state legislatures direction in where schools may be physically located in relationship to toxic contamination sites. The EPA has been given a deadline of June, 2009. Nothing has been done since congress passed this directive. No one has even been given the responsibility for this task.

Meanwhile, communities struggle to relocate schools away from industrial plants emitting toxic levels of air pollutants. USA Today had identified over 20,000 of these schools located within a half mile of a major industrial plant.

"No one should have to file a lawsuit to ensure that their kids go to school on sites that are weren't used for the disposal of hazardous waste," says Steve Fischbach of Rhode Island Legal Services who has fought legal battles to pass rudimentary school siting guidelines in Rhode Island.

For more information, please see: http://www.childproofing.org/school_siting.htm

About CHEJ

The Center for Health, Environment & Justice exists to mentor the movement to build healthier communities by empowering people to prevent harm in as many ways, and for as many people, as possible. We believe this can happen when people and groups have the power to play an integral role in promoting human health and environmental integrity. CHEJ's role is to provide the tools, the direction, and the encouragement to these people and groups, so that they can build strong, healthy communities where they live, work, learn, shop, play and pray. Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for the people living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ in 1981 in order to continue mentoring others seeking to prevent harm. CHEJ provides mentoring assistance to communities, homeowners, families and individuals throughout the country. To date, CHEJ has assisted over 10,000 groups nationwide. Currently, CHEJ is mentoring community groups in Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina and Ohio. Details on CHEJ's efforts to help people and communities prevent harm can be found at <http://chej.org/>.