For Immediate Release **Contact: Matthew Freeman**
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New Report Reveals Gap in Houston Air Pollution Testing:

Migrating Toxic Hot Spots from Petrochemical Complex Evade Detection, Endanger Health

Houston --- A new report from the Center for Progressive Reform, to be released to the public at a community meeting Monday evening, September 18, highlights a serious and newly identified air-pollution problem in Houston. According to the report, migrating toxic hot spots -- areas with considerably higher-than-average concentrations of pollutants that are variable in location and persistence because of changing wind direction and emission sources – pose a serious health threat, but are difficult to detect using current tracking methods.

"The pollution coming from the Houston Petrochemical Complex puts local residents are at great risk of life-threatening illnesses," said report author Thomas McGarity, President of the Center for Progressive Reform and a law professor at the University of Texas. "We need to clean up the plants that are causing this damage, and that requires adequate tracking of the pollution they're causing – including migrating toxic hot spots. The TCEQ needs to devote new energy and resources to tracking this severe problem, otherwise Houston residents will continue to pay with their health and possibly even their lives."

In the report, "Man-Made Disaster: Texas's Failure to Protect Its Citizens from the Perils of the Houston Petrochemical Complex," McGarity writes:

> Like phantoms, [the toxic hot spots] come and go, as fugitive emissions from aging pipes, gaskets, and flanges combine with emissions from point sources and uncontrolled emissions from upsets, startups, and shutdowns to produce a complex soup of toxic chemicals in the air of neighborhoods surrounding refineries and associated petrochemical facilities. As breezes shift, these mobile hot spots wax, wane, and wander in unpredictable ways. Particularly in areas with large and interconnected petrochemical facilities, like those in southeast Houston and Texas City, identifying the sources of toxic hot spots is quite difficult but often can be accomplished with adequate resources and much persistence. Tracking the hot spots as they move is also difficult, but doable with adequate resources and will. As it stands now, both are in short supply.

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According to the report, such hot spots have often been detected by standard monitoring, but because systematic monitoring is largely limited to stationary devices, the mobile toxic hot spots are easily missed. Moreover, very little has been done to warn nearby residents of the danger posed by these mobile toxic hot spots. With adequate resources and persistence, McGarity writes, the hot spots could be tracked and their sources identified, thus allowing regulators to clamp down on the dangerous polluting emissions.

At particularly high risk from the migrating toxic hot spots are the southeast Houston neighborhoods near the Houston Petrochemical Complex and Texas City. State and private monitoring has detected dangerously high levels of the toxic chemicals benzene and 1,3-butadiene in areas near oil refineries and petrochemical facilities. These chemicals are dangerous to anyone who inhales them. Long-term exposure, even in small quantities, can cause cancer as well as blood, neurological, and immune system, cardiovascular, respiratory, blood, and liver disorders. Short-term exposure in high doses to benzene via inhalation can cause vertigo, headaches, and unconsciousness, while the acute effects of 1,3-butadiene inhalation include irritation of the eyes, nasal passages, throat, and lungs, blurred vision, and headaches.

The report will be released to the public at community meeting Monday, September 18 at the Hartman Community Center. It is available on CPR's website, along with separate executive summaries in Spanish and English, at www.progressivereform.org.

The Center for Progressive Reform is a nonprofit research and educational organization dedicated to protecting health, safety, and the environment through analysis and commentary. For more information, contact Matthew Freeman at 301-762-8980 or at mfreeman@progressivereform.org. Visit CPR on the web at www.progressivereform.org.

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