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Bush Administration Fails to Clean Up Toxic Waste Dumps, Leaves Communities at Risk

New report from the Center for American Progress and Center for Progressive Reform profiles communities around 50 of the most dangerous Superfund sites in the 10 most populous states

Washington, DC—Toxic waste dumps continue to threaten communities across the country, as the rate of annual Superfund cleanups has fallen more than 50 percent under the Bush administration. One in four Americans live within three miles of one of the 1,244 Superfund sites awaiting cleanup, and approximately three to four million children, who face developmental risks from exposure to environmental contaminants, live within one mile.

A [new report](#) from the Center for American Progress and Center for Progressive Reform, “**The Toll of Superfund Neglect: Toxic Waste Dumps & Communities at Risk**,” profiles five of the most dangerous sites in each of the 10 most populous states (California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey and Georgia), and provides demographic data on the communities at risk.

“This report shows we still have a long way to go to protect our communities from toxic waste sites,” said Reece Rushing, associate director for regulatory policy at the Center for American Progress. “Chemicals found at these sites can get into drinking water, foul the air and contaminate the soil where children play. This puts thousands upon thousands of Americans at heightened risk of everything from cancer to birth defects to brain damage.”

As of the 2000 Census, 234,524 people lived in the census tracts containing one of the 50 sites profiled by the report. Of those, 34,127 are children aged nine and younger and 14,068 are persons aged 75 and older. In 30 of the 50 census tracts, the median household income for 1999 was below that for the nation (that is, below \$41,994), while 13 sites are located in census tracts where the population is at least 40 percent racial minority or Hispanic, including four sites where the percentage is greater than 70.

These sites have awaited cleanup for many years—some since the creation of the Superfund program in 1983—despite being among the most dangerous toxic waste dumps in the country.

“In far too many cases, children born today are threatened by the very same Superfund sites as children born a quarter century ago when Superfund was created,” said Professor Rena Steinzor, co-author of the report and a Member Scholar of the Center for Progressive Reform, which was commissioned by the Center for American Progress to prepare the report. “To ensure that our next generation is healthy and safe, we must recommit ourselves to cleaning up these sites.” Steinzor is also a professor of law at the University of Maryland.

Instead of taking aggressive action to protect at-risk communities, the Bush administration and Congress have resisted reinstatement of a “polluter pays” corporate tax that previously generated \$1.5 billion a year for the Superfund program. The largest beneficiaries of this tax windfall are oil and petrochemical companies whose record profits and outsized CEO compensation packages are front-page news nationwide.

“The Bush administration and Congress have turned their backs on communities threatened by toxic waste sites,” said Steinzor. “Public health is being sacrificed in order to lavish tax breaks on the oil and chemical industries—the very industries responsible for creating the toxic waste sites in the first place. It’s long past time to reinstate the tax on the companies that played such a large role in creating these toxic waste sites.”

With Superfund starved of resources, cleanups have slowed to a crawl. In each of the last three years, only 40 Superfund sites have been declared “construction complete,” compared to at least 85 in each of the four years prior to the Bush administration. Sites are declared “construction complete” when all major construction required for a cleanup is in place. It may still take years more for the actual cleanup to be finished.

Visit http://images1.americanprogress.org/il80web20037/cap/superfund_neglect.pdf to read the entire report: “The Toll of Superfund Neglect: Toxic Waste Dumps & Communities at Risk.” For more information or to arrange interviews, contact Daniella Gibbs Léger of the Center for American Progress at 202-682-1611 or Matthew Freeman of the Center for Progressive Reform at 301-762-8980 or mfreeman@progressivereform.org.

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