

Rachel's Environment & Health News

#178 - America's 167 Most Dangerous Polluters

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New data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reveal that 167 chemical plants and other industrial facilities pose "extremely high cancer risks" to people in nearby neighborhoods, according to Congressman Henry Waxman (D-California) and Congressman Gerry Sikorski (D-Minnesota) who released the data earlier this year. The risk assessments were done by EPA itself. (These are not the Toxic Release Inventory [TRI] data released by EPA this past week, but are similar data from other sources, accompanied by EPA risk estimates.)

Each of the 167 plants presents a cancer risk greater than one in 10,000, according to EPA. This means that one person in a group of 10,000 living near the plant for a lifetime would be expected to get cancer from the plant's air emissions. Congressman Waxman said, "Public officials agree that as a matter of public policy, maximum lifetime cancer risks of greater than one in one million are unacceptable." In other words, the risk from each of these 167 plants is at least 100 times greater than the risk that Congressman Waxman considers acceptable. Congressman Waxman did not say so, but many citizens consider even a one-in-a-million cancer risk too great if those enduring the risk are gaining no benefits, or if they are exposed to the risks without their informed consent.

According to the EPA data, 52 plants present a cancer risk greater than one in 1000; seven present a cancer risk greater than one in 100; and one plant--a Texaco refinery at Port Neches, TX--presents a risk greater than one in ten. If this estimate is accurate, it means that 10% of the people living near the plant for their lifetime are at serious risk of getting cancer from the plant's air pollution.

In delivering the data to Congressman Waxman, EPA Administrator William Reilly cautioned that "the potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the data is significant." Mr. Reilly said EPA conducted the risk assessments without considering local wind patterns, topography and other important details that could change how a plant's emissions affect a nearby neighborhood. Mr. Reilly asserted that EPA's crude technique makes the data suitable for ranking one plant as more dangerous than another, but unsuitable for giving people an accurate sense of the personal risk they face.

Waxman drew a different conclusion from the data: he pointed out that EPA has known about some of these "astronomically high" risks since 1984 and has done nothing about them. In a press release, he lamented the "EPA's sad record of inaction on air toxics."

We have organized the list of America's 167 most acutely dangerous polluters alphabetically by state; within each state, they are arranged alphabetically by town.

Within the list, we have put a number inside square brackets [] alongside those plants that present a risk greater than one-in-10,000. For example, in Port Neches, TX you'll find a [10] next to the Texaco plant; this means the average risk it offers its neighbors is one-in-ten of getting cancer. A plant with no numbers inside square brackets presents a risk somewhere between one-in-1000 and one-in-10,000.

To learn about a single company's misdeeds, you must read the entire list. For example, you must read the whole list to find out that General Electric is operating acutely dangerous plants in Indiana, West Virginia, and Illinois, that Dow Chemical runs acutely dangerous plants in Connecticut, Georgia, Texas, Michigan, California, and Louisiana, and that Occidental (responsible for Love Canal) now owns acutely dangerous plants in Texas, West Virginia, North Carolina, and Louisiana.

We notice the prevalence on this list of petrochemical plants, paper manufacturers, and health industry plants such as Johnson & Johnson (the bandaid people) in New Jersey and Texas and Abbott Labs in North Carolina and Puerto Rico. We also see an obvious prevalence of companies in southern states. With sweet sorrow, we

also note the names of many companies who sponsored Earth Day festivities.

Here are the acutely dangerous 167:

Ketchikan Pulp (Ketchikan, AK); Boise Cascade (Jackson, AL); Akzo (Lemoyne, AL [1000]); International Paper (Mobile, AL); Scott Paper (Mobile, AL); Hammermill (Selma, AL); Nekoosa Papers (Ashdown, AR); Georgia Pacific (Crosset, AR); Asarco (Hayden, AZ [1000]); Stone Container (Snowflake, AZ); Simpson Paper (Anderson, CA); Gaylord Container (Antioch, CA); Simpson paper (Fairhaven, CA); Baxter Health (Irwindale, CA); Unocal (La Mirada, CA); Dow (Pittsburgh, CA); Louisiana Pacific (Samoa, CA); Beatrice Foods (Santa Ana, CA); Santa Maria Chi (Santa Maria, CA); Griffith Micro (Vernon, CA); Valleylab Inc. (Boulder, CO); Cobe Laboratories (Lakewood, CO); Dow (Gales Ferry, CT [1000]); U.S. Surgical (North Haven, CT); Reichhold (Cheswold, DE [1000]); Champion International (Cantonment, FL); ITT Rayonier (Ferdandina Beach, FL); Proctor & Gamble (Foley, FL); Professional Medical Products (Ocala, FL); Georgia Pacific (Palatka, FL); Stone Container (Panama City, FL); St. Joe Forest Products (Port St. Joe, FL); Merck (Albany, GA); Vacudyne (Atlanta, GA); Veratech (Augusta, GA); Georgia Pacific (Brunswick, GA); Goodyear (Calhoun, GA); C.R. Bard Inc. (Covington, GA [1000]); Dow (Dalton, GA [1000]); ITT Rayonier (Jessup, GA); Reichhold (Kensington, GA [1000]); Gilman Paper (St. Mary's, GA); Potlach Corp. (Lewiston, ID); Medline Industries (Mundelein, IL); GE Plastics (Ottawa, IL); GE (Mount Vernon, IN); Vulcan Chemical (Wichita, KS); B.F. Goodrich (Calvert City, KY); American Synthetics (Louisville, KY [1000]); W.R. Grace (Owensboro, KY [1000]); Union Carbide (Taft, LA [1000]); Armtek (Baton Rouge, LA [1000]); Exxon (Baton Rouge, LA [1000]); Formosa (Baton Rouge, LA); BASF Wyandotte (Geismar, LA [1000]); Borden (Geismar, LA); Shell (Geismar, LA); Vulcan Chemical (Geismar, LA); Firestone (Lake Charles, LA [1000]); DuPont (LaPlace, LA); James River (St. Francisville, LA); Occidental ([formerly Diamond Shamrock] Convent, LA); Dow (Plaquemine, LA); McCormick & Co. (Hunt Valley, MD); Westvaco (Luke, MD [1000]); International Paper (Jay, ME); James River (Old Town, ME); Boise Cascade (Rumford, ME); Georgia Pacific (Woodland, ME); Mead Corp. (Escanaba, MI); Upjohn (Kalamazoo, MI); Dow (Midland, MI); Boise Cascade (International Falls, MN); Baxter Health (Cleveland, MS [1000]); International Paper (Moss Point, MS); Asarco (East Helena, MT [100]); Champion International (Canton, NC [1000]); Occidental ([formerly Diamond Shamrock] Castle Hayne, NC [1000]); Burroughs Well (Greenville, NC); Abbott Labs (Laurinburg, NC); Weyerhaeuser (Plymouth, NC); Arrow International (Randleman, NC); Abbott Labs (Rocky Mount, NC); Hoffman Laroche (Belvidere, NJ); Griffith Micro (Bound Brook, NJ); Marcal Paper (Elmwood Park, NJ); ETO Sterilization (Linden, NJ); Johnson & Johnson (New Brunswick, NJ); Finch Pruyn (Glenn Falls, NY); Sherwood Medical (Sherburne, NY); Goodyear (Akron, OH [1000]); Mead Corp (Chillicothe, OH); Gen Corp (Mogadore, OH); Appleton Papers (West Carrollton, OH); James River (Clatskanie, OR); James River (Halsey, OR); Boise Cascade (St. Helens, OR); International Paper (Erie, PA); West Co. (Jersey Shore, PA); Penntech (Johnsburg, PA); Proctor & Gamble (Mehoopany, PA); BASF (Monaca, PA [1000]); Zinc Corporation of America (Palmerton, PA); P.H. Glatfelter (Spring Grove, PA); Baxter Health (Aibonita, PR [1000]); Abbott Labs (Barceloneta, PR); Baxter Health (Jayuya, PR); C.R. Bard Inc. (Cranston, RI [1000]); Veratech (Bethune, SC); Macalloy (Charleston, SC [1000]); Baxter Health (Kingstree, SC [1000]); Vacudyne (Memphis, TN [1000]); Velsicol (Memphis, TN [1000]); Bowater Inc. (Calhoun, TN); BASF (Chattanooga, TN); Baxter Health (Johnson City, TN); Rhone-Poulenc (Mt. Pleasant, TN); ICI Americas (Bayport, TX); Exxon (Baytown, TX [1000]); DuPont (Beaumont, TX [1000]); Goodyear Tire (Beaumont, TX [1000]); PD Glycol (Beaumont, TX); Mobil (Beaumont, TX [100]); Sherwood Medical (Commerce, TX); Occidental ([formerly Corpus/El Paso] Corpus Christi, TX [1000]); American Chrome (Corpus Christi, TX [100]); Occidental

([formerly Diamond Shamrock] Deer Park, TX); Shell Oil (Deer Park, TX [100]); Occidental ([formerly Shell Chemical] Deer Park, TX); Asarco (El Paso, TX [1000]); Temple Inland (Evadale, TX); Dow (Freeport, TX); Goodyear (Houston, TX [1000]); Mobay (Houston, TX [1000]); Champion International (Houston, TX); Fermenta (Houston, TX); Texas Petrochem (Houston, TX [1000]); Gen Corp (Odessa, TX [1000]); Firestone (Orange, TX [1000]); Polysar (Orange, TX [1000]); Ameripol Synpol (Port Neches, TX [100]); Texaco (Port Neches, TX [10]); DuPont (LaPorte, TX); Eastman Kodak (Longview, TX); Champion International (Lufkin, TX); Formosa (Point Comfort, TX); Johnson & Johnson (Sherman, TX); Westvaco (Covington, VA [1000]); Union Camp (Franklin, VA); Georgia Pacific (Bellingham, WA); James River (Camas, WA); Weyerhaeuser (Cosmopolis, WA); Weyerhaeuser (Everett, WA); ITT Rayonier (Hoquiam, WA); Longview Fiber (Longview, WA); Weyerhaeuser (Longview, WA); ITT Rayonier (Port Angeles, WA); Simpson Paper (Tacoma, WA); Boise Cascade (Wallula, WA); Pope & Talbot (Eau Claire, WI); Proctor & Gamble (Green Bay, WI); P.H. Glatfelter (Neenah, WI); Nekoosa Papers (Port Edwards, WI); Consolidated Paper (Wisconsin Rapids, WI); Occidental ([formerly Diamond Shamrock] Belle, WV [1000]); LCP Chemicals (Moundsville, WV); GE (Washington, WV [1000]).

Mr. Waxman's press release said his list contained 149 plants but, inexplicably, we count 167. The original EPA data includes the name of the chemical that formed the basis of the risk estimate, the amount of the chemical released into local air, and a description of the risk estimation technique. We can mail all 21 pages to you for \$10.00.

--Peter Montague

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Descriptor terms: henry waxman; gerry sikorski; data; epa; health effects; cancer; air quality; chemical industry;