

Congress Must Act to Secure Chemical Plants

In New Jersey, 11 chemical plants each put 100,000 or more people at risk. The catastrophic risks posed by poison gases used at many U.S. chemical plants are avoidable thanks to the many safer alternatives already in use. Recent accidents in the petrochemical industry and terrorist attack attempts remind us of the vulnerability of these chemical plants and the need for comprehensive chemical security legislation that supports the use of safer technologies and reduces the risks to public safety.

Looming Disasters

U.S. chemical plants remain one of the sectors of America's infrastructure that is most vulnerable to terrorist attacks. According to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) data, more than 100 million Americans are put at risk by the 300 most dangerous chemical plants. Unless Congress acts this year, most major U.S. cities will remain at risk.

The price of failure could be staggering. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has identified 5,333 plants as "high risk" in the U.S. and 128 of them are located in New Jersey. In 2004, the Homeland Security Council estimated that an attack on a chemical facility would kill 17,500 people, seriously injure 10,000 more people, and send an additional 100,000 people to the hospital.

Safer Alternatives are Available

The good news is that some of these hazards are preventable. Nationwide, at least 287 plants have switched to safer and more secure chemicals or processes since 1999, thereby eliminating risks to 38 million Americans.

Cost effective safer technologies are used in a wide variety of facilities including water treatment plants, power plants, oil refineries and other manufacturing facilities. At least four New Jersey plants have converted, eliminating these risks for 11,380,000 people. Safer alternatives are not necessarily expensive and can even save money, create jobs, and are long-term investments in our community.

The very highest risk facilities, however, have yet to adopt safer chemical processes. We need chemical security standards that put all high-risk facilities on an even playing field. The current law actually bars the government from requiring safer chemical processes and exempts thousands of water treatment plants and hundreds of port facilities. The chemical lobby wants to make this law permanent.

Act Now to Protect Your Family and Community

On November 4, 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives passed historic legislation (H.R. 2868) that would require the highest risk plants in the U.S. to use smart security and convert to safer available cost-effective processes where feasible. This legislation is a major step toward protecting the American people from an accident or attack that could threaten millions. It's now time for the U.S. Senate to act.

The Senate should pass legislation at least as strong as that passed by the House. To protect American families, communities and workers, the legislation must:

- Include requirements to convert the highest risk chemical plants to safer and more secure alternatives;
- Involve workers in planning and protecting the plant from attacks and accidents, and
- Provide information to the public that ensures compliance with the law and government accountability.

The White House Supports "Smart Security" Measures

Both the DHS and the EPA called for new authority on the use of safer chemical processes. In 2006, Senator Obama authored and supported three bills that would have ensured the use of safer chemical processes. As he introduced one of them on the Senate floor he said, "Each one of these methods reduces the danger that chemical plants pose to our communities and makes them less appealing targets for terrorists." He also said, "**We cannot allow chemical industry lobbyists to dictate the terms of this debate...We cannot allow our security to be hijacked by corporate interests.**"

Converted Facilities in NJ

Facility Name**	City	State	Industry Type	Previous EHS Chemicals***	Change Made	Number of People No Longer at Risk
Manhattan Products, Inc.	Carlstadt	NJ	Cleaning compound manufacturing	Ammonia (anhydrous)	Switched to aqueous ammonia below thresholds	160,000
Edward P. Decher Secondary Wastewater Treatment Plant	Elizabeth	NJ	Wastewater treatment	Chlorine gas	Switched to liquid bleach disinfection	50,000
Middlesex County Utilities Authority	Sayreville	NJ	Wastewater treatment	Chlorine gas	Switched to liquid bleach disinfection	10,740,000
Little Falls Water Treatment Plant	Totowa	NJ	Drinking water treatment	Chlorine gas	Switched to liquid bleach disinfection	430,000

Number of Facilities Converted Nationally (since 1999): 287

Number of People No Longer at Risk Nationally: 38.5 Million

Number of NJ Facilities Converted: 4

People No Longer at Risk: 11,380,000

Example: Sayreville, NJ — 10,740,000 no longer at risk

* Facility is still registered under Risk Management Planning program or is in the process of deregistering.

** Except where noted in brackets, facility names appear as formerly registered under EPA's Risk Management Planning program. Current facility names may have changed.

*** Except where otherwise noted, the first chemical listed is the basis chemical from which the facility calculated its vulnerability zone population.

**** Facility used anhydrous ammonia when calculating its vulnerability zone population.

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/04/b681085_ct2556757.html

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/chemical_security_report.html

