

Conference Abstracts

"Waiting to Die": Toxic Emissions and Disease Near the Denka Performance Elastomer Neoprene Facility in Louisiana's Cancer Alley

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Keywords: Health Disparities, Cancer Alley, Cancer Risks, Air Pollution

<https://doi.org/10.53876/001aa.129686>

International Journal of Cancer Care and Delivery

Vol. 6, Issue Supplement 1, 2026

Background

Louisiana Cancer Alley is an 85-mile stretch along the Mississippi River with over 150 petrochemical plants. According to the most recent EPA NATA, Cancer Alley contains 7 of the 10 US census tracts with the highest cancer risk from air pollution, including the census track with the highest nationwide risk. Nationally, the average cancer risk from air pollution is 32 per million people. In the census track with the highest nationwide risk, the cancer risk from air pollution is 1505 per million people. This is 47x higher than the national average and in a predominantly Black community. Upon learning the EPA's estimate of St. John Parish's cancer risk, residents formed a community group called the "Concerned Citizens of St. John the Baptist Parish." The Concerned Citizens demanded a significant reduction in chloroprene emissions such that the air concentration of the chemical does not exceed 0.2 micrograms per cubic meter. This is the maximum air concentration that would keep the cancer risk within EPA's upper limit of acceptability, 100 per million people. The Concerned Citizens will continue to fight for

environmental justice and raise advocacy for their community along the Mississippi River.

Methods

Denka Performance Elastomer Plant is the only industrial plant in the US that emits chloroprene. This study assessed the relationship between the household proximity to the facility and reported illness. The survey area consisted of "Zone 1," who were household within 1.5km of the facility, and "Zone 2," who were households between 1.5 and 2.5km from the facility. The survey implementers collected information on cancer diagnoses for all residents of each surveyed household. Zone 1 is 95% Black and 5% white, and Zone 2 is 71% Black and 27% white.

Conclusion

Cancer risk from air pollution had a significantly higher-than-likely prevalence in Zone 1 and a lower prevalence in Zone 2. About 1/2 of children in surveyed households in Zone 1 suffered from headaches and nosebleeds. This is a necessary health study to highlight the disparities in the lack of action taken.