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Environmental Justice Groups Tell Congress: Protect Us from Toxic Chemicals

Communities of color most at risk for health effects linked to chemical exposure

(Washington, DC): Letters went to both the Senate and the House today demanding stronger protections for disproportionately impacted communities of color, Indigenous communities, as well as low-income communities in the upcoming reform of U.S. laws governing toxic chemicals - the Toxic Substance Control Act of 1976 (TSCA).

"Each Day we feel the urgent need for chemical policy reform," says Eboni Neal Cochran, Co-Cordinator of Rubbertown Emergency Action (REACT) who lives in a community of color adjacent to Rubbertown, a cluster of 11 chemical plants. "It's time for our government to give serious consideration to the physical and financial costs to those who are suffering from toxic exposures and take action."

"Illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer have contributed to large health disparities in environmental justice communities as the amounts of poorly regulated chemicals linked to these illnesses has increased," according to Mark Mitchell, MD, from the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. "This exposure is impacting multiple generations of people, hurting children and the elderly the most."

"While some lobbying firms and front groups for the chemical industry are targeting communities of color to tell them that chemical reform will hurt them, we know the opposite is true," says Jose Bravo of the Just Transition Alliance. "In addition to chemical trespass from the pollution, now we have to battle industry front groups trying to deceive our communities in order to continue their exploitation of workers and other vulnerable populations."

Monique Harden, Esq. from Advocates for Environmental Human Rights adds: "Historically, manufacturers have built polluting plants in traditional African American and other communities of color, particularly in Louisiana and Texas. 14 toxic industrial facilities surround Mossville, which has been devastated by cancer and other illnesses, yet the nation's laws have failed to protect this community and hundreds like it."

Tom Goldtooth from the Indigenous Environmental Network adds: "Historically, petrochemical plants, manufacturers and big users of chemicals have polluted Native Nations and communities without changing their practices and cleaning up their toxic legacy. The result we see is cancer and other illnesses among our people, yet the nation's law is still failing Native communities."

Senator Frank Lautenberg and Representative Bobby Rush are expected to introduce legislation for TSCA reform shortly. Environmental Health Advocates across the spectrum are demanding a focus on under served communities most harmed by chemical exposure.

Read the letter:

<http://www.louisvillecharter.org/EJLettertoEPA04.2010.shtml>

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