

News From...
The New Jersey Work Environment Council

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Millions of New Jerseyans Still at Risk from Toxic Accidents or Attacks
Report finds despite positive steps by Corzine Administration, more
regulation of chemical industry needed

Trenton, NJ – Seven years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, nearly 100 New Jersey industrial facilities can still pose potential catastrophic risks to workers and/or the public if there was a major toxic release caused by an accident or deliberate attack. These facilities operate in 19 of New Jersey's 21 counties. A worst-case chlorine release from the most hazardous facility, in Hudson County, could harm up to an estimated 12 million people in New Jersey and New York City. Another facility, in Salem County, reported that a release could harm up to two million residents and extend 25 miles to downtown Philadelphia.

The NJ Work Environment Council (WEC) today released a report, *Still At Risk*, showing that millions of New Jerseyans work or live in the danger zones of these facilities. In the report, WEC revealed data submitted by facility management as required by the NJ Toxic Catastrophe Prevention Act and the federal Clean Air Act. Facilities include chemical plants, oil refineries, sewage and water treatment works, bulk chemical handling and storage terminals, and major food processors.

“Governors Codey and Corzine have taken some positive steps and now New Jersey has some of the nation's best chemical security policies. However, the report shows a continuing vulnerability and significant gaps in worker and community protection,” said Denise Patel, WEC Campaign Organizer.

The report also highlights positive steps taken by some New Jersey facilities. Water treatment plants continue to become safer as they switch from dangerous chlorine gas to liquid bleach for disinfection. One Middlesex County paper mill stopped using chlorine and switched to much safer “just in time” production of chlorine dioxide. The company's action, prompted by the United Steelworkers, made 1.1 million people working at and living around this plant safer.

Since 2006, when WEC first publicly disclosed off-site consequence information, fifteen facilities reported improvements to decrease their vulnerability to an accident or attack. These facilities represent chemical plants, water treatment plants, food processors, and an oil refinery. As a result, over 1.2 million people working in and/or living near these facilities are safer. Unfortunately, eleven facilities, mostly chemical plants, report *increases* in the number of people at risk from a toxic release.

Patel added, "It's clear that many facilities have *feasible*, safer alternatives. There's no reason why they should continue to put the health and safety of workers, plant neighbors and the environment at risk."

WEC urges Governor Corzine to issue additional Department of Environmental Protection regulations to require facility management to prevent a catastrophic disaster. These rules would require facility management to:

- actually adopt *feasible* inherently safer technology, not just review its potential for adoption, as recent rules specify.
- hold an annual public meeting, upon petition from neighbors and/or workers, to address health, safety, environmental, emergency response, and sustainability concerns in particular.
- effectively inform area residents what specific emergency steps they should take if there is a toxic or flammable release.
- ensure transparency, so workers, the public, emergency responders, and elected officials have a right to know about potential toxic dangers *and* steps taken to reduce risks.

The New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) is an alliance of 70 labor, community, and environmental organizations working together for safe, secure jobs, and a healthy, sustainable environment through training, technical assistance, grassroots organizing, and public policy campaigns. More information about WEC is available at www.njwec.org.

Speakers at the press conference: Rick Engler, WEC Director; Denise Patel, WEC Campaign Organizer; Ron McCullough, President of United Electrical Workers Local 155 at Stepan Chemical, Burlington County; Jeff Tittel, Director of NJ Sierra Club; and Avery Grant, Concerned Citizens of Long Branch and Monmouth County representative.

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