

April 20, 2022

Michael Regan  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington DC, 20460

Dear Administrator Regan,

As healthcare workers and public health experts, we are writing to request the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) issue strengthened chemical disaster prevention rules to protect the health and safety of communities and workers across the country.

The EPA's Risk Management Plan (RMP) Rule, commonly known as the Chemical Disaster Rule, currently regulates some 12,000 high-risk chemical facilities across the United States. The RMP rule needs urgent reform to ensure that it is able to achieve its intended purpose of preventing chemical disasters and protecting human health and the environment.

Nearly 200 million Americans live near these RMP facilities and millions more work and attend school within the RMP worst-case scenario zones. Communities located at the fencelines of these facilities disproportionately consist of people of color and people with low-income who are often faced with other social and environmental stressors that can increase their susceptibility to health threats. Additionally, RMP facilities are frequently located near other industrial and commercial facilities, which pollute neighborhoods and communities with multiple hazards at once. It is vital that the EPA address cumulative health impacts from multiple polluting facilities and environmental stressors in an updated and strengthened RMP rule.

Despite the RMP program being in place for decades, the threat of chemical disasters in the United States is still a real and present danger for many communities and workers across the country. Chemical disasters, including large-scale releases, fires, explosions, and near-misses, occur regularly across the country, including recently in your home state of North Carolina, where more than 6,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes due to the risk of a chemical explosion in Winston-Salem.

A basic principle of public health is that primary prevention—namely preventing releases, fires, explosions, from these facilities—is always preferable to secondary and tertiary prevention, which involves preventing the worst outcomes when one of these events occurs. Among the many reasons why primary prevention is preferred is that local healthcare facilities, which have to treat and care for those who have been harmed, may be challenged to do so in the best of times. Now, in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the healthcare capacity in the United States has been pressed to its limits. Many healthcare facilities are under-resourced and unprepared to handle the current health crisis, let alone a chemical disaster in their communities.

Another reason for prioritizing primary prevention is that it reduces the potential for health inequities that inevitably occur when disaster strikes. Worker involvement in RMP plan development is essential for identifying hazards to prevent incidents before they occur. In the absence of these measures, the least that can be done is ensuring that communities are alerted in

a timely fashion and in ways they understand. Facilities should minimally be equipped with back-up power, leak detection, and real-time air monitoring to ensure that the adverse outcomes of disasters aren't further exacerbated for communities where they occur.

As healthcare workers and public health experts, we implore the EPA to pursue primary prevention in the RMP rule by using incentives and requirements for transitioning to the use of safer chemicals and processes, requiring frequent and independent facility inspections, expanding the number of facilities covered under the program, and requiring broad disclosure of information—including information in Spanish and other languages spoken by affected communities—that is easily accessible about toxic chemicals onsite at facilities. A new rule must prioritize environmental justice considerations and meaningful worker involvement to ensure safe operations. The rule must also recognize climate change as a threat multiplier for these facilities and the health of the communities in which they operate. Multiple [studies](#), including a recent [report](#) from the Government Accountability Office, have found that roughly a third of RMP facilities are at increased risk from climate change impacts.

We must deploy all preventative and hazard reduction measures possible, and not simply rely on secondary or tertiary prevention. It is vital that the EPA strengthen the RMP rule to protect the health and safety of communities and workers, many of whom are already overburdened by exposure to other pollution sources and social stressors. We request your urgent action to safeguard all of our communities by issuing a protective and science-based Chemical Disaster Rule.

Thank you,

the undersigned 333 health experts

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