

CITIZEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP

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NEWS RELEASE

ROCHESTER RANKED 1ST IN NATION IN CARCINOGENIC RELEASES KODAK RESPONSIBLE FOR TOXIC RELEASE RANKING

(Rochester, NY) From 1987-2000, 64,382,640 pounds of toxic chemicals linked to cancer were released in the City of Rochester alone. This according to a new report released today by the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG.) This high number places Rochester New York number one in the nation for toxic releases during this 13 year period.

NYPIRG's report, Toxic Releases and Health: A Review of Pollution Data and Current Knowledge on the Health Effects of Toxic Chemicals, is a first ever analysis by health effect of air and water releases reported by industry to the Toxic Release Inventory Program from 1987 to 2000. The review of these data demonstrates the degree to which toxic substances with links to serious health problems are released into the environment.

"Polluters in New York State discharge millions of pounds of toxic pollution while the people of New York State have no knowledge of how it is affecting their health," reports Michael Davoli, Western New York Regional Coordinator, with the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). "Rochester must not be a national leader in the amount of toxic pollution released into the air and water."

In New York State, zip code 14652--Rochester ranked 1st in the nation for toxic pollution linked to cancer. This zip code led all zips in the nation for emissions of cancer- causing chemicals from 1987-2000. Of the 64.4 million pounds of carcinogens released over that period, more than 58 million pounds were air releases of dichloromethane by Eastman Kodak Co.

In addition, Eastman Kodak's Kodak Park facility in Rochester ranked nine among the top 100 facilities nationwide for TRI releases of dioxin and other carcinogenic chemicals in 2000.

"We were shocked to hear that Rochester released more carcinogenic substances from 1987-2000 than any other city in the United States," said Amy Liberatore, Program Associate for Citizens' Environmental Coalition. "This new information underscores the need for Kodak to make a greater commitment to reducing the use and production of carcinogenic chemicals, and for the State Department of Health to release their study on childhood brain cancer cases in Monroe County."

National analysis of toxic pollution released between 1987 and 2000 showed that the dominant sources of pollution have shifted from the industrial Northeast and Midwest, "Rustbelt" to the south and Southeast "Sunbelt."

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Toxic releases are concentrated in a small number of communities. In 2000, 76% of air and water releases of chemicals linked to potential reproductive harm occurred in just ten zip codes.

NYPIRG's research also showed that the public lacks information on how toxic pollution affects human health because few states track the public's exposure to toxic discharges or the rates of potentially related chronic diseases. Currently only three states, Massachusetts, California, and Iowa, have high-level cancer and birth defect registries and systematically track asthma. No state in the nation systematically tracks such other chronic diseases as autism, and no state tracks the potential environmental exposures linked with these chronic diseases.

Although in New York State health tracking data collection began in 1976 the first year that data was available was 1997.

Eastman Kodak has been widely reported to be one of the nation's largest emitters of cancer-causing chemicals. For years, residents surrounding the facility have been concerned that Kodak's emissions may be causing adverse health effects. Environmentalists and health activists believe that this new information underscores the need for Kodak to phase out their incinerators and make a greater commitment to reducing the use and production of carcinogenic chemicals. In addition, local health activists are calling for the NY State Department of Health to release their long-awaited "intensive review" of childhood brain cancer cases in Monroe County.

"I certainly agree there is a need for more and better information about chemical toxicity and the release of toxins into the environment and the links between toxic chemicals and the development of chronic diseases," said Maureen Reynolds, of the Kandid Coalition. "The family's living in these areas and breathing in these carcinogens have a right to make better and more informed decisions."

While the chemicals covered in this study were linked to various serious health consequences, this report covered less than one percent of the estimated 80,000 chemicals on the market today. U.S. law also makes it difficult for a chemical that poses a health threat to be banned or restricted. In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency has only restricted the use of nine toxic chemicals out of the thousands that potentially pose a danger to human health.

During 2002, Congress approved funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to award 20 grants to state and municipal public health departments to either improve or initiate health tracking programs in those cities and states. In New York State, the State of New York received a grant for a data linkage demonstration project and the City of New York received a capacity building grant. During the 107th Congress, the Senate awarded an increase in funding for these health tracking programs, but the House failed to approve the relevant Appropriations bill. The Senate will be required to reconsider the funding for health tracking this month, and could increase funding to make more grants available to more states.

NYPIRG applauded Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) for co-sponsoring legislation in the 108th Congress to set up a nationwide network for tracking chronic diseases. This network would expand the monitoring of human exposure to toxic chemicals as well as track chronic diseases such as asthma, cancer, birth defects and neurological conditions.