

# Pollution

(Continued from Page 1)

seems to pose the greatest health danger, the analysis showed.

More than half the Blacks in Kansas and nearly half of Missouri's Black population, for example, live in the 10 percent of their states' neighborhoods with the highest risk scores. Similarly, more than four out of every 10 Blacks in Kentucky, Minnesota, Oregon and Wisconsin live in high-risk neighborhoods.

And while Hispanics and Asians aren't overrepresented in high-risk neighborhoods nationally, in certain states they are. In Michigan, for example, 8.3 percent of the people living in high-risk areas are Hispanic, though Hispanics make up 3.3 percent of the statewide population.

All told, there are 12 states where Hispanics are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanics to live in neighborhoods with the highest risk scores. There are seven states where Asians are more than twice as likely as Whites to live in the most polluted areas.

The average income in the highest risk neighborhoods was \$18,806 when the Census last measured it, more than \$3,000 less than the nationwide average.

One of every six people in the high-risk areas lived in poverty, compared with one of eight elsewhere, AP found.

Unemployment was nearly 20 percent higher than the national average in the neighborhoods with the highest risk scores, and residents there were far less likely to have college degrees.

Research over the past two decades has shown that short-term exposure to common air pollution worsens existing lung and heart disease and is linked to diseases like asthma, bronchitis and cancer. Long-term exposure increases the risks.

The Bush administration, which has tried to ease some Clean Air Act regulations, says its mission isn't to alleviate pollution among specific racial or income groups but rather to protect everyone facing the highest risk.

"We're going to get at those folks to make sure that they are going to be breathing clean air, and that's regardless of their race, creed or color," said Deputy EPA Administrator Marcus Peacock.

Peacock said industrial air pollution has declined significantly in the past 30 years

as regulations and technology have improved. Since 1990, according to EPA, total annual emissions of 188 regulated toxins have declined by 36 percent.

Still, Peacock acknowledged, "there are risks, and I would assume some unacceptable risks, posed by industrial air pollution in some parts of the country."

Government scientists and contractors spent millions of dollars creating the health risk measures. They're based on air emission reports from industry, ratings of each chemical's potential health dangers, the paths pollution takes as it spreads through neighborhoods, and the number of people of different ages and genders living near plants.

The AP used EPA risk scores from 2000 so they would match the Census data and because it takes years for the government to get corrected emissions data. Some risks may have changed since then as factories opened or closed or their emissions changed. The risk scores aren't meant to calculate a citizen's precise odds of getting sick but rather to help compare communities and identify those in need of further attention.

The scores also don't include risks from other types of air pollution, such as automobile exhaust.

Kevin Brown's most feared opponent on the sandlot or basketball court while he was growing up wasn't another kid. It was the polluted air he breathed.

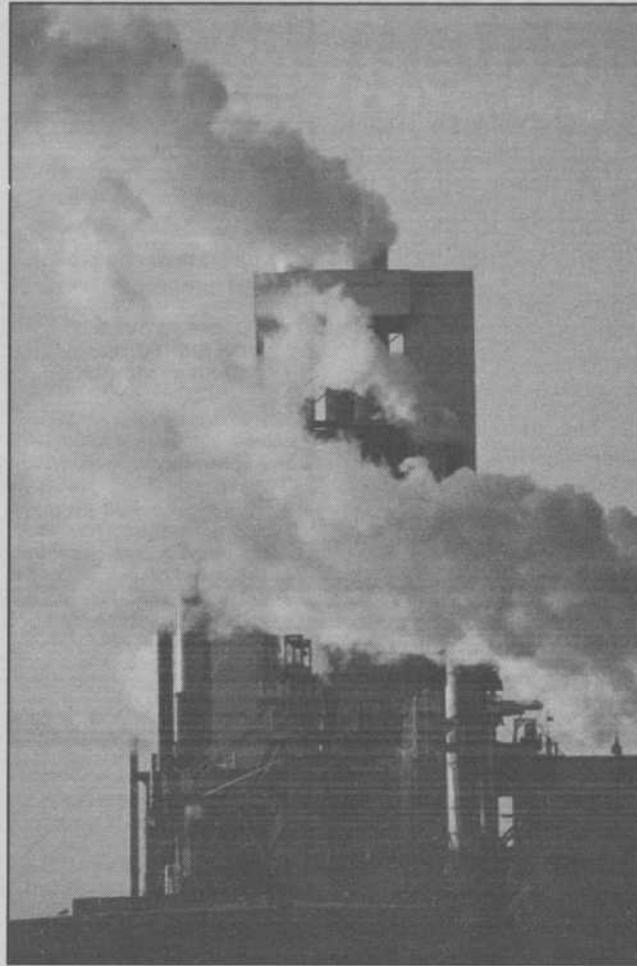
"I would look outside and I would see him just leaning on a tree or leaning over a pole, gasping, gasping, trying to get some breath so he could go back to playing," recalls his mother, Lana Brown.

Kevin suffered from asthma. His mother is convinced the factory air that covered their neighborhood triggered the son's attacks that sent them rushing to the emergency room week after week, his panic filling the car.

"I can't breathe! I have no air, I'm going to die!"

The air in the neighborhood where Kevin played is among the least healthy in the country, according to research that assigns risk scores for industrial air pollution in every square kilometer of the United States.

Altgeld Gardens, the housing project where Kevin spent most of his childhood staying with his grandmother



Plumes of smoke billow from these industrial machines.

and going to school, is in a virtually all-Black neighborhood where more than half the people live in poverty. The two-story project is nestled among the south Chicago steel mills, which for decades turned the night skies orange with pollution.

Most of those steel mills are now closed, victims of imports. But the area still retains enough industry to rank among the nation's neighborhoods with the highest health risks.

Just across the Little Calumet River from Altgeld, the

ISG Riverdale steel plant annually releases into the air tens of thousands of pounds of heavy metals like manganese, zinc, lead and nickel. Dave Allen, a spokesman for Mittal Steel, which acquired the factory this year, said his company is committed to improvements.

"The environment is a matter of focus and pride for us and we hope to be good operators," he said.

Mrs. Brown said the asthma attacks that hit Kevin, now 29, were most serious and frequent during the time

he stayed in Altgeld Gardens.

"He may now get an attack maybe once a year, if that often, where he has to go to a hospital," she said. "He was having them at one point quite frequently, at least two to three times a month."

Mrs. Brown was interviewed at the home she purchased seven years ago on a tree-lined street neighborhood south of the plant, where the health risk from industrial pollution is one-fifth the level in Altgeld Gardens.

She said she never considered pollution the culprit in her son's asthma, even after she left the neighborhood. It was only after she moved back into her mother's home for several years that she began to realize how widespread breathing problems were in Altgeld Gardens. Two children who lived next door had asthma, and one used a breathing machine as many as three times a day, she said.

"You see things happening and then you say let me start investigating," she said. "I found out a lot of people either had bronchitis or some kind of respiratory problem. Someone in each household seemed to have a respiratory problem."

In Louisville, Ky., Renee Murphy blames smokestack emissions in the "Rubbertown" industrial strip near her home for the asthma attacks that trouble her five children. Her neighborhood, which is 96 percent Black, ranks among the

nation's highest in risk from factory pollution.

"It's hard to watch your children gasp for breath," she said.

The Murphy family lives just a few blocks from Zeon Chemicals, which released more than 25,000 pounds of a chemical called acrylonitrile into the air during 2000. The chemical is suspected of causing cancer, and the government has determined it is much more toxic to children than adults.

Tom Herman, corporate environmental manager at Zeon, said the plant is reducing its emissions and is talking with area residents concerned about air quality to show that "there are real people working here concerned for them as well as our own health."

Malcolm Wright, 43, operates power washing equipment in Camden, N.J., where several neighborhoods also rank among the worst nationally. He said he developed asthma after moving to the city in his early 30s, and he blames the city's air pollution for attacks that sent him to the hospital four times last year.

Air pollution "works with many other factors, genetics and environment, to heighten one's risk of developing asthma and chronic lung disease, and if you have it, it will make it worse," said Dr. John Brofman, director of respiratory intensive care at MacNeal Hospital in the suburban Chicago town of Berwyn.

## Law Firm of Timothy C. Williams

ATTORNEY AT LAW



TIMOTHY C. WILLIAMS

Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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844 E. Sahara Avenue  
Las Vegas, Nevada

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