

A tank rupture at the Freedom Industries plant in West Virginia spilled up to 7,500 gallons of the toxic chemical MCHM into the Elk River, sickening residents and interrupting the water supply of 300,000 people.

Accidents Waiting to Happen

Industrial Toxic Chemicals

Industrial facilities across the U.S. store and use millions of tons of toxic chemicals. Many of these facilities sit near waterways and threaten spills that can harm the environment and public health.

Industrial Facilities Store Millions of Tons of Hazardous Chemicals

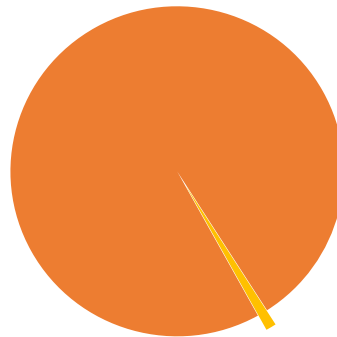
U.S. industrial facilities store millions of tons of hazardous chemicals. In 2016, more than 21,000 facilities reported managing 14 million tons of toxic waste – not including chemicals used for manufacturing or included in products. In New Jersey, where companies report total toxic chemical use, the total weight of toxics is almost 100 times higher than that of the toxic waste produced.

Toxic Spills Threaten U.S. Waterways

Industrial spills have a wide range of causes, from corroded pipes, to human error, to flooding caused by extreme weather. When facilities are located at water's edge – as many are for cooling, water transportation, or to make waste discharges – these spills can damage America's rivers, lakes and streams. Sites far from the water can also threaten waterways, as in the case of a Louisiana paper mill that caused a fish kill in a river 1.5 miles away, after waste was discharged through a water treatment system that connected the plant to the waterway.



This U.S. Steel Corporation plant on the shore of Lake Michigan leaked hexavalent chromium, forcing the closure of adjacent beaches.



Company-Reported Toxic Use in New Jersey (2011)

- Toxics Consumed or Shipped (16,811 million pounds)
- Toxic Waste (172 million pounds)

Federal rules only require reporting on toxic waste, not total toxic chemicals. In New Jersey, the total weight of toxics used is almost 100 times higher than toxic waste alone.

Toxic Chemical Spills Are Common

In 2012, the National Toxic Substance Incidents Program estimated that there were 3,700 toxic spills of liquids or solids that occurred at fixed facilities (as opposed to during transportation). Recent industrial spills from many industrial sectors have damaged waterways or put them at risk:

- In April 2017, a U.S. Steel plant in Indiana spilled 298 pounds of highly toxic hexavalent chromium into a waterway connected to Lake Michigan.
- In March 2018, a spill of ferric chloride at a Georgia chicken processing plant killed almost 8,000 fish.
- In October 2017, a spill of lye at Dover Chemical killed fish along two miles of Sugar Creek in Ohio.
- In July 2017, a storage facility spilled a herbicide and pesticide additive into a creek in Roanoke, Virginia, killing tens of thousands of fish.

Extreme weather can increase spill risks. In 2017, Hurricane Harvey caused more than 100 toxic releases in the Houston area, impacting some waterways.

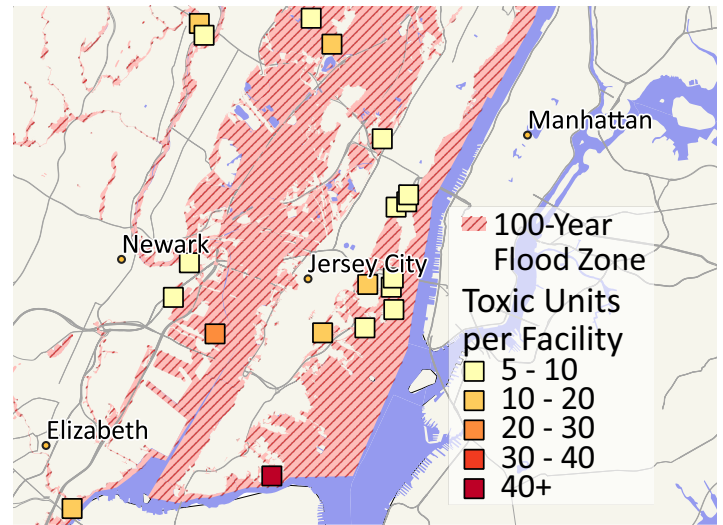
Protect American Waterways from Damaging Spills

Many industrial facilities put America's streams and rivers at risk, but it doesn't have to be that way. Policymakers have a number of options to protect our waterways from all types of catastrophic accidents. Policymakers should work to:

Limit or end operations that pose severe threats to water. The best way to prevent toxic spills is to limit activities that create the potential for spills in the first place, including reducing the use of toxic chemicals and requiring industry to shift to safer alternatives.

Keep risky facilities away from water. As long as high-risk, waste-generating operations remain, policymakers should ensure that they are kept far enough from waterways to eliminate the risk of contamination.

Set and enforce strict standards for existing risky facilities that operate near waterways. Strict standards should apply to any facilities that store or transport hazardous material near water.



In 2017, 31 New Jersey facilities in flood zones reported having five or more toxic storage units on site.

Threat Spotlight: Toxic Chemical Storage in New Jersey Flood Zones

New Jersey has more Superfund hazardous waste sites than any other state, a long history of industrial environmental damage, and a large and active chemical industry. New Jersey is also one of the few states that tracks toxic chemical storage, making it possible to identify facilities that may put water at risk.

In 2017, 31 New Jersey facilities in 100-year flood zones reported having five or more toxic storage units on site. Sixteen are in the Newark-Jersey City area, home to numerous waterways including the Hackensack River. Facilities with the highest number of toxic units on site are IMTT, a chemical storage and transfer company; Chemtex, a chemical importer for the fragrance industry; and Buckey Pennsauken Terminal, a warehousing and storage facility.



For more information and the full report,
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