

# Big Oil And Gas Hurts Communities Of Color

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Oil and gas industry giants have a long history of polluting Black, Brown and Native communities, with devastating environmental and health impacts. Here are just some of the many examples of the harm they've caused.

## ExxonMobil

- After decades of resistance, ExxonMobil refineries are still [spewing cancer-causing chemicals](#) into the majority Black Charlton-Pollard community of Beaumont, Texas.
- On February 12th, 2020, the ExxonMobil oil refinery in majority-Black Baton Rouge, LA erupted in fire, releasing cancer-causing chemicals and [enraging nearby residents](#).
  - The refinery [shed](#) 1,900 jobs over two decades while receiving property tax breaks worth nearly \$700 million.
  - After the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board rejected Exxon's requests for tax exemptions, the company [lobbied](#) to remove control over tax exemptions from local governments.
- In 1989, Exxon's Valdez oil tanker [spilled](#) at least 11 million gallons of crude oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound. The spill profoundly

[affected](#) native Alaskans in the area, who relied on fishing for sustenance and income.

- Oil from the spill [covered](#) 1,300 miles of coastline, [stretching](#) more than 500 miles south to the Alaska Native village of Chignik on the Alaska Peninsula.
- Spilled oil [killed](#) thousands of animals and [devastated](#) the salmon and herring fisheries. Plummeting prices forced some members of the Eyak peoples to move away from their ancestral lands.
- The event was the [worst](#) oil spill in U.S. history until BP's Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010, and decades later, pockets of crude oil remain in some places.

## Marathon

- Pollution from Marathon's southwest Detroit refinery, located in one of the [most polluted zip codes in the country](#), has caused the [rates of cancer and asthma](#) to skyrocket among its predominantly Black residents.
- In 2019, a vapor [chemical leak](#) at Marathon's Detroit refinery [resulted](#) in the hospitalization of at least two people. Marathon allegedly [failed](#) to inform residents of the dangers, including health impacts, associated with the released chemicals.
- In 2019, Marathon sought exemptions to state environmental regulations in order to [store pet coke uncovered](#) near the Detroit River.
- In 2010, Marathon was [ordered](#) to pay \$4.7 million to the federal government after knowingly underpaying royalties from natural gas produced on federal and Indian leases.
- In 2018, nearly 50 members of three Native American tribes in North Dakota filed a [lawsuit](#) claiming Marathon's Andeavor profited from operating the High Plains crude oil pipeline through tribal lands without compensating landowners. In April 2020, a US District Judge [ruled](#) the tribal members were to exhaust remedies with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) before pursuing legal action, and the lawsuit was dismissed. In July 2020, the BIA [ordered](#) Marathon to shut down the pipeline and fined the company \$187 million for damages associated with the trespass. Marathon [appealed](#) the order, and the

U.S. Interior's Board of Indian Appeals is yet to make a [decision](#), leaving the BIA's decision in effect.

## Chevron

- Chevron [tweeted](#) "black lives matter" (no capitalization), drawing a [fervent rage](#) from climate activists who've spent decades fighting the consequences of the company's environmental racism in Black communities.
  - Despite Chevron's public comments in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, Global Witness [found](#) that Chevron gave over four times more campaign funding to U.S. politicians who failed to uphold racial justice and civil rights legislation.
- In 2012, Chevron's refinery in Richmond, CA [caught fire](#), forcing 15,000 primarily Black and Latino residents to seek medical attention for respiratory problems.
  - The company [pleaded no contest](#) to 6 criminal charges, and paid \$2 million in fines.
- A 2009 survey found that children growing up near Chevron's Richmond refinery are diagnosed with asthma at more than [twice the national rate](#).
  - Oil refining is the [largest industrial air polluter](#) in the Bay Area, which is [linked](#) to increased rates of asthma.
  - In the past 5 years, Chevron's [Richmond refinery](#) has had 12 quarters with significant environmental violations, received 205 informal enforcement actions, and paid \$1,930,300 in EPA penalties.

## Occidental Petroleum

- Occidental [expanded](#) its toxic facility in the predominantly Black Cancer Alley in 2019.
- In 2006, Occidental subsidiary Oxy Vinyls [reached a settlement](#) for releasing cancer-causing chemicals into the predominantly Latino community of Pasadena, TX, and the disproportionately Black community of Louisville, KY.

- In 2014, an Occidental subsidiary [reached a settlement](#) for polluting the Passaic River near the predominantly Black city of Newark, NJ.

## Koch Industries

- The Koch brothers' [Flint Hills Resources refinery](#) sits in Refinery Row in Corpus Christi, TX, where it spills cancer-causing and asthma-inducing pollution into nearby communities of color.
- Koch Industries funded a [disinformation campaign](#) aimed at the Black church that used gospel music to portray oil and gas as beneficial to Black communities.
- Koch-owned Georgia-Pacific was the subject of [Company Town](#), a 2016 documentary detailing the [environmental racism](#) of a paper mill in Crossett, AK, that pumped 1.5 million pounds of toxic chemicals into a disproportionately Black community.

## Valero

- Low-income Latino communities in the Manchester area of Houston, TX, continue to [fight against](#) hydrogen cyanide pollution of their air from Valero's petro-chemical plant, which [leaked](#) harmful chemicals during Hurricane Harvey.
  - Exposure to hydrogen cyanide [impacts](#) nearly every organ in the body, especially the brain, heart, and lungs, and can be fatal in high concentrations.
  - Manchester residents face a 22% [higher risk](#) of cancer than the overall Houston urban area.
- Valero is seeking approval to build a crude oil pipeline in Memphis, TN, that would [cut through](#) several Black communities and the municipal wellfield that provides their drinking water.
- In 2017, a malfunction and repeated flaring activity at Valero's Benicia refinery [released](#) more than 80,000 pounds of sulfur dioxide into the Bay area's atmosphere.

## TC Energy

- TC Energy's Keystone XL pipeline would have [crossed the territory](#) of 67 Native American Tribes, most of whom [fought](#) the construction of the pipeline due to environmental concerns.
- Even though existing Keystone XL pipeline infrastructure is relatively new, the pipeline has [ruptured](#) several times in the past decade, including spilling 407,000 gallons of oil near a South Dakota Indian reservation in 2017. These spills jeopardize the ability of indigenous peoples to hunt and fish for subsistence and for their economy.

## Chesapeake Energy

- In 2015, Chesapeake was [fined](#) \$2.1 million for under reporting gas production on land leased from Native tribes, cheating the Tribes of their royalty revenue while releasing dangerous pollutants onto their ancestral land.

## Shell

- Shell is building a plastics facility on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, PA, that some [worry](#) could start to turn Appalachia into the next Cancer Alley.
- Shell's [operations](#) in the Cancer Alley town of Norco, LA's Diamond neighborhood have received [international recognition](#) as a textbook example of environmental racism. One study found that the majority Black residents of Diamond were exposed to toxin levels [100-1000](#) times those experienced by rural Louisianans.
  - In 2018, Shell [settled](#) allegations that they had violated the Clean Air Act in Norco, paying a penalty of \$350,000 and agreeing to "eliminate more than 150 tons of excess emissions of harmful air pollutants" each year at the facility.
- Shell's facilities in Galena Park, TX — a [low-income](#) community that is [81% Hispanic](#) — have contributed to [decades of pollution](#) that [exceeds EPA limits](#) for [cancer-causing](#) benzene.

## BP

- Following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, a majority of landfills that [received](#) oil-spill solid waste were located in communities of color already bearing the brunt of industrial pollution.
- BP has [facilities](#) in the [Cancer Alley](#) tract near the predominantly Black community of Baton Rouge, LA.
- BP was [ranked](#) in the 15th out of 18 tiers in an assessment of oil and gas companies' respect for indigenous rights in the Arctic.
  - BP had [planned](#) to drill in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), but ultimately [opted not to](#) in the face of [public pressure](#) and low oil prices.

## ConocoPhillips

- ConocoPhillips [operates](#) a refinery in the heavily polluted city of Wilmington, CA. The community has a [population](#) that is 86% Latino and is [predominantly](#) low-income.
  - Wilmington has one of the [highest](#) cancer rates in Southern California, and some of the state's highest asthma rates.
- ConocoPhillips operates an oil [refinery](#) in the predominantly Black neighborhood of Mossville, LA. Mossville residents have [suffered](#) the effects of industrial pollution for decades - with residents' toxicology results showing dioxide levels among the highest ever recorded in the country.

## WPX Energy

- In 2016, oil tanks owned by WPX Energy [exploded](#) near the majority Native-American area of Nageezi, NM, causing a fire that burned for days. More than 50 residents were evacuated, and residents complained about health issues from breathing in methane burned by the fire.

## Hilcorp Energy

- Hilcorp Energy is the [largest operator](#) of methane gas wells in the Four Corners region of New Mexico.

- Hundreds of thousands of Native Americans live within the [Four Corners](#) region of the Southwest U.S., which is covered by a cloud of methane released by the region's oil and gas wells.
  - The area has the [highest concentration](#) of methane emissions in the country, causing [devastating](#) environmental and public health impacts.
- In 2018, investigators from Earthworks [documented](#) methane leaks from Hilcorp's wells in New Mexico.
- In 2019, the New Mexico Environment Department issued a [Notice of Violation](#) to Hilcorp regarding methane emissions at other sites in New Mexico