

Regulatory Laxness Exacerbated Hurricane Harvey's Environmental Nightmare

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Featured image: National guardsmen rescue residents stranded by flooding after Hurricane Harvey hit the Texas coast, 27/08/2017, Houston, Texas. (Credit: Planetpix/Alamy Stock Photo)

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Flood-prone Houston was woefully unprepared for days of torrential rainfall. Its drainage system can't handle it.

Its regulatory policy is lax. Its overdevelopment eliminated green space. Its damaged oil refining, fuel and chemical facilities exacerbated the disaster, turning much of the area into a toxic swamp, land, air and water affected – certain to gravely harm public health.

Houston Health Department spokesman Porofirio Villarreal said there's no need to test floodwater.

"It's contaminated. There's millions of contaminants."

Exposure is hard to avoid.

Well water used by hundreds of thousands of residents in affected areas is contaminated. Before Harvey, Houston drinking water was ranked 6th worst in the nation.

Earlier water quality tests found 18 chemicals exceeding federal and state health guidelines. The national average is four.

Forty-six pollutants were detected, including benzene and other carcinogens. The national average is eight. Illegal alpha particles were found, a form of radiation.

City water was unsafe before Harvey. It's much more hazardous to human health now.

Regulatory laxness is commonplace in America. Significant industrial disasters happen nationwide, aside from what acts of nature cause.

According to [Political Correction](#), the 11 most significant ones in the last century included:

"Hawk's Nest Tunnel: At least 764 dead

Texas City Port Explosion: Approx. 4,000 casualties

Consol No. 9 Mine Disaster: 78 dead

Sunshine Silver Mine Fire: 91 dead

L'Ambiance Plaza Building Collapse: 28 dead

Exxon Valdez Spill: 11M-30M gallons of crude spilled

Phillips 66 Explosion: 23 dead

Imperial Foods Fire: 25 dead

BP Refinery Explosion: 15 dead

Upper Big Branch Mine Collapse: 29 dead

Deepwater Horizon Drilling Disaster: 11 dead"

The [International Business Times](#) (IBT) said "Texas Republicans helped chemical (company Arkema) lobby against safety rules" – likely contributing to two August 31 explosions at its Crosby plant, 25 miles from Houston, releasing toxic smoke and chemicals into the air and water.

"The effort to stop the chemical plant safety rules was backed by top Texas Republican lawmakers, who have received big campaign donations from chemical industry donors," IBT explained.

The plant was earlier fined for 10 "serious" violations this year. Five of the company's six plants are near Texas' southeast coast. Floodwaters pose a serious risk for further explosions, releasing more toxins into the air and water.

The Trump administration was instrumental in blocking chemical plant safety regulations. Supportive federal and state lawmakers received large industry political contributions.

Texas Senators John Cornyn and Ted Cruz got \$408,000 and \$234,000 respectively from the chemical industry over the course of their political careers.

It buys a lot of industry-friendly legislation and regulatory laxness.

The death toll from Hurricane Harvey stands at 31 so far. The human health toll, unfolding for months and years ahead, could be staggering – likely tens of thousands of area residents harmed, maybe millions, on their own with little or no federal or state aid.

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