

# Over 90% of Houstonians Want Toxic Alerts on their Mobile Phones

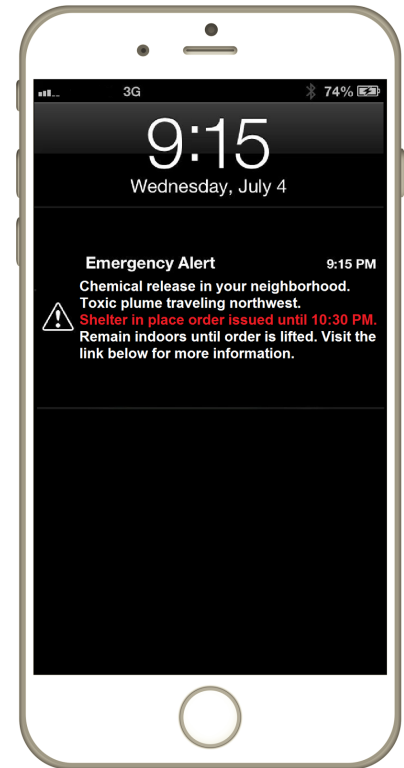


## HB 1927: Relating to an Alert System for Notification of the Release of Toxic Chemicals by a Manufacturing Facility

A recent poll of residents of the Houston region shows that most are concerned about air pollution and its impact on vulnerable populations. Furthermore, **92% of Houstonians support the creation of a public notification system** similar to Amber alerts for leaks of hazardous chemicals. These alerts would warn residents via cellular phone of incidents and let them know what action to take to keep safe.

According to an investigative report published by the Houston Chronicle in 2016<sup>1</sup>, an incident involving hazardous materials in the Houston area occurs about every six weeks. Nationally, there have been more than 93 incidents involving hazardous chemicals since late 2015, killing 7 and injuring 573 people.

**Houston area residents agree that having a toxic emergency alert system is common sense.** It will reduce our exposure to toxic chemicals and cancer-causing compounds and make our region a safer place to live and raise our families.



### What does the Toxic Alert Bill do?

*The Toxic Alert Bill directs the State Emergency Response Commission to develop a statewide system to inform the public of chemical emergencies in a timely manner using a multi-media approach, including traditional media, social media, and wireless emergency alerts. This statewide system will eliminate patchwork local approaches and relieve local governments of the burden of developing and maintaining their own systems. The wireless emergency alert system allows customers who own certain wireless phones and other enabled mobile devices to receive geographically-targeted, text-like messages alerting them of substantial threats to human health or the environment. The alert will provide for a maximum of 360 characters and include clickable hyperlinks to a publicly accessible website. Social media will also direct residents to the same hyperlink, which will provide:*

- *information on symptoms that could require emergency medical treatment,*
- *directionality of plume movement,*
- *the severity of threat, and*
- *information in English and Spanish.*

*The toxic emergency alert system will be reviewed every four years and modified as needed to account for advances in technology.*

<sup>1</sup> Houston Chronicle, Chemical Breakdown Series, 2016. <http://www.houstonchronicle.com/chemical-breakdown/1/>



## A List of Some of Houston's Toxic Emergencies in 2016

Houston continues to experience chemical emergencies that put communities at risk and worry people. Toxic Alerts can warn the public of emergencies like these and keep people safe.

- Jan. 2016: Explosion at PeroxyChem, Pasadena. *One person dead, three others injured.*
- Mar. 2016: Explosion at Pasadena Refining Systems, Inc., Pasadena. *One person burned.*
- April 2016: Fire at the ExxonMobil refinery, Baytown. *Unauthorized release of 732+ lbs of toxic sulfur dioxide and 1785 lbs of hazardous volatile organic compounds.*
- April 2016: Explosion at LyondellBasell, SE Houston. *Shelter-in-place in SE Houston, including Chavez H.S., Deady Middle School, and Rucker Elementary School.*
- May 2016: Fire and chemical release in Spring Branch. *Fish, turtles, snakes, and frogs die from chemical spill.*
- June 2016: Chemical leak & fire, Mont Belvieu. *Dozens of people evacuated from their homes.*
- July 2016: Benzene spill, Houston Ship Channel. *Channel closed to traffic for several hours.*
- July 2016: Propylene leak, ExxonMobil Pipeline, Baytown. *Local evacuation and shelter-in-place for nearby community.*
- July 2016: Chemical Release at Pasadena Refining Systems, Inc., Pasadena. Heavy black smoke and sulfur dioxide release, *shelter-in-place for Galena Park residents.*
- Aug. 2016: Power failure at LyondellBasell resulted in the shutdown of the sulfur recovery unit, releasing sulfur dioxide. *Refinery evacuated.*
- Aug. 2016: Explosion at Voluntary Purchasing Group (Bonham) woke up neighbors. A second explosion one month later *injured 2 workers.*
- Aug. 2016: Fire at Hexion in Deer Park, *shelter-in-place for neighborhoods north of P Street in Deer Park.*
- Sept 2016: Chemical spill in Willow Marsh Bayou (Beaumont). *Local shelter-in-place, killed over 1,400 fish, snakes, turtles, racoons, and birds.*
- Dec. 2016: A chemical leak contaminated the drinking water supply for Corpus Christi. *A water ban was in effect for nearly 4 days, 7 unconfirmed illnesses associated with the drinking water.*
- Jan. 2017: Naphtha overfill at tank at Valero Texas City Refinery. *Residents complain of respiratory issues. No shelter in place alert was sent because "the incident happened in the middle of the night."<sup>2</sup>*



<sup>2</sup> <http://abc13.com/news/spill-at-refinery-in-texas-city-causes-nasty-odors/1705027/>