



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **New EPA Rule will bring Cleaner Air to Communities near Refineries**

HOUSTON, TX – Today the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a new rule that will protect communities near oil and gas refineries. The rule will put in to place new controls that will reduce toxic air pollution from refineries and, for the first time ever, require air monitoring at refinery fencelines.

“This rule is a step in the right direction for people living near refineries,” said Adrian Shelley, Executive Director of Air Alliance Houston. “For too long, poor and minorities communities have suffered from toxic air pollution that damages their health and shortens their lives.”

Today’s rule is the result of a lawsuit filed in 2012 by Air Alliance Houston and others, including Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, Community In-Power and Development Association, Louisiana Bucket Brigade, California Communities Against Toxics, Del Amo Action Committee, and Coalition For A Safe Environment. These groups were represented by Earthjustice and the Environmental Integrity Project. Together, these groups have been working for years to ensure that EPA would set stronger standards to protect public health, including by participating in EPA’s comment period, the public hearings, and the public workshops that EPA held during this rulemaking.

The rule will reduce toxic pollution from refinery sources including flares, delayed cokers, and storage tanks. The rule is expected to eliminate 5,200 tons per year of toxic air pollutants, 50,000 tons per year of volatile organic compounds (which lead to ozone formation), and reduce risk for 1.4 million people to below the EPA’s 1 in a million cancer risk threshold. The Houston area is home to five oil refineries with a daily refining capacity of more than 1.3 million barrels.

The rule will also remove a significant loophole in the prior standards by deleting the exemption for emissions that occur during Startup, Shutdown, and Malfunction. “People breathe all the time,” said Shelley, “and it’s important that all toxic emissions are accounted for.”

Finally, this rule will put in place the first ever requirement to monitor air pollution at the fenceline of all U.S. refineries. Refineries will monitor their fencelines for benzene, a known human carcinogen and infamous pollutant in Houston. This is the first time that EPA has established through rulemaking that fenceline community residents have a right to know what harmful pollutants are exiting a facility and entering their communities.

This rule is a first step, and EPA could have gone further to provide communities with more protections. EPA declined to find the risk presented by refineries to be “unacceptable,” a finding that would have

given the agency more latitude in rulemaking. EPA also did not propose to use fence-line monitoring technology that could have provided continuous monitoring and real-time access to information about pollution emissions. Regarding continuous, real-time monitoring, Shelley said, “Only data made available to the public in real time will allow fence-line community residents to make their own decisions to limit their exposure to toxic pollution that threatens their health, or their lives.”

*The full text of the Petroleum Refinery Sector Risk and Technology Review and New Source Performance Standards is available at <http://www3.epa.gov/ttn/atw/petref.html>.*

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*Air Alliance Houston is the Houston region’s clean air and public health nonprofit. Our mission is to reduce air pollution in the Houston region to improve public health and environmental integrity through research, education, and advocacy.*