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Contact: Matt Tresaugue, (713) 392-7888, mtresaugue@edf.org

Pollution Protection Bill Advances in Texas House *HB 1820 Could Increase Penalties for Illegal Toxic Releases*

(AUSTIN – April 23, 2021) A Texas House committee today advanced [a bill](#) that, if passed, could increase penalties and establish new ones for illegal releases of air pollution for the first time in a decade.

House Bill 1820 could help the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality hold corporate polluters accountable by increasing the maximum available fine from \$25,000 per day to \$50,000 per day. The bill also would triple the penalty if a chemical release injures an emergency responder.

State Rep. Erin Zwiener, a Hays County Democrat, authored the bill with the goal of pushing corporations to do more to prevent the industrial fires and chemical releases that happen too frequently in Texas. The bill is in response to the rash of fires and explosions at petrochemical plants, refineries and storage facilities in the Houston, Beaumont-Port Arthur and Corpus Christi areas in 2019 and 2020.

A recent Environment Texas [analysis](#) found that corporations released pollution above their allowable limits across Texas every day in 2019.

“Texas polluters routinely violate the law, putting the health and safety of our families at risk,” said **Luke Metzger**, executive director of Environment Texas. “Unfortunately rare and weak fines mean it’s often cheaper to pay a fine than take steps to prevent pollution. I’ve lobbied for tougher enforcement at the Legislature for two decades and this is the first time I’ve seen a committee stand up to the polluters and take meaningful steps to rein in pollution. We still have a long way to go to pass this bill into law, but today I’m encouraged.”

“My Galena Park neighbors and I want clean air every day,” said Galena Park resident **Juan Flores**, who testified with his son before the House Environmental Regulation Committee. “We are exposed almost daily to harmful chemicals from nearby chemical plants and refineries. My son tells me that he can smell them during tennis practice after school. It’s not right that our health is put at risk. I’m very hopeful that this bill will become law and force companies to be better neighbors.”

“Air pollution is a serious public health threat, and Texas must strengthen enforcement to protect communities,” said **Elena Craft**, senior director for climate and health at Environmental Defense Fund. “Texans suffer the consequences with needless asthma attacks, heart ailments, lung disease, cancer and shortened lives. This is a meaningful first step by lawmakers to make the state a healthier and safer place to live.”

“For too long bad corporate actors have harmed communities across Texas and their industries with chemical disasters and illegal pollution,” said **Adrian Shelley**, Texas director of Public Citizen. “Business as usual is unsustainable, and today’s vote is a signal that lawmakers want to do more to protect every Texan from the most serious violators of environmental laws.”

The Texas Oil and Gas Association, Texas Association of Manufacturers, Texas Chemistry Council and other industry groups opposed the bill before the committee.

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