

# HEM TAKES A BUS TOUR OF NEIGHBORHOODS NEAR THE SHIP CHANNEL

On the 29th of November, a Christian Herald reporter joined 35 other ethnic media representatives from the Houston Ethnic Media (HEM) consortium on a

It's because there is no zoning that keeps them away from each other. Zoning and historical policies that created it. Half of the sources of air pollution in Houston come from

the report are:

- The results of this study highlight the impacts of industrial pollution on the health and well-being of residents in East Harris County.
- Baytown and Deer Park suffered the greatest health impacts in the form of excess mortality due to PM2.5 pollution from the county's largest emitters.
- It also highlights the magnitude of NOX and SO2 pollution from these facilities and their contributions to asthma hospitalizations in the county.
- These results offer preliminary insight into air pollution exposure within Harris County and prompt further research.

During the tour which took the reporters experienced first-hand the effects the pollution has on the community. Juan Flores, Community Air Monitoring Program Manager for Air Alliance, who was one of the tour guides and himself living in Galena Park outlined the actions needed and said, "We know these companies are billion-dollar companies and they are not going to shut down. We want them to be good neighbors and actually invest some money and fix the problems. Stop just paying fines." He continued, "Be transparent, give us a heads up. If there's a chemical leak, let us know it happened because sometimes there are leaks here and they won't admit it, but we smell it. It's about communication, being transparent, fixing the problem, and enforcing the rules in place right now to at least give us a chance. That's all we're asking."

Cruz Hinojosa, of Environmental Community Advocates of Galena Park (ECAGP), whom we also met during the tour has been a resident of the Galena Park area since 1999 said,

"When I moved here, I didn't think anything about the plants, I did not think anything about the air, I didn't think anything about the environment. I just got a good deal on a home and that's what I was concerned about, and they had a great school district here," Hinojosa said. "Then I started becoming aware of the things that were not natural. The things that the plants were subjecting us to."

- Greater Houston registers some of the highest pollution of any metro region in the US.
- Air pollution contributes to every major health and social issue.
- The sources of air pollution in Houston are somewhat varied. It is a Texas problem also because we have a very lax regulatory environment.

stance releases.

- In Galena Park, toxic sludge dumped from the port looks like small hills covered over by grass.
- In another neighborhood, plans are moving forward to build a cement factory opposite a major hospital.
- The health impacts are severe (within a two-mile radius of the Port, for example, leukemia rates among children are 50 times higher than those for outlying areas.)
- The Houston area, plagued by high industrial concentration and lack of zoning, sees its low-income, communities of color living alongside heavy polluters.
- These communities, facing regular over-emission by facilities, are now taking matters into their own hands by installing air monitors that can collect data, proving the direct link from the plants to pollution.



Jennifer Hadayia (L), Executive Director, Air Houston Alliance and Dr. Inyang Uwak, Research and Policy Director

bus tour of the Houston Ship Channel. The Houston Ship Channel is home to one of the world's highest concentrations of refineries, petrochemical plants, and cement production plants. The tour was

the industries that are not regulated rigorously and that's a Texas problem," said Jennifer (Jen) Hadayia, Air Alliance Houston's Executive Director in a briefing before the bus tour. Jennifer Hadayia was



(R-L) Cruz Hinojosa, Juan Flores and members of the Houston Ethnic media in Galena Park

organized by Air Alliance, a Houston non-profit advocacy organization working to reduce the public health impacts of air pollution and advance environmental justice.

"All of us as reasonable health-aware people would say 'Why would you put a rock crusher that emits particulate matter across from a hospital?'

joined by Dr. Inyang Uwak to give a very detailed analysis of their work in Air Alliance including the criteria for air pollutants and the sources of air pollution in the Houston area which comprise a variety of petrochemical plants, chemical storage facilities, and traffic emissions. Their report was focused on the industrial sources. The conclusion from



The Team at Air Alliance (L-R) Alex Spike, Alondra Torres, Leticia Gutierrez, Crystal Ngo, Juan Flores, Genesis Granados and Cassandra Casades

According to the American Lung Association, Houston ranks #9 for ozone and #15 for particle pollution.

- The Houston-Woodlands-Sugar Land MSA, with its 517 facilities in the Toxic Release Inventory, surpasses other major cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC, in toxic air sub-

- The data collected from the air monitors is needed to help hold state regulators and polluters accountable, and it aids in making informed health decisions.
- Neighborhood activists are mobilizing with the support of Air Alliance; EPA just gave a grant to the Environmental Community

