

# TEXAS

## EPA's inspector general says agency isn't enforcing benzene pollution rules at refineries in Texas, nationally

A report by the federal environmental agency's internal watchdog found that EPA is failing to enforce its own pollution limits for the known carcinogen at many refineries — including some in Texas.

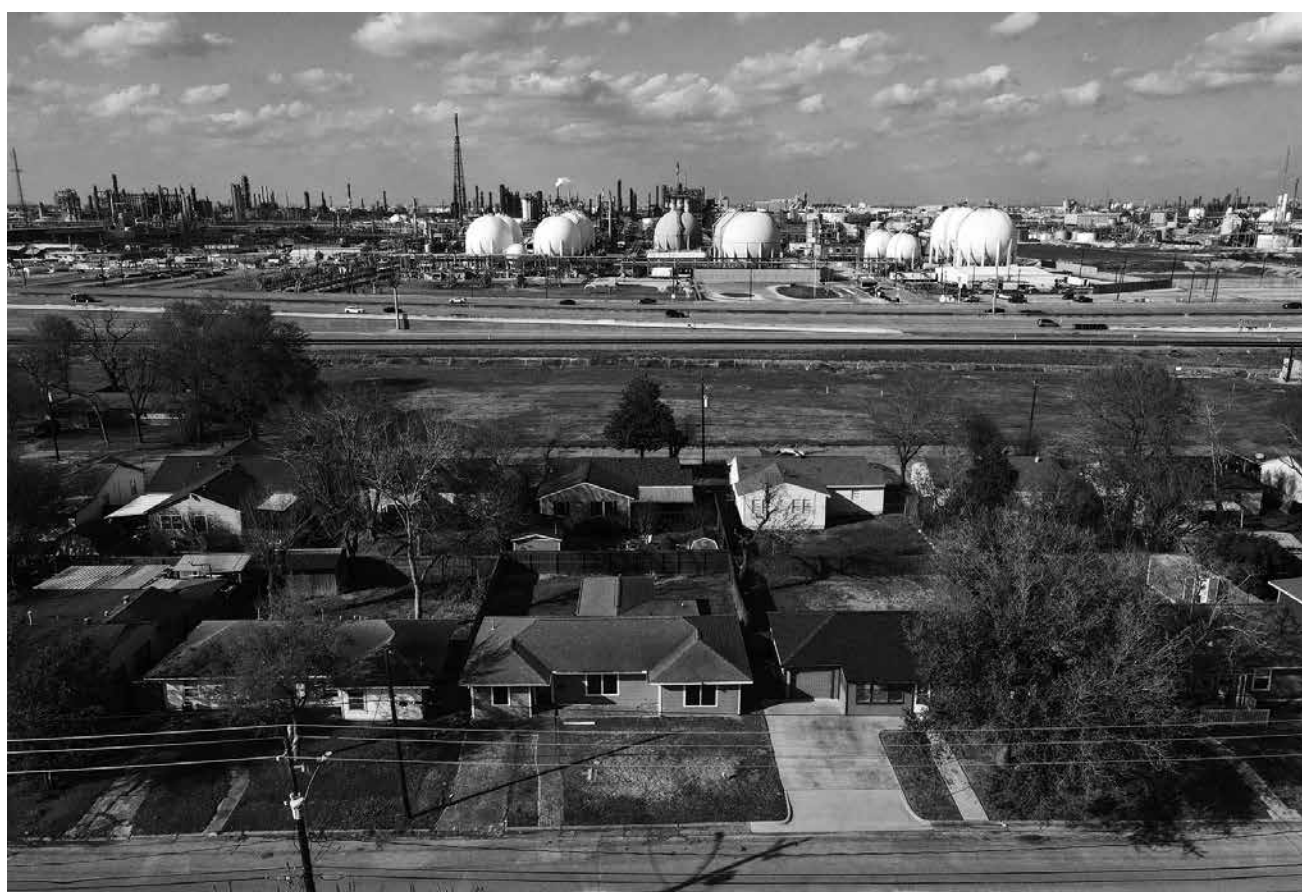
By Alejandra Martinez  
Texas Tribune

A report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general found that the federal agency is failing to enforce federal pollution limits on benzene emitted from refineries, including nine in Texas.

The report published earlier this week found that the EPA has not ensured that petroleum refineries that exceed benzene concentration limits at their fence lines take actions to reduce emissions of the invisible hydrocarbon, which is known to cause cancer after repeated exposure.

The report says that from January 2018 to September 2021, 25 of 118 refineries that submitted benzene monitoring data to the EPA exceeded benzene pollution limits at least once during that time period, including refineries in Corpus Christi, Pasadena, Port Arthur and Texas City. Thirteen exceed pollution limits repeatedly, the report says.

When those limits were exceeded, according to the report, enforcement actions



A Deer Park neighborhood next to Highway 225, which borders the refineries, petrochemical plants and industrial storage tanks that line the Houston Ship Channel. Credit: Mark Felix for The Texas Tribune/Public Health Watch

were limited, partly because of insufficient air pollution analysis at the refineries and incomplete data submitted by companies.

In Texas, the EPA has given the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the state's environmental regulatory agency, power to enforce such limits. Refineries are required to submit benzene fence line monitoring data to the TCEQ.

The inspector general's office recommended that the EPA give clear instructions to its delegated authorities, like the TCEQ, on what counts as breaking pollution limit rules and how to spot missing information from refineries.

Ilan Levin, Texas director for the Environmental Integrity Project, a nonprofit environmental organization, said that the report "gives ammunition to those who do

want to try to clean up cancer causing pollution."

The report also noted that regulatory agencies find the pollution limits challenging to implement because the level that triggers an alert does not automatically lead to a violation. Levin describes the EPA's benzene limit like a car's engine light. It's a warning to regulators that benzene levels are high, but regulators can't always issue a penalty for it.

The report recommended that the EPA come up with a plan to deal with refineries that don't lower their benzene levels after exceeding the federal limits.

The EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance said it plans to fix these issues and expects to complete the inspector general's recommendations by next year.

Benzene is emitted from various sources at refineries, such as storage tanks, equipment leaks, and wastewater. It's known to cause cancer after repeated exposure and can irritate the throat and eyes. When inhaled in large quantities over a short period, benzene can affect the central nervous system and cause symptoms including dizziness, a rapid heart rate and headaches.

Eric Schaeffer, the Environmental Integrity Project's executive director, said in a press release that the report "highlights an urgent need" for the federal agency to crack down on oil refineries that are "putting neighborhoods right down the street from these plants at risk."

Schaeffer, the former director of civil enforcement at EPA, said "the benzene levels remain far too high at refineries year after year. EPA needs to give these industry laggards a deadline for cleanup, or companies will stop taking these requirements seriously."

Along the Houston Ship Channel, chemical plants, refineries, and smokestacks are surrounded by a string of communities — many of them predominantly communities of color — and studies have found that residents have experienced adverse health impacts from pollution coming from their industrial neighbors.

In 2019, a group of chemical tanks caught fire in a massive blaze that burned for days at Intercontinental Terminals Company's Deer Park facility.

A Texas Tribune investigation revealed earlier this year that hundreds of people experienced symptoms of benzene exposure — including dizziness, a rapid heart rate and headaches — and that elevated levels of benzene remained in the air for weeks after public health measures were lifted.

The inspector general's office looked at benzene pollution data to measure the effectiveness of rules issued in 2015, when the federal agency began requiring petroleum refineries to monitor benzene concentrations outside their fence lines.

If a company's annual average concentrations exceed the 9 micrograms per cubic meter, a level that EPA says is safe to breathe, the company is required to investigate the cause of the excess emissions and take corrective actions. The report says companies don't always follow through with that requirement.

"[The report] confirms what communities have been saying for a long time and adds to the growing evidence of pollution," Levin said. "I hope it can lead to some better protections and for some of these refineries to cut their cancer causing pollution."

### NOTICE OF MEETING TO VOTE ON TAX RATE

A tax rate of \$0.734206 per \$100 valuation has been proposed by the governing body of City of Shoreacres.

PROPOSED TAX RATE	\$0.734206 per \$100
NO-NEW-REVENUE TAX RATE	\$0.734206 per \$100
VOTER-APPROVAL TAX RATE	\$0.758555 per \$100

The no-new-revenue tax rate is the tax rate for the 2023 tax year that will raise the same amount of property tax revenue for City of Shoreacres from the same properties in both the 2022 tax year and the 2023 tax year.

The voter-approval rate is the highest tax rate that City of Shoreacres may adopt without holding an election to seek voter approval of the rate.

The proposed tax rate is not greater than the no-new-revenue tax rate. This means that City of Shoreacres is not proposing to increase property taxes for the 2023 tax year.

A PUBLIC MEETING TO VOTE ON THE PROPOSED TAX RATE WILL BE HELD ON October 16, 2023 AT 6:00 p.m AT 604 Shore Acres Blvd., La Porte, Texas 77571.

The proposed tax rate is also not greater than the voter-approval tax rate. As a result, City of Shoreacres is not required to hold an election to seek voter approval of the rate. However, you may express your support for or opposition to the proposed tax rate by contacting the members of the City of Shoreacres of City of Shoreacres at their offices or by attending the public meeting mentioned above.

YOUR TAXES OWED UNDER ANY OF THE RATES MENTIONED ABOVE CAN BE CALCULATED AS FOLLOWS:

$$\text{Property tax amount} = (\text{tax rate}) \times (\text{taxable value of your property}) / 100$$

**FOR the proposal:** Felicia Ramos Ron Hoskins  
Wes Bell

**AGAINST the proposal:** Mayor Pro-tem Jerome McKeon Paul Greeson

**PRESENT** and not voting:

**ABSENT:**

Visit [Texas.gov/PropertyTaxes](https://www.texas.gov/PropertyTaxes) to find a link to your local property tax database on which you can easily access information regarding your property taxes, including information about proposed tax rates and scheduled public hearings of each entity that taxes your property.

The 86th Texas Legislature modified the manner in which the voter-approval tax rate is calculated to limit the rate of growth of property taxes in the state.

The following table compares the taxes imposed on the average residence homestead by City of Shoreacres last year to the taxes proposed to be imposed on the average residence homestead by City of Shoreacres this year.

	2022	2023	Change
<b>\$100 of value)</b>			-11.15%
<b>Average homestead taxable value</b>	\$198,583	\$220,290	increase of 21,707, or 10.93%
<b>Tax on average homestead</b>	\$1,640.95	\$1,617.38	decrease of -23.57, or -1.44%
<b>Total tax levy on all properties</b>	\$1,284,406	\$1,302,387	increase of 17,981, or 1.40%

For assistance with tax calculations, please contact the tax assessor for City of Shoreacres at 281-420-4845 or [Tharrison@cityofshoreacres.us](mailto:Tharrison@cityofshoreacres.us), or visit [www.cityofshoreacres.us](http://www.cityofshoreacres.us) for more information.

Who cares about public notices?

**YOU SHOULD**

You have the right to know what's happening in your community.

Public notices - information local governments are obligated to provide citizens - are required to be published in local newspapers to provide a public record that's accessible to everyone.

Public notices keep you informed about your government. But, in some states legislators are trying to keep public notices from appearing in local newspapers. This severely impacts government transparency and, in turn, limits the public's right to hold them accountable for their actions.

Let your state legislators know that you value being able to access notices in your newspaper and that they are worth the investment.

Protect public notices in newspapers and protect your right to know.

America's Newspapers

[newspapers.org/public-notices](https://www.newspapers.org/public-notices)

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