FORMOSA PLASTICS: AN ASSAULT ON HUMAN LIFE

DECEMBER 2020
The Taiwanese-owned Formosa Plastics Sunshine Project is a massive, $9.4 billion petrochemical complex that could begin major construction in St. James, LA, in 2021. It will be one of the largest plastics plants in the world, composed of 14 plants stretching over 2,400 acres in District 5 of St. James Parish. The complex will emit huge amounts of air pollutants that will increase the cancer risk across several LA parishes, potentially pose a danger to unborn children, and be built over the graves of enslaved ancestors of Black Louisianans—all in the heart of Cancer Alley.

Residents of St. James have protested this project from day one. It has received media attention from local, state, and national outlets. Louisiana offered Formosa Plastics an incentives package including a $12 million grant and a $1.5 billion tax break. Gov. Edwards has emphasized the jobs that this project will bring, though whether these jobs would go to St. James or even Louisiana residents is uncertain.
ETHYLENE OXIDE: A KILLER CHEMICAL

The Sunshine Project will be one of the top five emitters of ethylene oxide (ETO) in the United States, potentially emitting 7.7 tons of ETO into the air every year.

An EPA report states: “EPA has concluded that ethylene oxide is carcinogenic to humans by the inhalation route of exposure. Evidence in humans indicates that exposure to ethylene oxide increases the risk of lymphoid cancer and, for females, breast cancer.”

The above map shows ETO emissions for the Sunshine Project, whose potential location is outlined in (red). The yellow lines represent areas within which the cancer risk rate would exceed a certain number. For example, the “10x” and “15x” designation that St. Louis Academy is within means that the FP’s ETO emissions will add between 10 per 100,000 (or 100 per million) and 15 per 100,000 (or 150 per million) to the cancer risk rate for that area.

A LOCAL & STATEWIDE DANGER

The Sunshine Project will be about one mile from an elementary school, St. Louis Academy (formerly Fifth Ward Elementary). If the Sunshine Project’s flare destruction efficiency operates at a very high level of 99%- which is unlikely, especially in the long term- its ETO emissions alone could increase the cancer risk for the region of St. Louis Academy by 100-150 cases per million.

Its ETO emissions also could increase the cancer risk rate for a wide geographical range-- as far as S. Baton Rouge, Thibodaux, and Morgan City by 10-20 cases per million.

This is not to mention the other carcinogenic chemicals that will be released by the Sunshine Project. The Sunshine Project will make Cancer Alley more cancerous.
“Formosa Plastics would be a death sentence for St. James Parish.”

- Sharon Lavigne, Founder of RISE St. James
A DANGER TO UNBORN CHILDREN

Exposure to ETO by pregnant women has been shown to increase the risk of preterm births and spontaneous abortion (miscarriage). Additionally, exposure to fine particulate matter (PM$_{2.5}$) and ozone has been repeatedly linked to a significant rise in risk of preterm births, stillbirths, and low birth weight. The Sunshine Project will release 339.81 tons of PM$_{2.5}$ per year, and thousands of tons of the chemicals that lead to ozone on hot days: volatile organic compounds (1667.89 tons per year) and nitrogen oxides (1242.53 tons per year).

Louisiana recently was given the lowest rating ("Getting Started") for achieving Good Health for babies by the ZERO TO THREE’s State of Babies Yearbook 2020. Louisiana has a preterm birth rate of 13 percent, the second highest in the nation. The rate for Black preterm births in Louisiana is 17 percent. Louisiana cannot afford more dangers to its unborn children.

RACIAL INJUSTICES

In the mid-1800s, white plantation owners in Louisiana violently forced enslaved Black people to work in their sugarcane fields. Those enslaved human beings gave their lives to build up the economy of the state of Louisiana. If the Sunshine Project is built, it will rest upon the burial sites of some of those enslaved people. Formosa Plastics failed to disclose the existence of those graves during its land approval process.

Formosa Plastics will not only desecrate these Black people’s graves through its presence—it will also poison their descendants. St. James Parish is about 50% Black, but the fifth district, in which the Sunshine Project could be built, is over 85% Black. St. Louis Academy, the elementary school about one mile from the site, has 99% Black enrollment.

The process leading to the Sunshine Project’s land permits was unjust. In a move reminiscent of the Jim Crow era, the St. James Parish Council in 2014 re-zoned parts of Districts 4 and 5 (two heavily Black districts) for industrial use in a rushed process without the consent of the residents.

A few years later, the land use for Formosa was approved by the council. Even one of the council members, Clyde Cooper, admits that the presence of the Sunshine Project will be an instance of racism. “I view it as environmental racism,” he said. “It’s a decision based on, ‘We don’t want it in the white area, but we don’t mind it being in the black area.’ That’s what it came down to, and that’s the truth.”
WHAT YOU CAN DO

Environmental justice and faith-based advocates have made some significant inroads in their struggle for justice in St. James lately. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has temporarily suspended its permit for Formosa Plastics in order to engage in a re-evaluation process, and a state district judge has ordered the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) to reassess its permits for Formosa Plastics in light of the plant’s impact on the Black community.

In other words, the Sunshine Project is currently on shaky ground, and there is a real chance that we can stop this plant from being built in Cancer Alley. You can help.

Write a message to Gov. Edwards and the St. James Parish Council asking them to revoke the permits for the Sunshine Project.

Send this report to others and encourage them to take action on behalf of the Black community, unborn children, and all Louisianaans.

Keep this cause and the residents of Cancer Alley in your prayers.

We must find alternative ways of investing in St. James and Louisiana that won’t pose such an anti-life, racially unjust, and existential threat to our communities. The Sunshine Project is a bad deal for Louisiana.

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