



## Residents for Air Neutralization

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For Immediate Release

**Contact:** Velma White, President, Residents for Air Neutralization, (318) 218 - 3328  
Lynne Hancock, United Steelworkers, (615) 828 - 6169  
Anne Rolfes, Founding Director, Louisiana Bucket Brigade, (504) 452 - 4909

Statewide press conferences on Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>:

New Orleans Location	Baton Rouge Location	Shreveport Location	Phone Conference
11 am 4226 Canal Street	11 am 2747 Sorrell Ave.	11 am 5305 Broadway Ave.	1 pm CST 866.906.9888 Code: 4817190#

### ***Louisiana refineries average 5.7 accidents per week Total pollution increased from last year***

**(New Orleans)** Louisiana’s 17 refineries reported 301 accidents to the state of Louisiana in 2011. These self reports – long criticized for underestimating actual releases – detail pollution from over one million pounds of toxicants into the air and over 1.3 million gallons into Louisiana’s water and soil. The data – the most recent available – is released as part of an annual report on refinery accidents.

“This report offers a window into what is really going on at Louisiana’s refineries. They help our union make the case for how unsafe this industry can be. Instead of ignoring the results of this report or doubting the accuracy of the public records on which the data is based, refiners should work with our union and the community to make these plants safer,” said Gary Beevers, International Vice President of the United Steelworkers. “No one wants these refineries to shut down, but refiners can do more to ensure the safety and health of their workers and the community. ExxonMobil definitely has the financial resources to do a better job.”

The goal of *Common Ground: the Call for Cooperation to Reduce Accidents at Refineries in Louisiana* is to solve the ongoing problem of refinery accidents. The report thus includes a detailed analysis of the causes of the accidents. “Every year we repeat our call to refinery management to sit down with us and with the workers to get to the bottom of the industry’s accident problem,” said Anne Rolfes, Founding Director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade. “Refinery managers continue to act as if they don’t have an accident problem. Until they face the facts, the oil industry, our economy, our environment and our health will suffer.” Among the most notable problems in 2011 were ongoing flaring at Motiva in Norco and high emissions totals from ExxonMobil’s Chalmette Refining, which year after year has topped the list in quantities of pollution.

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Calumet Refining is another location that has had repeated accidents, and more workers to maintain the facility are needed. “When I found out that Tank 175 was leaking hydrogen sulfide, I also learned that the refinery doesn’t regularly check for maintenance and they don’t invest in new equipment,” said Velma White, President of Residents for Air Neutralization. “I submitted a citizen’s complaint about the tank, and two months later I learned that a valve associated with that the same tank had failed!”

Among the findings in this year’s report is that the total pollution increased from the preceding year. “Accidents are becoming worse, more out of control than last year,” said Ms. Rolfes. “Refinery management should stop laying off full time workers who really know these refineries.”

	2010	2011
<b>Pounds of air pollution</b>	950,750	Over one million
<b>Gallons of water / soil pollution</b>	389,135	Over 1.3 million

Benzene, a known carcinogen, is released in large quantities as is sulfur dioxide, a chemical that triggers asthma attacks and other respiratory problems. The cumulative reports by refineries since 2005:

- 3,339 accidents
- 24 million pounds of air pollution
- 25 million gallons of water pollution

These numbers are likely far lower than what is really released. Underreporting is suspected for many reasons, including:

1. Refinery workers indicate that releases are often far worse than reported by management
2. Reports are based on *estimated* rather than *measured* emissions. (See [Common Ground 2](#), pp. 4 – 5)
3. ExxonMobil Baton Rouge’s June 2012 underreporting is an excellent case study. Exxon Chemical reported a benzene leak of near 10 pounds. Days after the initial report – after much agitation by LABB staff and neighbors – Exxon increased its report to 31,000 thousand pounds. The facility has received a Notice of Potential Penalty for underreporting.

Child poverty in the neighborhoods nearest refineries ranges from 11% near CITGO in Lake Charles to 45% near ExxonMobil in Baton Rouge and 48% near Calumet in Shreveport. “Breathing toxic pollution week after week has an impact on school attendance and earning potential,” said Ms. Rolfes. “ExxonMobil makes \$40 billion dollars year after year and other oil companies are also making money. Neighborhoods languish in their shadow.”

Analysis of the accidents finds the most problematic units to be the sulfur units and the cooling towers. Tanks are also a source of pollution.



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Recommendations from the report include hiring more full time workers and increased enforcement by the government agencies, including engagement of workers and neighbors in inspections.

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**Residents for Air Neutralization** is a group of concerned citizens in Shreveport working to reduce pollution and improve the quality of life in their neighborhood.

The United Steelworkers. We're 1.2 million active and retired members strong. You'll find us fighting for a better life for all workers in union halls, at the work place, in the courts and in legislatures.

The **Louisiana Bucket Brigade** is an environmental health and justice organization supporting neighborhoods' use of grassroots action to create informed, sustainable communities free from industrial pollution.

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