

Study shows proximity to industrial facilities does not translate to better jobs for minorities

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A pair of researchers at the University of Massachusetts has found that minorities living close to industrial facilities do not necessarily gain an

employment advantage. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Michael Ash and James Boyce describe their study and comparison of environmental and job data from government agencies and what they found.

In the United States, as in other parts of the world, government officials are often faced with deciding whether the harm caused by [industrial polluters](#) is worth the jobs they provide. In such cases, it is often argued that such facilities will offer more or better jobs to people who live in the area. In this new effort, Ash and Boyce argue that such claims may not be true for [minorities](#). To learn more about how minorities fare in such situations, they pulled information from the U.S. Environmental Agency and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission databases and sorted the data by the amount of pollution emitted, job opportunities and race.

They found that living near facilities such as oil and gas refineries or coal processing plants did not significantly bolster minority employment. Instead, they found that while minorities are more likely to be exposed to pollutants from such facilities, they could not count on them for jobs.

More specifically, after looking at data from 712 heavily polluting industrial facilities, they found that just 10.8 percent of the jobs at such facilities were held by black people. Also, only 9.8 percent of such jobs were held by Hispanic people. They also found that people of color held less than 7 percent of jobs that were considered to be higher paying across all of the industrial sites listed. Sadly, they also found that black people experienced 17.4 percent of exposure to [air pollutants](#) from the facilities, and Hispanics experienced 15 percent.

The researchers noted that the oil and gas industry, which includes some of the worst polluters, offered very few opportunities for minorities—just 9 percent of the workforce was black. Even worse,

black people were paid 23 percent less on average than [white people](#). Meanwhile, twice as many [black people](#) as white people were found to be exposed to pollutants from such plants.

The researchers conclude by claiming their data shows that black and Hispanic people are exposed to a larger share of pollutants than non-minorities, compared to the number of [jobs](#) they hold in the facilities they studied.

More information: Michael Ash et al. Racial disparities in pollution exposure and employment at US industrial facilities, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2018). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1721640115](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1721640115)

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