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## **Disaster at Winston-Salem Fertilizer Plant Is Unacceptable, Unnecessary, and Entirely Preventable**

### **The Biden Administration and EPA Must Act Now to Prevent Chemical Disasters**

#### ***Joint Statement of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, Center for Progressive Reform, Coming Clean, Earthjustice, Public Citizen, and Sierra Club***

A fire that erupted Monday night at a fertilizer plant in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, continues to burn endangering thousands of people in the area who have had to evacuate or shelter-in-place. The threat of a deadly explosion remains as the fire continues to burn out of control, threatening the health and safety of the nearby communities. This tragic chemical disaster poses unacceptable risk to those who live, work, or go to school near facilities like this, yet [they regularly happen all over the United States](#), despite being entirely preventable. Communities at the fenceline of the chemical industry in other communities live daily with similar harm and threat due to major gaps in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) federal rules on hazardous chemical storage, use, and industrial facility safety. It's time for the EPA to prevent these harmful chemical disasters once and for all.

EPA must act now to [strengthen](#) the federal regulations and issue a strong new chemical disaster prevention rule so that no community will ever have to experience a tragedy like what is happening in Winston-Salem today

As experts in worker health and safety, chemical disaster prevention, and advocates for environmental justice, we [demand that EPA take action now](#) to protect the public from this and other such environmental atrocities. No one, whether in Winston-Salem, or anywhere else, should be forced to live under the [constant threat of disasters and explosions](#). That is a reality no one should have to face. The groups joining this statement hope that this incident does not become even graver and seek to offer support and concern for the community members who are sheltering in place today, and encourage the press to elevate their stories, photos, and tweets.

#### **More background:**

Over one hundred chemical disasters occur annually in the U.S., [showing the serious problems with EPA's existing Clean Air Act Risk Management Plan \(RMP\) Rule](#), the federal regulations intended to prevent chemical disasters. Accidental explosions of ammonium nitrate fertilizers are among the deadliest industrial disasters in U.S. history. Nearly 600 residents were killed by a massive fertilizer explosion in Texas City, Texas, in 1947. In 2013, 15 first responders and workers were killed by the ammonium nitrate explosion at the West Fertilizer Company in West, Texas. Less than two years ago, more than 200 people were killed and thousands more injured in Beirut, Lebanon by detonation of ammonium nitrate fertilizers.

Ammonium nitrate is not subject to the federal RMP rules, even though fence-line communities have called for EPA to regulate this chemical — and facilities that use this chemical like fertilizer plants — under this program for years.

At President Biden's direction, the EPA is currently undertaking a review of the RMP rules and, last summer, held listening sessions and took public comments. Fence-line [communities and environmental groups](#), [scientists and health experts](#), [workers](#), [national security experts](#), [the Blue Green Alliance](#), [the Environmental Justice Health Alliance](#), and many members of the public called for the EPA to strengthen RMP regulations and to include ammonium nitrate facilities under an expanded coverage of the chemical disaster prevention program. A core objective of the comments EPA received is the need for EPA to focus on prevention of chemical disasters in the first place.

The [U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board](#) has also called for stronger regulation of ammonium nitrate and a [preliminary report](#) it issued after the 2013 West Fertilizer explosion recognized that the fertilizer industry has produced alternatives that practically eliminate the risk of accidental explosion posed by ammonium nitrate. [The final report](#) of the CSB highlights the devastation that the explosion caused to the surrounding community. Ammonium nitrate fertilizer products have also been used as homemade weapons against Americans, including by the domestic terrorists and perpetrators of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

In January 2022, over 70+ state and local elected officials sent a [letter](#) to EPA Administrator Michael Regan, [calling for stronger RMP and chemical disaster prevention rules](#).

Chemical disasters are all too common in the US. Just days before this incident, a chemical disaster occurred in Westlake, Louisiana. For information on this and other recent incidents, see the Coalition to Prevent Chemical Disasters [website](#) (which includes incidents at both RMP covered and non-covered facilities).

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*The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, Center for Progressive Reform, Coming Clean, Earthjustice, Public Citizen, and Sierra Club are all advocates working to prevent hazardous chemical releases and protect our communities from catastrophic chemical disasters. For additional information, visit the [Coalition to Prevent Chemical Disasters](#).*