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Local Group Supports Suit Against EPA Over Toxic, Flesh-Dissolving Refinery Chemical That Threatens Fenceline Communities in Los Angeles County.

On July 8, 2025 the Clean Air Council (CAC), Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), filed a lawsuit to compel the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to address the threat of hydrogen fluoride (HF). HF is a dangerous and unnecessary chemical used at dozens of American refineries to produce high-octane gasoline. The chemical's continued use is despite the availability of safer alternatives and their employment at many refineries across the United States. The organizations filed the suit in federal district court in California after the EPA rejected the groups' petition to address the HF's needless risks.

Here is the [NRDC Press Release](#), from July 9th, which we encourage you to read and publicize.

Information about the Torrance Refinery Action Alliance

The Torrance Refinery Action Alliance (TRAA) is a grassroots organization based in South LA County. Our mission is to phase out the use of HF at two Southern California refineries, PBF Energy in Torrance and Valero in Wilmington, to a safer technology as a growing number of refineries have successfully done or are currently doing. TRAA was formed in response to the 2015 explosion at the Torrance Refinery that nearly resulted in a catastrophic release of HF. If the chemical escaped the refinery, it would have become a lethal, ground-hugging cloud capable of traveling for miles, causing severe injury or death to anyone in its path. Elimination of HF will provide safety from death — as well as day-to-day peace of mind — for hundreds of refinery workers, their families, and for thousands of others in the surrounding community.

Torrance Refinery Action Alliance (TRAA) has been collaborating with CAC, CBE, and NRDC on this effort for over a year and a half. We have worked closely with the above organizations (many TRAA members are also members of NRDC) and are encouraged by the filing of this lawsuit, which we strongly support.

Timeline of the efforts to eliminate the extreme danger of HF at refineries

On March 1st, 2024 the EPA issued long-awaited regulations to strengthen the Risk Management Program (RMP). The RMP requires roughly 12,000 industrial facilities using or storing extremely hazardous substances to develop Risk Management Plans that identify prevention and response measures for chemical releases. The new rule restored critical disaster planning and prevention protections after it was gutted in 2019 under the Trump administration.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, “*The RMP was first established in 1996 and in the nearly 30 years since, the program has been subject to political tug-of-war. After the Biden-Harris administration took office, the EPA held a series of listening sessions, and in 2022, proposed the “Safer Communities by Chemical Accident Prevention” rule. The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) joined hundreds of organizations and individuals in commenting on the proposed rules and testifying at EPA’s*

public hearings. While the proposal restored many of the rollbacks under the Trump administration, it still left some to be desired in terms of preventing chemical disasters.”

The new rule makes significant improvements over the Trump era version. First, it restores the requirement that HF refineries do an analysis of safer alternatives. Additionally, it adds, for the first time, requirements to analyze the “practicality” of these alternatives, requiring HF refineries to state why they are not using safer chemicals. This provides the EPA a tool to “influence” HF refineries toward implementation of conversion. Many of the improvements over the draft rule stem from grassroots advocacy. For example, the United Steel Workers scored victories in the significant expansion of worker participation in safety processes.

(Full letter available on request, excerpts ([link to AG excerpts](#))).

However, the rule fails to protect vulnerable Environmental Justice burdened communities living near HF refineries in 20 states. The EPA recognized that HF units are vulnerable to accidents, natural disasters, and terrorist acts. However, the rule did not meet the standard set by **California Attorney General Rob Bonta** and 20 other State AGs in their 2022 letter to the EPA. That letter quoted the US Chemical Safety Board saying it is “**fully within the authority and responsibility of the EPA pursuant to ...the [Chemical Disaster Rule] Risk Management Plan (RMP) Rule (40 CFR Part 68.67) as well as through its General Duty Clause.**” ... “**to impose a robust safer technology protocol that will drive the remaining hydrofluoric acid-using refineries to identify and implement safer alternatives”**

Many of the HF dangers highlighted by TRAA, as well as those alerted to by national security experts, are referenced in the EPA release. Nonetheless, TRAA sees this rule as a three-legged stool without its 3rd leg. Without requiring conversion to a safer alternative, the rule does little to protect the community from a catastrophic, and potentially deadly, release of HF.

On February 11, 2025, CAC, CBE, and NRDC filed a petition under the Toxic Substances Control Act which sets out the facts establishing why the EPA must establish regulations to prohibit the use of HF in domestic oil refining to eliminate the unreasonable risks that this use presents to public health, the US economy and the environment. When this petition was rejected, the organizations filed their suit.

Additional information about the dangers of HF/MHF alkylation, and efforts to replace it with a safe alternative, can be found here: [TRAA.website](#)