

“Environmental Racism” Divides and Diverts Activists

by **Lorna Salzman** (September 2015)

In East Liverpool, Ohio, a hazardous waste incinerator has been operating since 1993, with uncontrolled emissions – over three thousand tons of toxics annually including lead and benzene – that threaten the health of the entire town. Residents of the black community closest to the plant have been trying to get the EPA to declare the plant an example of “environmental racism,” claiming that they, as opposed to the rest of the town, suffer disproportionately from these emissions. In 2005 the EPA did in fact designate it as such, based on the fact that the black population closest to the plant contained twice as many minority residents as other minority communities in the EPA region. But what the community did not realize is that no specific EPA action is required for such designations, which are, according to the EPA, simply to acknowledge such cases as “environmental justice” examples for use in internal government reviews.

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