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Citizens for Environmental Justice – National Refinery Reform Campaign

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## **Local and National Environmental Justice Groups File Legal Challenge to CITGO For Permit to Operate Tanks and Increase Benzene Pollution Despite CITGO Federal Criminal Indictments for Underreporting Benzene Emissions at Two Tanks**

(Corpus Christi, TX) The Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid filed legal action on behalf of Citizens for Environmental Justice, Refinery Reform Campaign, and South Texas Colonias to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to block the increase of emissions proposed by CITGO East Refinery and have demanded for a Contest Case Hearing.

“It’s mostly people of color and low-income that lives in the census tracts surrounding Citgo refinery,” said Suzie Canales, with Citizens for Environmental Justice. “This population has had to bear more than its fair share of pollution, including tremendous amounts of benzene, a carcinogen. We have major concerns with the high levels of VOCs that CITGO is proposing in this permit and the impact to human health.”

Citgo submitted to the TCEQ an application and attempt to obtain Air Quality permit number 80693 and proposed permit number PSDTX1086 which would authorize operation of existing storage tanks and will emit organic compounds, hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, nitrogen oxides, and carbon monoxide. According to the initial filing, VOC emissions rates proposed is 1015.76, pounds per hour - at 305.8 tons per year.

In a report released earlier this year by the Environmental Integrity Project, Corpus Christi was the only city in the nation to have 2 refineries rank among the top 10 worst refinery polluters of carcinogens in the United States. The groups argue that the permit application, should it be approved, would also increase organic compounds which includes VOCs and Benzene, a chemical Corpus Christi has chronically ranked highest in the state. “We believe that Citgo also would have make the top 10 list of worst polluters for carcinogens had they not underreported their benzene emissions for nearly 10 years.” Canales added.

The application submitted by Citgo to the TCEQ states, in part, “Demonstration of short-term emission caps will be accomplished through calculations using maximum pumping rate.” The groups wonder why sampling isn’t being conducted during refilling of the tanks, the highest emissions period.

In addition, the application states: BACT (Best Available Control Technology) for storage tank maintenance and startup (MSS) – “Free liquid will be removed by draining to a closed system and/or pumped to a closed container or transport. The tank will then be opened to the atmosphere. The tank will be cleaned prior to re-filling”

The groups question why CITGO isn't proposing to clean the tanks before opening to the atmosphere. The residue in the tanks, after emptying, will volatilize, and discharge to the air if they open the tanks. The preliminary VOCs rates for MSS is 4441.41 pounds per hour at 39.11 tons per year.

"It appears that CITGO proposes to dump more pollution into the already over-burdened community, instead of containing it" Denny Larson, Director of Refinery Reform Campaign, "Citgo has not learned the lesson that has them under criminal indictment."

The environmental groups submitted the comments to the TCEQ within the comment period deadline.

Citizens for Environmental Justice are a grassroots group based in Corpus Christi, Texas who works to achieve environmental justice. Their website is: [www.cfejcorpuschristi.org](http://www.cfejcorpuschristi.org) or [www.citgojustice.org](http://www.citgojustice.org). The Refinery Reform Campaign is a national campaign that seeks to clean up refineries. The RRC's website is: [www.refineryreform.org](http://www.refineryreform.org)

Suzie Canales is the recipient of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute award for outstanding achievements in Environmental Justice.