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## **Sierra Club Marks Fifth Anniversary Of West, Texas Explosion**

*Warns little has been done to protect people from more preventable disasters*

Austin, Texas -- The Sierra Club marked the five year anniversary of the West Fertilizer Company plant explosion in West, Texas, today, with a warning that more preventable disasters could happen because of EPA inaction.

On April 17, 2013, a spontaneous combustion of ammonium nitrate led to several explosions that killed 15, injured 180, and caused destruction to surrounding areas, including a middle school, nursing home, apartment complex, and dozens of homes in the town of West. First responders and plant personnel were among those killed.

However, the Environmental Protection Agency continues to delay the Chemical Disaster Safety rule, created by the EPA in 2016 to improve safety regulations on chemical facilities to prevent deaths, injuries, and hazardous pollution exposure and protect residents, workers, and first-response providers.

Under industry pressure, Trump's EPA has put off the rule until February 2019 while it looks for ways to roll back these protections.

Last month, oral arguments were heard in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in a case against a 20-month delay, filed by Earthjustice, representing 15 environmental and labor groups including the Sierra Club. But harmful chemical accidents continue to occur, and EPA's own data shows there could be at least 300 more accidents involving dangerous chemicals during this nearly two year delay.

Seven months ago, residents of Crosby, Texas, a small city northeast of Houston with around the same population as West (less than 3,000 people), were exposed to toxic fumes when highly reactive chemicals at the Arkema, Inc. chemical manufacturing plant caught fire during flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey (Arkema is currently being sued by two counties, dozens of first responders and hundreds of Crosby residents for negligence.)

**"These are not isolated incidents in a state notorious for lax fossil fuel industry regulations and home to the world's largest petrochemical complex. Texas ranks number 1 in the nation, with 2,113 facilities or 17 percent, that are handling dangerous chemicals subject to the EPA's new Chemical Safety rules,"** said Lone Star Chapter Clean Air Director Neil Carman.

"I used to inspect refineries and chemical plants in Texas and witnessed fires occur at major industrial plants first hand. Texas has large populations living in fence line and downwind communities where toxic air pollution drifts for miles such as into the City of Houston from the Houston Ship Channel industry. Each day that the Chemical Safety Rule is delayed, taking into account the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather disasters, these communities are more and more at risk from fires, explosions and toxic releases."

DC judges are expected to issue a ruling on the Earthjustice litigation this spring.