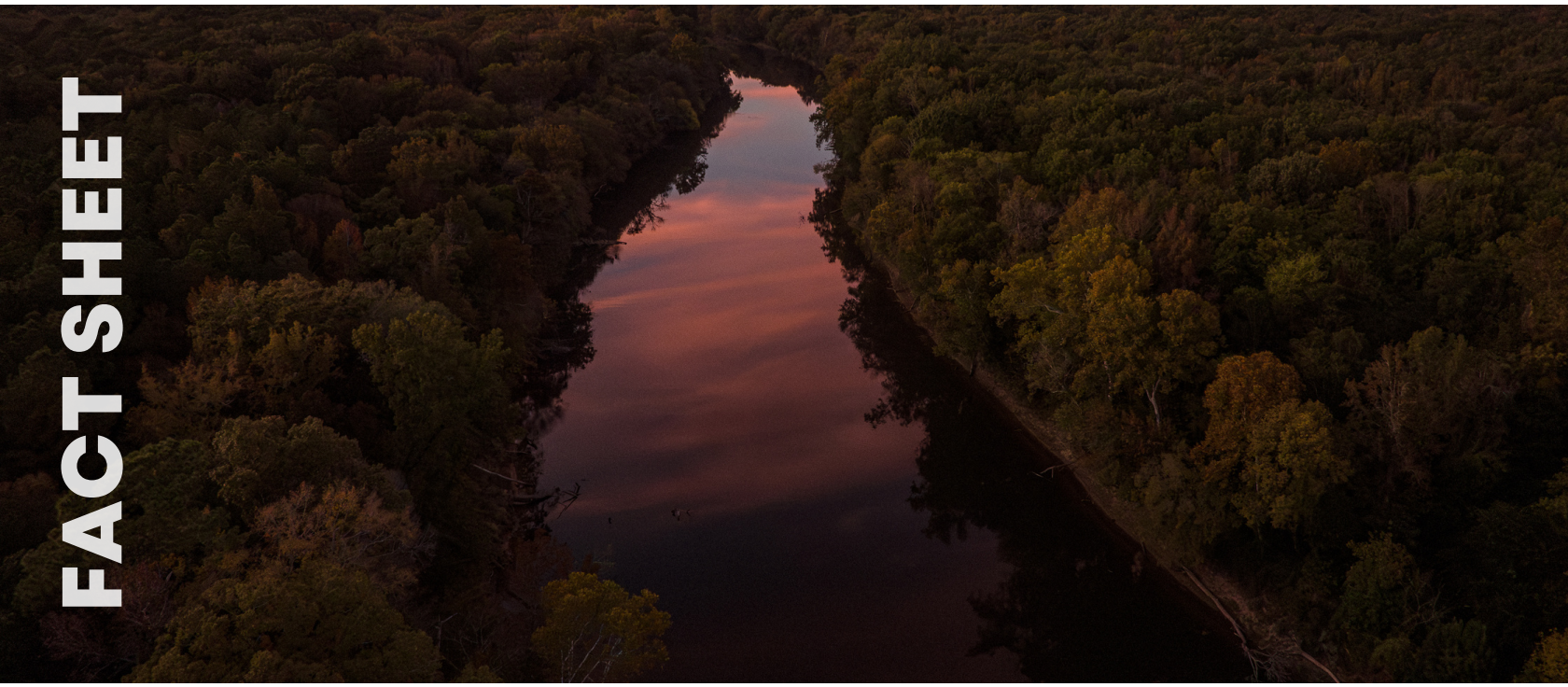
New Water Pollution Control Standards for Slaughterhouses and Rendering Facilities

FACT SHEET



One of the largest pork slaughterhouses in the United States discharges 1,759 pounds of nitrogen per day directly into the Cape Fear River, pictured above, which supplies drinking water to Wilmington, North Carolina, a city of 119,000 people. *Source: Justin Cook for Earthjustice.*

Slaughterhouses and Rendering Facilities Discharge Dangerous Water Pollution

- On average, over 17,000 animals are killed each minute in slaughterhouses across the United States. Slaughterhouse byproducts such as fat, bone, and feathers are often sent to rendering facilities for conversion into tallow, animal meal, and other products. Both slaughterhouses and rendering facilities require a near-constant flow of water, and they discharge hundreds of millions of pounds of water pollution each year.
- Slaughterhouses and rendering facilities are among the top industrial dischargers of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, which can render water unsafe for drinking, unfit for outdoor recreation, and uninhabitable for aquatic life. According to EPA, this pollution ranks among "the most widespread, costly, and challenging environmental problems impacting water quality in the United States."[1]
- Over 60 million people live near rivers and streams polluted by slaughterhouses, and EPA admits that slaughterhouse pollution disproportionately harms under-resourced communities, low-income communities, and communities of color.

EPA Finally Proposed New Water Pollution Control Standards for Slaughterhouses and Rendering Facilities —But the New Standards Don't Go Far Enough

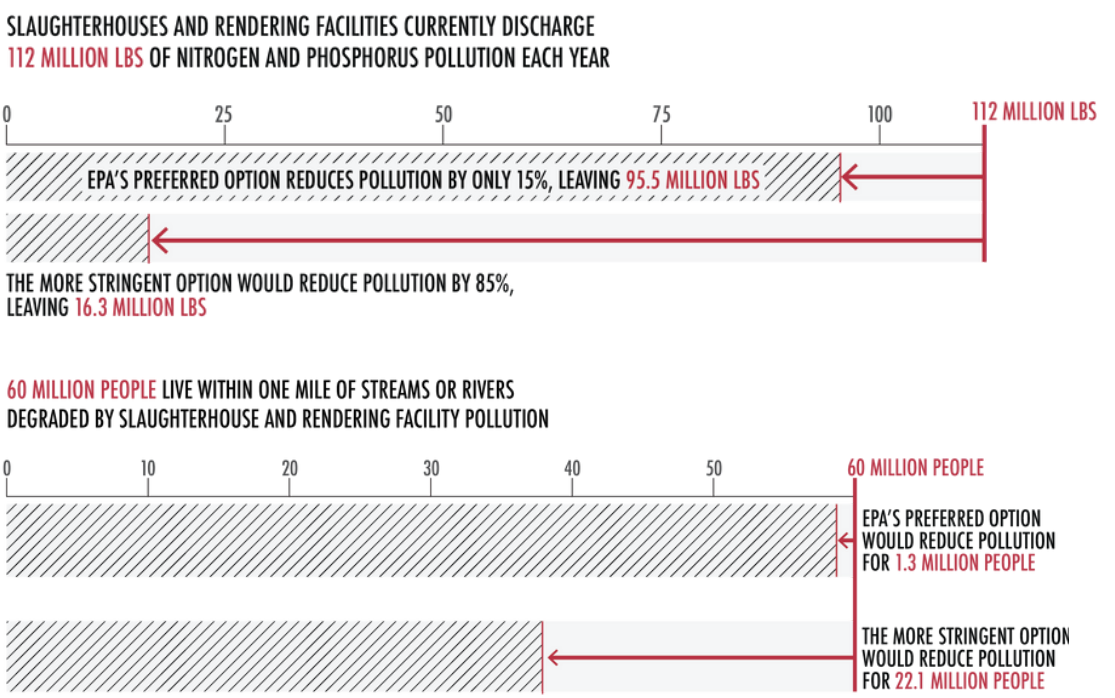
- The Clean Water Act requires EPA to publish water pollution control standards, review existing standards every year, and revise standards as necessary to keep pace with improvements in pollution-control technology.
- Despite these clear requirements, EPA has published standards for only about 3 percent of slaughterhouses and rendering facilities nationwide, and those standards are now decades old and fail to control harmful nutrient and other pollution. The vast majority of slaughterhouses and rendering facilities are not subject to any federal water pollution control standards at all.
- For more than a decade, EPA has recognized that these standards are likely out of date. Finally, as a result of a lawsuit brought by environmental and community groups, EPA proposed several options for new standards in December 2023. As shown below, EPA's preferred option doesn't go far enough to protect people and the environment. At a minimum, EPA should select the most protective option. And nothing prevents EPA from adopting standards that are stronger than any of the options it has proposed so far.

Stronger Standards Will Improve Lives, Create Jobs, and Protect the Environment—at Almost No Cost to Industry

- EPA's preferred option will reduce nitrogen and phosphorus pollution by almost 15 percent—that is, 16.5 million pounds per year.[2] And the most protective option would go over *five times* further, reducing this pollution by over 85%, or nearly 96 million pounds per year.[3] Less pollution means better water quality, fewer threats to human health, and a clearer path to recovery for dozens of threatened and endangered species.
- According to EPA, strengthening water pollution control standards for slaughterhouses and rendering facilities will result in a net gain of at least 100—and possibly more than 1,600—long-term jobs. Fewer than 0.04% of workers might be temporarily displaced, but facilities that adopt new technology are expected to absorb these jobs as they expand production capacity.[4]
- EPA projects that over 99% of slaughterhouses will adopt the new standards without facing any risk of closure.[5] In fact, many slaughterhouses already have reduced their pollution voluntarily. No small businesses will incur costs greater than 1% of revenue, and the vast majority of small businesses won't incur any costs at all.[6]

Sources

1. Clean Water Act Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards for the Meat and Poultry Products Point Source Category, 89 Fed. Reg. 4474, 4475 (proposed Jan. 23, 2024).
2. Environmental Assessment for Revisions to the Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards for the Meat and Poultry Products Point Source Category at ES-3 (Dec. 11, 2023). 3. Technical Development Document for Proposed Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards for the Meat and Poultry Products Point Source Category, at Tbl. 11-3 (Dec. 2023). 4. 89 Fed. Reg. at 4502 (Tbl. VIII-16). 5. *Id*. at 4499 (Tbl. VIII-8). 6. *Id*. at 4501 (Tbl. VIII-12). *Photo Source: Justin Cook for Earthjustice*.



Get Involved!

Communities harmed by slaughterhouse and rendering facility pollution need solidarity and support from people around the country to ensure EPA adopts robust and protective standards.

Lend your voice to this critical fight for environmental justice. Here are a couple of ways to get involved:

- Urge EPA to adopt stringent water pollution control standards for slaughterhouses and rendering facilities at the Agency's March 20, 2024 virtual public meeting. You can sign up to attend **here**.
- Submit written comments letting EPA know that communities deserve strong protection from slaughterhouse and rendering facility water pollution. You can submit comments **here** until March 25, 2024.

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