



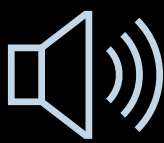
Welcome to Our Site

This site will use a multimedia approach to examine the various types of pollution communities living in redlined areas experience.



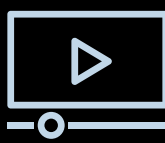
Written Article

Explore air pollution concerns throughout Omaha, NE, and their contributing factors, particularly effecting residents in redlined areas.



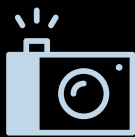
Audio Story

Learn about the growing issue of noise pollution in Omaha, Nebraska, and how it disproportionately affects historically redlined communities.



Video Story

Find out about Omaha's lead superfund site and the lingering effects impacting historically redlined areas like North and South Omaha.



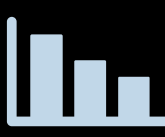
Photos

Photos showcased in this website were taken by our team to capture the city of Omaha, NE.



Social Media

Check out our project through a social media lens, featuring clips from interviews, statistics, and more.



Infographics

Our infographics aim to provide contextual context to our content, especially relating to air quality in Omaha, NE.

Check Out These Source Articles

AIR

- [Nebraska Public Media "In a twist, OPPD could keep burning coal as renewable projects undergo study"](#)
- [Nebraska Asthma Coalition](#)
- ["Why Air Quality in Omaha is Suffering & What Citizens Can Do"](#)
- [OPPD Environmental Reports](#)
- [Purple Air](#)
- [EPA Health and Environmental Effects of Particulate Matter](#)

NOISE

- [Nature Ecology and Evolution "Inequalities in noise will affect urban wildlife"](#)
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- [CDC "Testing for Lead Poisoning in Children"](#)
- [EPA "Protect Your Family from Sources of Lead"](#)
- [City of Omaha "Lead Contamination Discovered on Five School Campuses"](#)

Our Team

Supportive. Collaborative. Dedicated.

Pollution in redlined areas was a topic close to home for many of our members who grew up in South Omaha. It was a rewarding, educational, and critical experience to work together as a team to put together a multimedia project covering such a significant topic.



Mary Mitzlaff
Audio, Video, Website Design Lead, Social Media, & Infographic

I am a senior at the University of Nebraska Omaha, majoring in ...

Read more

mmitzlaff@unomaha.edu

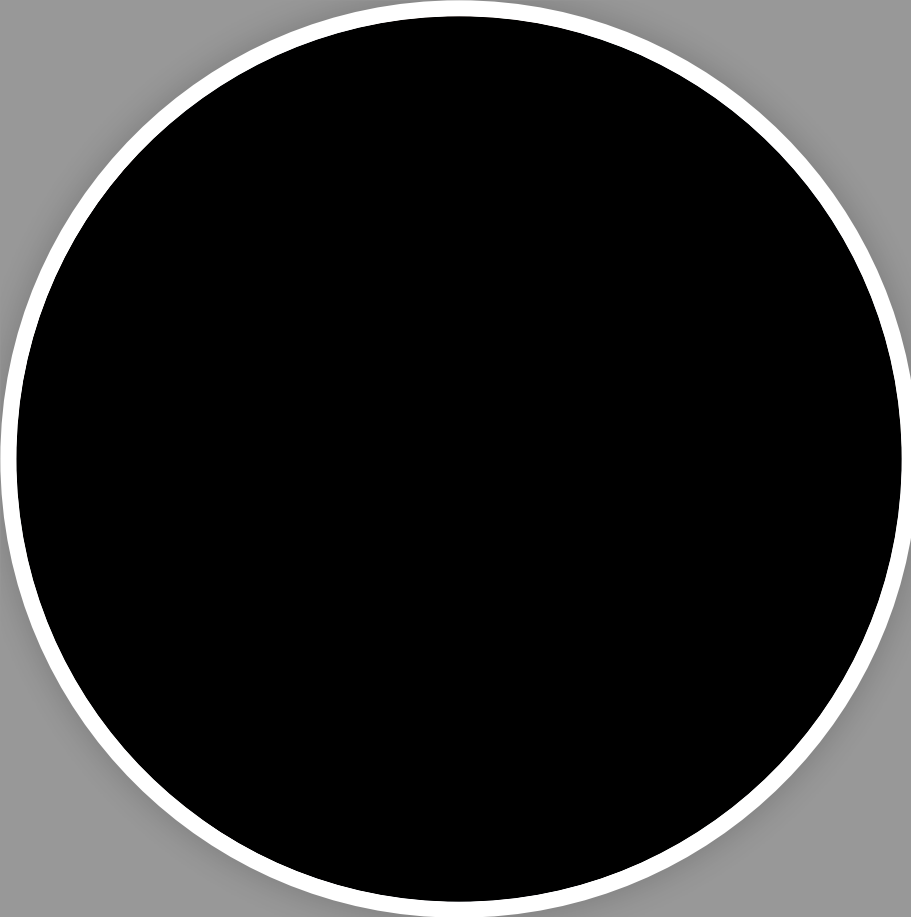


Jade Thornton
Written Article Lead & Social Media

My name is Jade Thornton and I worked on the written article for thi...

Read more

jthornton@unomaha.edu



Ivan Tovar
Photo, Drone Footage, & Social Media

My name is Ivan Tovar. I worked on the photos and drone shots for this ...

Read more

itovar@unomaha.edu



Alexander Woelich
Infographic & Social Media

My name is Alexander Woelich. I worked on the infographics for this ...

Read more

awoelich@unomaha.edu



Pablo Perez
Photo & Social Media

My name is Pablo Perez and I worked on some of the pictures and voiced ...

Read more

pabloperez@unomaha.edu

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Air Pollution

Coal Plant Delays Raise Concerns In Omaha’s Redlined Areas

OMAHA, NEBRASKA – Residents of Omaha’s redlined neighborhoods continue to experience a large portion of the city’s air pollution, as the Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) recently announced it will continue to burn coal at the North Omaha Station until 2026. Environmental advocates and community leaders are raising alarms over the prolonged usage of coal, citing the harmful environmental and health impacts for Omaha and its redlined districts.

“The largest single source polluter in Omaha is by far the North Omaha coal plant, units 4 and 5,” said David Corbin, Energy Committee Chair for the Nebraska Sierra Club. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), coal plants are a significant source of particulate matter pollution, which is linked to respiratory illnesses and other health drawbacks.

Transportation is also a major source of pollution in Omaha. Corbin says, “Omaha is very car centric, so transportation is not doing very well in reducing pollution...” While initiatives like expanded public transit and Heartland Bike Share offer some alternatives, they don’t compete with the city’s heavy reliance on vehicles.

Coal Transition Delayed

OPPD originally planned to retire coal at the North omaha Station by the end of 2023, but regulatory delays have pushed the transition to 2026. Jodi Baker, Media Specialist for OPPD, explained that delays in bringing two new natural gas plants online—Turtle Creek Station and Standing Bear Lake Station—needed an extension.

“Around 2026, we are planning to transition the other three units to more modernized natural gas and retire the two units previously converted to gas in 2016,” Baker said. “This delta does not change our commitment to achieve net zero carbon by 2050.”

Despite these improvements, many argue that natural gas is not a long-term solution. Baker acknowledged the negative impacts of coal burning, stating, “Climate change causes a continuing adjustment in precipitation, air quality, rising temperatures, and extreme weather events. These negative effects are a driving force in our conversion.”

Health Disparities in North Omaha

The health impacts of air pollution are evident in Omaha’s redlined neighborhoods, where residents face higher rates of asthma and other respiratory issues. Data from the Nebraska Asthma Coalition shows that Black Nebraskans have a significantly higher asthma death rate than their White counterparts.

“The most common [health impact] is asthma,” Corbin said, referencing disparities in death rates. Local advocacy groups have stepped in to monitor air quality more closely. “When OPPD decided to continue burning coal, various groups, including the Sierra Club, purchased air monitors and placed them around North Omaha,” Corbin explained.

Arianna Hill, an Omaha resident, also emphasized the importance of location when it comes to air quality. “Yes. I definitely think that your location in Omaha determines the air quality. The closer you are to factories or plants, I think the air is more polluted.”

Research shows that North Omaha’s air quality frequently falls into unhealthy ranges due to high levels of fine particles in the air. These particles, small enough to be inhaled deeply into the lungs, are known to trigger or worsen health issues like asthma, especially in children and older adults.

Steps Toward Cleaner Air

While Omaha has made progress in reducing air pollution, significant challenges remain. OPPD’s earlier conversion of three coal units to natural gas helped lower emissions, but units 4 and 5 continue to operate. Additionally, Omaha’s heavy dependence on cars highlights the need for expanded public transportation and infrastructure for residents.

Public awareness is another barrier. “I don’t think air pollution is on most people’s minds unless Omaha is affected by smoke from fires in other states or Canada,” Corbin said.

Hill also pointed out the need for consistency in air quality enforcement. “I think they just need some consistency in whatever they do. By that, I mean that whatever rules they enforce regarding the air quality in one area, should be enforced in other areas. There should also be specific consequences of affirmative action for those that don’t comply with the new rules.”

Looking Ahead

As OPPD moves forward with plans to retire coal at the North Omaha Station, there are still lingering concerns about whether the progress is proceeding fast enough. Advocates are urging the utility to prioritize wind and solar energy to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels entirely.

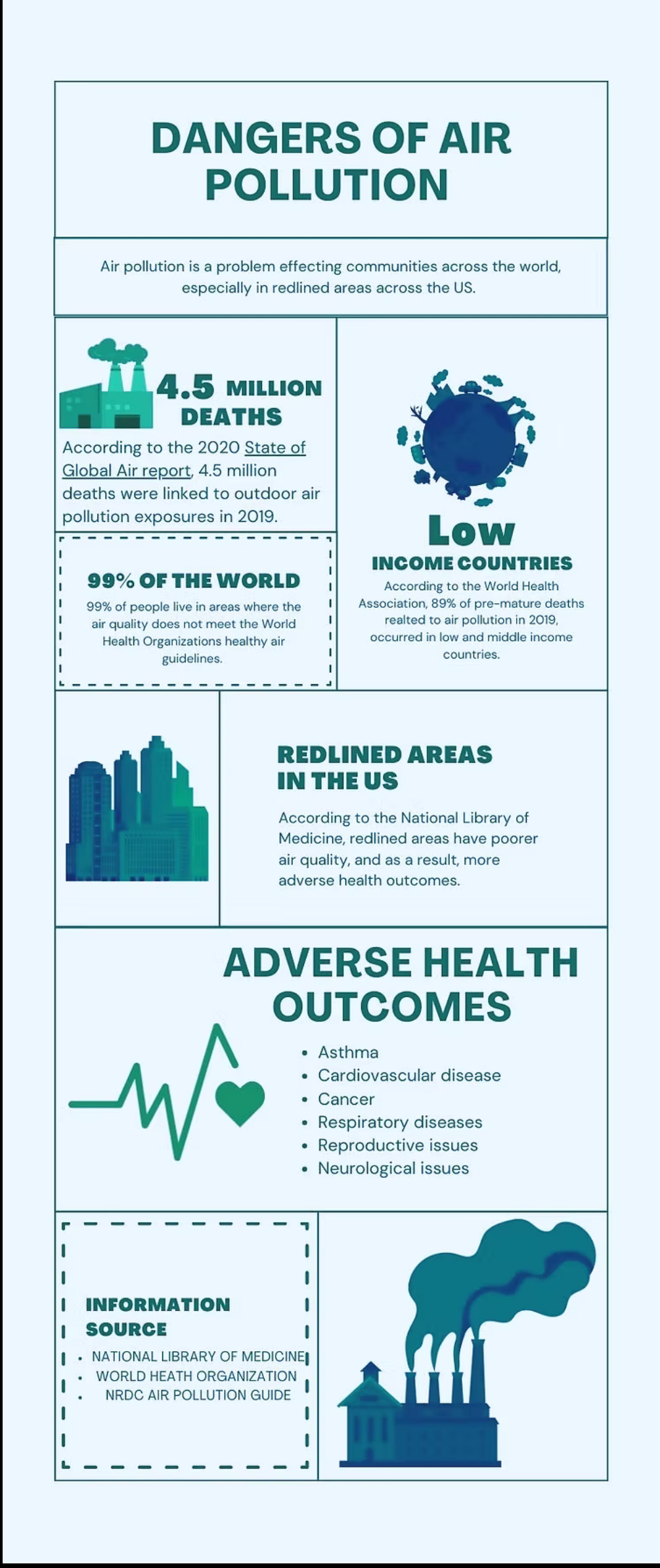
“Although carbon dioxide occurs naturally in the Earth’s atmosphere, human activities over the last century have significantly increased levels of greenhouse gases,” Baker said. She emphasized that OPPD’s shift to natural gas is just one part of a broader strategy to reduce emissions.

With coal set to burn for two more years, the path to cleaner air and healthier communities in Omaha remains a work in progress.

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Nebraska Public Media 'In a twist, OPPD could keep burning coal as renewable projects undergo study'	Nature Ecology and Evolution 'Inequalities in noise will affect urban wildlife'	EPA 'OMAHA LEAD OMAHA, NE Cleanup Activities'
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*Assistance from Chat GPT and Grammarly was used occasionally to proofread and re-write sentences more clearly.





Transcript

Reporter:

Noise pollution from highway systems is a pressing issue in historically redlined communities in Omaha, Nebraska. A study published in *Nature, Ecology & Evolution*, found that neighborhoods with a history of redlining have noise levels up to 17% higher than non-redlined areas in the U.S.

According to the World Health Organization, the normal decibel level for a home in a rural or quiet urban neighborhood can be as low as 30 decibels during the day. For residents living within 50-100 feet from major highways, noise levels within their homes can climb as high as 90 decibels during peak times.

Todd and Cindy Brown, are long-time South Omaha residents living less than 65 yards from Interstate 480 and the I-480 interchange in Omaha, Nebraska. Todd says living so close to one of the busiest highway systems in the United States, disrupts his family’s daily life.

Todd Brown:

“Well you definitely can’t, like, open the windows whenever you want, because it’s just going to be too loud.”

Reporter:

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, studies have shown direct links between noise and health, indicating that living near an area with noise pollution can lead to stress related illnesses, including high blood pressure, disrupted sleep, hearing loss, cardiovascular diseases, and speech interference.

Cindy Brown says the noise from the interstate has certainly added stress and worry to her daily life.

Cindy Brown:

“When it sounds like gunfire, which Todd always says that cars are backfiring but it sounds to me like a gun is being fired you know like shooting. It just makes me nervous, is that what it could be? It’s scary. Everyday pretty much we hear that.”

Reporter:

Communities in North and South Omaha have historically experienced higher levels of environmental stressors like noise pollution. The Nebraska Department of Transportation is responsible for the design, construction, and maintenance of highways, including implementing noise mitigation measures such as sound barriers.

Radio Script

I-80 Noise Pollution
90 seconds
Mary Mitzlaff

NOISE POLLUTION FROM HIGHWAY SYSTEMS IS A PRESSING ISSUE IN HISTORICALLY REDLINED COMMUNITIES IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA.

A STUDY PUBLISHED IN *NATURE ECOLOGY & EVOLUTION* FOUND THAT NEIGHBORHOODS WITH A HISTORY OF REDLINING HAVE NOISE LEVELS UP TO 17% HIGHER THAN NON-REDLINED AREAS IN THE U.S.

ACCORDING TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, THE NORMAL DECIBEL LEVEL FOR A HOME IN A RURAL OR QUIET URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD CAN BE AS LOW AS 30 DECIBELS DURING THE DAY. FOR RESIDENTS LIVING WITHIN 50-100 FEET FROM MAJOR HIGHWAYS, NOISE LEVELS WITHIN THEIR HOMES CAN CLIMB AS HIGH AS 90 DECIBELS DURING PEAK TIMES.

TODD AND CINDY BROWN, ARE LONG-TIME SOUTH OMAHA RESIDENTS LIVING LESS THAN 65 YARDS FROM INTERSTATE 480 AND THE I-480 INTERCHANGE IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA.

TODD SAYS LIVING SO CLOSE TO ONE OF THE BUSIEST HIGHWAY SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES, DISRUPTS HIS FAMILY’S DAILY LIFE.

Folder: Todd **TRT: 15 sec** **OC: “be too loud”**
“Well, you definitely can’t, like, open the windows whenever you want, because it’s just going to be too loud.”

ACCORDING TO THE UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, STUDIES HAVE SHOWN DIRECT LINKS BETWEEN NOISE AND HEALTH, INDICATING THAT LIVING NEAR AN AREA WITH NOISE POLLUTION CAN LEAD TO STRESS RELATED ILLNESSES, INCLUDING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, DISRUPTED SLEEP, HEARING LOSS, CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES, AND SPEECH INTERFERENCE.

CINDY BROWN SAYS, THE NOISE FROM THE INTERSTATE HAS CERTAINLY ADDED STRESS AND WORRY TO HER DAILY LIFE.

Folder: Cindy **TRT: 15** **OC: “we hear that”**
“When it sounds like gunfire, which Todd always says that cars are backfiring, but it sounds to me like a gun is being fired you know like shooting. It just makes me nervous, is that what it could be? It’s scary. Every day pretty much we hear that.”

COMMUNITIES IN NORTH AND SOUTH OMAHA HAVE HISTORICALLY EXPERIENCED HIGHER LEVELS OF ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS LIKE NOISE POLLUTION.

THE NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, AND MAINTENANCE OF HIGHWAYS, INCLUDING IMPLEMENTING NOISE MITIGATION MEASURES SUCH AS SOUND BARRIERS.

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[Nebraska Asthma Coalition](#)

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Transcript

Reporter:

Omaha, Nebraska, is home to a lead Superfund site spanning 27 square miles across more than 40,000 properties throughout North and South Omaha. According to the CDC, lead exposure poses health risks, especially for children. They can be exposed by touching, swallowing or even breathing in lead or lead dust. Historian and previous North Omaha resident, Adam Fletcher, says there are many risks for exposure.

Adam Fletcher:

"Any kid who grew up in these houses has opportunities for exposure, you know, it's the story of the paint chip. It's the story of drinking water from the pipes. It's a story of playing in the dirt. It's the story of playing on the slides at the park, of climbing the trees and the layer on the leaves and all of this exposure. And it's not just the olden days. There's a reason why the federal government and then the City of Omaha were scraping the lawns of hundreds of houses in order to get the lead out."

Reporter:

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, over 14,000 residential properties qualified for soil cleanup in Omaha. These properties had surface soil levels that exceeded the residential limit of 400 parts per million. Holly Israel was a homeowner at one of these properties and says it was majorly concerning to learn her soil was contaminated, as she had four young children at the time.

Holly Israel:

"My concern was really that there are long term effects that they could be suffering from something that I didn't even know was an issue when I first got the home."

Reporter:

From 1990 to 2015, data from the EPA shows a decrease in blood lead levels in children in Douglas County, going from 36% of children above the level of concern of ten micrograms per deciliter in 1990 to less than 2%, having levels above five micrograms per deciliter. Fletcher says there were over 100 companies who contributed to the overall pollution in Omaha throughout the years.

Adam Fletcher:

"The biggest offender, of course, was ASARCO, the American Smelting and Refining Company. And when the EPA Superfund site was finally declared that money went to the EPA and to the city of Omaha, not to the individual people who were toxified by the lead poisoning."

Reporter:

In 2023, the soil at five elementary schools in North and South Omaha tested positive for lead contamination.

T.V. Script



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Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

6 posts

Edit profile

Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

Get verified

@UNOgroup2024

Academic account for Service Learning Project and other class assignments at the University of Nebraska Omaha!

Omaha, NE

mmitzlaff7.wixsite.com/redliningproje...

Joined September 2024

1 Following

0 Followers

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Post

Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

@UNOgroup2024

...

Our Redlining and Pollution Project is in full swing. Almost completed! In the meantime... Check out the full, uncut interview with Adam F.C. Fletcher, a historian and former North Omaha Resident to hear about lead pollution. Link:

youtube.com

Interview with Adam F.C. Fletcher - Lead Pollution in Omaha

This academic interview was conducted as part of a service learning group project for UNO students. Our group focus...

12:03 PM · Dec 3, 2024 · 21 Views

←

Post

Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

@UNOgroup2024

...

(2/5) Air pollution disproportionately affects redlined areas. This graphic from the Nebraska Asthma Coalition shows just how high Omaha ranks in the worst places to live with Asthma...

OMAHA

In 2019, Omaha ranked in the top 10 most challenging places to live with asthma in the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America's Asthma Capitals Report. This ranking was based on asthma prevalence, asthma-related emergency room visits and asthma-related deaths. You can read the full report [here](#).

The Top 20 Most Challenging Places to Live With Asthma

6:16 PM · Dec 3, 2024 · 16 Views

←

Post

Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

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...

(3/5) The Federal Highway Act of 1956 funded the expansion of highway systems across the US. Highway systems were intentionally built to run directly through redlined areas, which decreased property values, lowered air quality, and destroyed small businesses.

6:25 PM · Dec 3, 2024 · 20 Views

←

Post

Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

@UNOgroup2024

...

(4/5) Enjoy this drone footage of Omaha shot by our group member Ivan!

Link

youtube.com

Drone Footage - Omaha, NE, November 2024. Shot by Ivan

Redlining and pollution academic group project drone footage. Shot by group member Ivan Tovar.

6:56 PM · Dec 3, 2024 · 20 Views

←

Post

Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

@UNOgroup2024

...

(5/5) Learn about the American Smelting and Refining Company in Omaha, Nebraska. Located on the Missouri River, this lead plant extensively polluted the city. Thanks to our team members, Pablo and Mary, for this graphic. [#Omahahistory](#) [#Omaha](#) [#Leadpollution](#)

ASARCO

The American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) was a lead smelting and refining factory located in Omaha, Nebraska on the Missouri River. The company operated from the late 1800s into the 1990s. The company played a large role in the lead pollution issues in Omaha. The lead pollution from ASARCO and the combination of over 100 other companies, eventually resulted in the city being declared a residential lead superfund site.

6:21 PM · Dec 4, 2024 · 10 Views

←

Post

Redlining and Pollution in Omaha, NE

@UNOgroup2024

...

We are proud to announce our website is finally live. This was an informative and challenging project that we enjoyed working on together.

Special thanks to [@unoengage](#) [@CommUNO](#)

Check it out here: [mmitzlaff7.wixsite.com/redliningproje...](#)

Bonus photo of our last team meeting of the semester:

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Photo Gallery



Grain Silos, South Omaha, 35th and Vinton



Pedestrian Bridge, Downtown Omaha



Railroad Tracks, Dahlman Ave.



Interstate 80



Railroad Tracks Near Old ASARCO Plant



Construction, Downtown Omaha



Gene Leahy Mall, Downtown Omaha



Construction, Downtown Omaha



Missouri River



Construction, Downtown Omaha



Omaha Skyline, Downtown Omaha



Omaha Skyline, Downtown Omaha



Omaha Skyline, Downtown Omaha



Elmwood Park, A-area, Omaha



Elmwood Park, A-area, Omaha



Elmwood Park, A-area, Omaha



Lakeview, Downtown Omaha



Elmwood Park, A-area, Omaha



Miller Park, North Omaha

Drone Footage, Downtown Omaha

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