

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Funding Awarded for the First Georgia Superfund Research Center

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"Poisoned in plain sight."

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**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Kasey Baker McCleary

Email: [healthycoastalneighborhoods@gmail.com](mailto:healthycoastalneighborhoods@gmail.com)

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**BRUNSWICK, Ga.**—For decades, industrial pollutants were released into the environment of this small coastal Georgia community. Now, through a new 5-year, \$15 million grant from the National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences to Emory University, industrial contamination in Glynn County will be studied by scientists from five of Georgia’s leading research universities. The new research builds on [a 2023 study](#) which found high levels of contaminants in the blood of Glynn County residents.

“I want more neighbors to have the opportunity to be tested and to learn about the project,” said resident Semona Holmes. “Because now more folks are saying, ‘I want to be tested.’”

Residents have been concerned for decades about whether they were being affected by the chemicals produced or used at Glynn County’s former industrial sites. A particular concern has been the incidences of chronic health issues, and whether they were related to some of the chemical industries that provided stable employment for numerous households. A lack of scientific evidence to validate the suspicions of residents about their exposures had remained a barrier. In 2023, researchers from the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University accepted an invitation from Brunswick residents to examine whether legacy pollutants were in the bodies of local residents, and if those levels were higher than normal. Thus, the launch of the Brunswick Glynn Human Exposure Study.

The Exposure Study provided an opportunity to center the community in conversations about what repair could look like, a first step towards addressing historical harms related to environmental pollution.

“Facilities like the former [LCP Chemicals site](#) and [Hercules Incorporated](#) have long histories tied to contaminants such as mercury and other industrial byproducts. Exposure isn’t always uniform,” Brunswick resident Michael Staley commented. “Some residents may have higher levels depending on their proximity, diet (like local seafood), or their occupation. I hope this gives our neighbors a clearer understanding about how our communities are affected by environmental contamination, because often regular people feel uncertain and overlooked. I feel like a comprehensive study shows commitment to understanding and addressing our concerns with real data.”

With the launch of the Exposure Study, the researchers forged a community-driven collaborative partnership with local organizations and residents that is led by the voices of those that have been directly impacted. Study participants asked how their chemical exposure levels might be affecting their health, how long the toxic chemicals stay in the environment, and what resources they can access to help them and their family members avoid ongoing exposure. Residents remain hopeful about the expanded research and cite a desire for more testing, community involvement, and transparency regarding contamination and health impacts.

In conversations with community members, concerns about environmental contamination were evident.

Larry Owens, a resident living near the fenceline of the Hercules/Pinova site, said, “I would like to see an expansion of the Exposure Study because the soil needs to be tested.” William Lewis Jr. wanted to “learn more about my high exposure numbers.” And John Freeman commented that “yes, I feel they need to come back and make sure that everybody in our neighborhood knows they are going to be doing research so that everybody will have the chance to come out and get tested and see what’s in their bodies.” He went on to say that, “I’m sorry that I’m not more involved in my community, but me and my wife are going to start getting involved and coming to meetings so that we can see what’s going on in our neighborhood and help make a difference.”

Jocelyn Farmer, another fenceline resident, commented that, “After I learned my numbers showed contamination, I started coming to the community meetings and attending NPA [Neighborhood Planning Assembly] meetings so I could learn more about the Study and about my neighborhood.” Eugene Smiley reflected, “I have lived in this neighborhood since 1987. I did not know about the research going on to sample people’s blood concerning the chemicals from Hercules. Everyone should have their blood tested that lives in this neighborhood. Yes, I think they should come back and give people a chance to get tested so that we all are aware of what chemicals are in our bodies from Hercules. I would get my blood tested. Please let me know when they’re coming back to test.”

In various community meetings residents have repeatedly expressed their desire for the researchers to conduct more tests, because they want answers to their questions. In a city that is ranked among the poorest in the state of Georgia, but sits inside a county that ranks among the 10 wealthiest, the Superfund Research Center is an opportunity to bring resources to the people who have been negatively impacted by generational industrial pollution. [Healthy Coastal Neighborhoods](#) is proud to stand with the City of Brunswick and Glynn County residents in not only answering questions about the contamination, but changing the narrative to one in which community residents are centered and allowed to decide what healing should look like after over a century of contamination. The Human Exposure Study empowered residents to become more vocal and express their concerns about the effects of the legacy pollutants in the community, and we hope the new research will keep the momentum going.

The new research is being funded through the National Institute of Health’s [Superfund Research Program](#), which supports research to solve complex environmental health problems related to hazardous contaminants.

Dr. Dana Barr, Emory professor and lead investigator, clarifies that, “The new Superfund Research Center will not be a physical building, but will be a series of collaborative and targeted investigations into environmental contaminants in Glynn County.”

The research will consist of five studies, as follows:

- 1) An “exposure and health” study that will evaluate possible links between people’s levels of toxicants and metabolic diseases, like stroke, heart disease,

and diabetes. This study will provide several hundred more residents an opportunity to get tested to learn if they have been exposed.

- 2) A laboratory-based toxicology study that could help agencies regulate sites contaminated with toxaphene, a now-banned pesticide created in Glynn County.
- 3) A study that will test soil and water around Glynn County to assess possible pathways of human exposure.
- 4) A modeling study of the impact that floods and storms may have on transporting toxicants around Glynn County and beyond.
- 5) An evaluation of the effectiveness of low-impact Superfund site remediation solutions in Glynn County's dynamic marshlands and tidal creeks.

The five projects were developed in consultation with Glynn County residents, and the Superfund Center would not have happened without the support of residents, organizations and elected officials. "This project is a direct consequence of community support in many forms," noted Dr. Barr. "We would not be here without your efforts, and we know what that means; that we have to keep community voices at the forefront of our work, and that we need to deliver."

The work includes scientists from Emory University, Morehouse School of Medicine, the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, Spelman College, and Texas Tech.

"Yes, we've been living here a long time, and we've been exposed to it," said Brunswick resident Victoria Mackey. "If this Study had not happened, we would not have known. The Exposure Study let us know. There are generations that have been exposed to these chemicals and didn't know it. We knew something, but now we know what. Now we have chemical awareness. Yes, the expanded Exposure Study is needed."

There will be a community meeting open to the public at 6:30pm on Wednesday June 24<sup>th</sup> at Howard Coffin Park where Healthy Coastal Neighborhoods and Emory scientists will share more details about the new Superfund Research Center.

Healthy Coastal Neighborhoods is a coalition of community members and researchers working to foster healthy neighborhoods for all through community-led action that ensures accountability and long-term access to clean environments. Learn more about HCN at [www.healthycoastalneighborhoods.org](http://www.healthycoastalneighborhoods.org).

Links hyperlinked above

- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026974912500613X>
- <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csitinfo.cfm?id=0401634>
- <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Cleanup&id=0404439#bkground>
- <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/supported/centers/srp>
- <https://healthycoastalneighborhoods.org/>

Other information

- NIH grant number: 1P42ES036533
- Disclaimer: The content of this press release is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.