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School of Medicine

Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Comprehensive Cancer Center
Qualitative and Patient Reported Outcomes (Q-PRO) Shared Resource

Assessing the Impact of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant Fire

Qualitative Findings

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Methods

Note: The terms Black and Latine are used to describe participants throughout the report to maximize inclusivity. Most participants used Black rather than African American to describe themselves, and Black is inclusive of people who identify as African American, African, or are of African descent. Latine was selected because it is gender inclusive.

Sample

Interviews were conducted with n=18 Latine participants and n=21 Black participants who lived within a one-mile radius of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant at the time of the fire. One interview with a Black participant was excluded from the sample because no audio was available, for a final sample of n=20 Black participants.

Participant characteristics are described in Table 1, below. The majority of participants in both groups were female (75% and 78%, respectively). The majority of Black participants (75%) had resided in their neighborhood for 15 or more years, while the majority of Latine participants (61%) had resided in area for five or fewer years.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

	Black Participants (N=20)	Latine Participants (N=18)
Sex		
Female	15 (75%)	14 (78%)
Male	5 (25%)	4 (22%)
Age		
18-25	1 (5%)	0
26-30	1 (5%)	1 (6%)
31-40	2 (10%)	4 (22%)
41-50	2 (10%)	4 (22%)
51- 60	8 (40%)	3 (17%)
61-70	4 (20%)	4 (22%)
71-80	1 (5%)	2 (11%)
80+	1 (5%)	0
Time in Community		
1-5 years	2 (10%)	11 (61%)
6-10 years	2 (10%)	4 (22%)
10-15 years	1 (5%)	1 (6%)
15+ years	15 (75%)	2 (11%)
Distance		
<.5 mile	5 (25%)	7 (39%)
< 1 mile	9 (45%)	1 (6%)
1 mile	6 (30%)	10 (56%)

Data Collection and Data Management

All interviews with Latine participants and most (n=14) interviews with Black participants were conducted by community members with racial and/or ethnic concordance with the participants. Additional interviews with Black participants were conducted by one of the study co-investigators. Interviews with Latine participants were conducted in Spanish and interviews with Black participants were conducted in English. One dyad interview was conducted with two Black participants; all other interviews were collected as individual interviews.

Interviews with Black participants ranged from 8 to 49 minutes, with an average length of 22 minutes. Interviews with Latine participants ranged from 11 to 36 minutes, with an average length of 21 minutes.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in their original language. Spanish-language interviews were then translated into English and the translation was reviewed for accuracy by a Q-PRO researcher.

Data Analysis

Two Q-PRO researchers reviewed the transcripts and developed a codebook to capture concepts found in the textual data using a combined inductive-deductive approach. First, deductive codes were developed to align with a priori domains of interest, and then open coding was conducted on a subset of transcripts to inductively identify additional, emergent codes.

Data were managed with ATLAS.ti software (1). Two Q-PRO researchers independently coded the transcripts in groups of 4-6 transcripts and met after each group of transcripts was coded to compare. The codebook was adjusted, as needed, based on discussions of code meanings and application. Discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved iteratively. Segments of text were then reviewed by participant group (e.g., Black or Latine participants) and by code and summarized. Summaries were synthesized into themes using the principles of reflexive thematic analysis (2). Summaries were compared by participant group to identify common and unique themes.

In the results section of this report, findings are summarized across participant groups and then detailed by participant group along with illustrative quotations, highlighting the nuance of the findings.

Reflexivity Statement

The two Q-PRO researchers who led the qualitative analysis have extensive training in qualitative research methods and experience applying reflexive thematic analysis techniques to diverse datasets.

In terms of relationship to the study content, both Q-PRO researchers are current residents of the city where the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire took place and resided in the city at the time of the fire. Therefore, they had been exposed to media coverage surrounding the fire and its aftermath. However, neither researcher resided in the area affected by the fire nor had their home, family, health, or employment directly affected by the fire, unlike the community participants.

One of the Q-PRO researchers identifies as Latine and is fluent in Spanish, and therefore was able to review the original Spanish audio and translated transcripts for accuracy, which was important for preserving authenticity. However, they did not have the same life experiences as the Latine participants. Neither researcher identified as Black, nor shared the same life experiences as the Black participants.

Overview of Results

Neighborhood Characteristics

Participants were asked to describe things they liked and disliked about their neighborhood, and about their awareness of businesses in or near their community. Participants felt positively about their neighborhood overall. They described their neighborhood as quiet and peaceful, with friendly neighbors, and proximity to shopping. Black participants described particularly strong ties with their neighborhood and neighbors.

Participants were divided on the safety of their neighborhood, and while some found it very safe, others referenced crime in the neighborhood. Other negatives included disrespectful behaviors of neighbors, ranging from parking to driving too fast to noise or smoking marijuana. Some Black participants felt that their neighborhood had been abandoned by the city.

Prior to the fire, many participants were not aware of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant or the chemicals contained onsite. Other businesses in the neighborhood that participants were aware of included waste management facilities, other factories, a gas station, and a bar.

Environmental Pollution

Participants were asked to describe the pollution in their neighborhood before, during, and after the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. Few noticed any pollution prior to the fire; those that did described seeing or smelling garbage. During the fire, nearly all participants described smoke they could see and smell. Some also described a chemical or rotten smell from the fire, and one described how their tap water was affected by the fire. Participants reported that the pollution lingered anywhere from a week after the fire to several months.

Fire Awareness & Initial Reaction

Participants were asked to describe where they were when they learned about the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire, and from whom. Most participants were at home when they learned about the fire, and many reported that they were sleeping and were awoken by emergency personnel presence in their neighborhood. Other ways that residents learned about the fire included through conversations with neighbors, family members calling them, or from the local television news.

When asked about their initial feelings after learning about the fire, most participants expressed feeling fear and worry about their safety and the possibility of an explosion. Other feelings included stress related to not knowing where to evacuate to, or not understanding what was happening.

Protective Measures

The majority of participants evacuated from their home and neighborhood during the Weaver Plant fire for at least one night. Most stayed with family or friends. Few utilized the city-provided shelter, and those that did left because they found it ill-equipped.

Aside from evacuating their homes and neighborhoods, participants also reported that they stayed inside during or after the fire, sealed their doors and windows, cleaned their homes, and wore face masks to protect themselves from the smoke. Some Black participants also reported that they started consuming bottled water or using water filters.

Fire Impact

Participants described the financial and health impacts of the fire, as well as how it changed their perceptions of their neighborhood. Nearly all Latine participants and about half of Black participants reported some financial impact from the fire, mostly losing income. Other costs included food or incidental costs and the cost of medical appointments and/or medication.

Many participants experienced new or worsened respiratory symptoms during or after the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire, including difficulty breathing, coughing, or congestion. Other physical health issues that participants experienced included frequent and severe headaches, and eye, nose, and/or skin irritation. Participants also described the impact of the fire on their mental health, contributing to anxiety, depression, or difficulty sleeping. For a few, a belief in God helped them cope with the fire and was protective of their mental health.

Some Latine participants but few Black participants reported feeling more negatively about the safety of their neighborhood or considered relocating away from the neighborhood following the fire. Participants in both groups described having a heightened awareness of potential environmental and health dangers.

Perceptions of Fire Response

About half of participants received some financial reimbursement after the fire, while others reported that they filled out the paperwork, but never heard back or received anything. Some expressed frustration about the time and process of applying, and desired additional compensation. Barriers to applying for reimbursement included a lack of awareness about the reimbursement, and fear related to immigration status.

Some participants described a sense of injustice at being affected by the fire and dissatisfaction with the city's response, including distrust about the quality of the clean-up efforts. Some Latine participants questioned if the fire was intentional. Participants desired additional financial resources, as well as information about the health and environmental impacts of the fire, an improved process of notifying residents about the fire, and better shelter options.

Neighborhood Characteristics

Neighborhood Advantages

Both Black and Latine participants generally had positive sentiments about their neighborhood. Black participants went more into detail about their relationships with neighbors. Many Black and Latine participants also liked that their neighborhood was quiet; however, there was a difference when it came to safety between Black and Latine participants. Several Black participants mentioned liking how safe their neighborhood was, while few Latine participants did the same. Similarly, more Black participants mentioned how they liked the proximity of stores to them.

Black Participants

Black participants were generally very positive about their neighborhood. They described the area as a “family neighborhood,” which was quiet and safe with friendly neighbors who had a long history in the neighborhood. Several participants also appreciated the “convenience” and proximity of the neighborhood to shopping areas.

Neighbors

Some Black participants said that they knew their neighbors and described them as “friendly” and that everyone gets along and looks out for one another. A few described the demographics of the neighborhood, including families with children and “grandparents” or senior citizens. Several participants mentioned that they and/or their neighbors had lived in the neighborhood for a long time (e.g., 40+ years).

“Friendly people. We all get along together, look out one another.” (PB13)

“This just a nice neighborhood. ‘Cause like I say, everybody been out here like 50-plus years. Since 1970. We closeknit community and everything. We say mister or miss, and we got respect. It’s good.” (PB14)

“It’s a family neighborhood. Everybody gets along with everybody.” (PB20)

Quiet

Many Black participants described the neighborhood as “quiet” or “peaceful,” which they enjoyed. Some spoke about the neighborhood being secluded from busier traffic areas, not having sirens or a police presence on a regular basis, or only seeing adolescents walking home from school.

“Well, it’s quiet. When we first moved over here, it wasn’t that many people over here, but it’s generally quiet.” (PB09)

“Well, it’s secluded off of the main drag, although there’s a shopping center to the left of us, but since we in the back of it and we miss all the traffic that’s on University.” (PB11)

“The only thing I hear is maybe dogs barkin’...I don’t ever hear sirens or no police.” (PB04)

Safe

Several Black participants spoke about the lack of violence in their neighborhood, or otherwise feeling “secure” in their neighborhood. They mentioned neighbors looking out for one another and that people “don’t play over here.” (PB01)

“The neighborhood is secure, for the most part. We have very few incidents that require police presence.” (PB19)

“Another thing is no violence. I like it. I like that part. No violence.” (PB01)

Convenient

Some Black participants liked the “convenience” and proximity of their neighborhood to shopping, restaurants, gas stations, banks, or main roads.

“It’s really convenient. You know what I mean? You leave out of here—goin’ to University, multiple restaurants and shops, stuff like that.” (PB18)

“I like that it’s in a nice proximity to Target, Walmart, shopping centers, restaurants, gas stations, banks. I like the area.” (PB06)

Latine Participants

Neighbors

About a third of Latine participants shared positive sentiments about their neighbors. They explained how they liked that their neighbors were mindful and quiet and how neighbors would check in on one another.

“It is quiet, and we don’t have any problems with anybody, we all have a good relationship, we take care of each other when someone is missing, we’re always checking up on them, and they check up on us.” (PL16)

“How calm the area is and the respect among the neighbors. If there is a noise, we call the police, and they come right away.” (PL15)

Quiet

The majority of Latine participants described their neighborhood as “quiet” or “calm” which they appreciated.

“It’s very quiet there. I’ve had no issues. I’ve been living there for over two years, and it’s quiet.” (PL14)

“What I like about the neighborhood is that it’s quiet, calm, and it’s not noisy. Neither at night nor during the day, it’s all quiet. I can’t say I have good or bad neighbors because I don’t interact with them.” (PL04)

Safe

Latine participants were divided on their perceptions of the safety of their neighborhood. (See Neighborhood Disadvantages for more). Some Latine participants found their neighborhood to be safe, which they appreciated.

“Well, security; there’s not much fuss; in other places, you can see a fuss happening in the apartments and all that, but not here.” (PL01)

“There is no crime or anything.” (PL08)

Convenient

A couple of Latine participants enjoyed the proximity of their neighborhood to stores.

“That I have everything nearby, where I live.” (PL12)

“That it is a quiet place and shops are close by.” (PL13)

Neighborhood Disadvantages

Despite having generally positive views of their neighborhood, Black and Latine participants shared some aspects they disliked. Both Black and Latine participants described disliking disrespectful parking and driving behaviors of their neighbors and referenced some crime in the neighborhood. Latine participants also highlighted other disrespectful behaviors including noise and neighbors smoking marijuana near them. One unique disadvantage mentioned only by Black participants was feeling that the neighborhood had been abandoned by the city.

Black Participants

Despite having generally positive views of their neighborhood, Black participants shared some aspects they disliked. Black participants described disliking disrespectful parking and driving behaviors of their neighbors. Some Black participants also felt that their neighborhood had been abandoned by the city.

Disrespectful Neighbor Behaviors

Some Black participants mentioned the parking and driving behaviors of their neighbors as something they disliked. They described people parking in their yards, on side streets adjacent to someone else's home, or on the side of the street instead of their driveways, which prevented the school bus from coming down the street.

"Yes, how they park on the side of the street, which stops school buses. My child is special needs, so it stop her school bus from being able to come up the street when they have driveways..." (PB12)

Several participants also talked about people driving too fast through the neighborhood, which was concerning for children playing or crossing the street.

"One thing I don't like about the traffic. People coming through, driving too fast. We thinking about having a bump put up there, 'cause you got student crossing the street." (PB16)

"Speeding cars. Oh, I think we need speed bumps in the street, 'cause we have the younger generations they're coming up now where they like to speed. The small children be out there playing. I have two grandchildren, and I have a four-year-old that loves to ride his bike out there.." (PB10)

Crime

One Black participant mentioned that their home had been broken into, and another made a general reference to crime in the community.

"My house has been broken in... Several times... I actually have bars on my windows. Nobody wanna feel like I'm in prison..." (PB02)

Area Abandoned by the City

One unique factor mentioned by Black participants is that they believed their neighborhood had been abandoned by the city. Many Black participants reported that they and/or their families had lived in the neighborhood for a long time, and a few mentioned feeling that the city had "abandoned" or was no longer maintaining the neighborhood. Examples include money being funneled away from the local North Forsyth High School and the quality of education at that

school diminishing over time, the Winston Salem Housing Authority no longer maintaining a neighborhood park, and the city no longer maintaining the cleanliness of the neighborhood roads.

“At the corner of Black Street and Brent Road, when I worked at the Housing Authority, they were responsible for common grounds. That is common grounds. It used to be a place for children to play. All we are seeing now it is trees, weeds, and one rusty broke down sliding board or something...” (PB10)

“...this neighborhood has been abandoned. This area has been abandoned, so just the quality of life has changed over years...when they decided to build Reagan High School, that funneled all of that money out of North Forsyth High School into Reagan High School. White people self-segregated, as they typically do. Just the quality of education has been impacted. It's not the same. North Forsyth is not the same high school with the same quality of education as it was when I graduated in 1990...” (PB05)

Latine Participants

Despite having generally positive views of their neighborhood, Latine participants shared some aspects they disliked. They disliked disrespectful behavior from their neighbors such as parking, smoking marijuana around them, and being loud. Most notably, a few Latine participants described crime occurring in their neighborhood, or directly affecting them.

Disrespectful Neighbor Behaviors

Two Latine participants stated having problems with parking.

“People use the parking spaces even though they don't live here, they come park here and leave me out.” (PL13)

A few Latine participants shared behaviors of their neighbors that they found disrespectful, including neighbors smoking marijuana that lets off a smell that affected the participant's health, being loud, or not respecting the elderly.

“That they [neighbors] smoke a lot of marijuana, and that smell affects my health. It's not nice when you don't even smoke. Unfortunately, it's my neighbor.” (PL09)

“The noise. Sometimes they [neighbors] make a lot of noise and loud music. Not always. That's the only thing I don't like as much.” (PL14)

“I think that sometimes there could be people that don't respect the elderly, and all that. There's always that.” (PL15)

Crime

Some Latine participants described crime happening in their neighborhoods. Two Latine participants had experiences with gun shots. One mentioned hearing shots in their community, while another had a personal experience as explained below.

“I received a stray bullet through the window...I heard the gunshots around 1:30 in the morning...Well, what can you do? you just cuddle up. I'm not going to be checking outside; next thing I know, I could receive one [a bullet] in the face...I stayed very still. At the moment, I thought it had been out there. I heard noise here, but I remained silent. In the morning, I woke up, but I didn't get up; I was on the floor. Also, when I start looking that way: I see a lot of garbage, 'What is that garbage doing there?' In my head, well, I say it for

myself, right? I started to approach it...When I went out there, I saw that my curtain had a hole. I move the curtain and I see glass. The hole of the gunshot.” (PL07)

A few Latine participants also mentioned break-ins happening in their community. One participant described it as a problem that was independent of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. However, another participant explained that break-ins happened during the evacuation period.

“...a lot of people in the area had broken windows. That was worse. Several people left to stay with family members. Well, this neighbor was robbed, so we panicked...” (PL09)

Neighborhood Structural Characteristics

A few Black participants were aware of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant prior to the fire, while only one Latine participant was aware of the plant. Both Black and Latine participants mentioned some other businesses in the local area, however, Latine participants seemed to have greater awareness. Some participants mentioned a waste facility or landfill close to the neighborhood, and others noted a gas station near the Weaver Fertilizer Plant. Some participants discussed other businesses in their neighborhood in the context of learning about the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire.

Black Participants

Weaver Fertilizer Plant Knowledge

A few Black participants talked about being aware that the Weaver Fertilizer Plant was in their neighborhood before the fire occurred, but they were not aware of any risk. They described not being aware of how fertilizer was made, or the chemicals involved, and therefore not being aware of the danger of having that facility in a residential area.

“I knew Weaver Fire was in our neighborhood, but...I never knew a fertilizer company could be that dangerous in a residential area. We've been there for 23 years and I've never thought about it until I just heard about the dangers of it.” (PB07)

“I never knew what it was. I just knew it was Weaver Fertilizer. That's all I knew. As far as the chemical-wise, I didn't know anything much about it.” (PB20)

One Black participant said that they were not aware of the Weaver fertilizer plant, and so when they received a phone call from the police department about the fire, they originally thought it was a prank. (PB01)

“I had just gone to bed, and my phone rang. I'm like, 'Who's that callin' me this time of night?' It said, 'This is the Winston-Salem Police Department. We have a fire at the Weaver Plant.' I'm like, 'Weaver Plant? What're they talkin' 'bout?' They went on and said that 'You are within a certain radius—one mile radius of it. You need to evacuate.' I looked at my clock, but I thought it was a prank. I really did, 'cause I knew nothin' of the Weaver Plant. I didn't. I didn't know about it.” (PB01)

Other Places of Business

A few Black participants mentioned or were familiar with other businesses or waste facilities in the neighborhood. A couple mentioned the currently operating Hanes Mill Road waste management facility, and another mentioned a landfill that had previously been in the area, and which they were not aware of when they moved into their home.

“I have a picture of my front yard when I first moved in here. It was its level as its table. I found out later that this was landfill. That stuff was dumped in here. Now my yard is slanted.” (PB10)

Another participant mentioned that a Texas Pete plant was located near their neighborhood.

Latine Participants

Weaver Fertilizer Plant Fire

Only one Latine participant mentioned that they were aware of the Weaver Fertilizer plant before the fire. Several Latine participants mentioned being aware of the presence of a factory in their neighborhood, but not knowing what was produced at the Weaver Fertilizer Plant before the fire. This contributed to some confusion about the source and danger of the plant fire.

"I really didn't know what the factory produced. (PL01)

"I saw the factory there. When we'd go out, we would always go through there. But I thought they were sacks of dirt. I saw a lot of sacks, but it never crossed my mind, nor did I know what it was. I thought they were cement sacks." (PL03)

Other Places of Business

A few Latine participants stated that there were other factories close to their homes, including a cardboard factory. One participant initially thought that the fire was coming from the cardboard factory.

"We thought it was the cardboard factory. We were wondering what it could be. 'I don't know but it's a factory,' they said." (PL16)

Two Latine participants mentioned a nearby gas station and shared that during the fire they were concerned about the gas station also catching on fire or exploding.

"I was afraid because there's a gas station nearby. I thought, 'If that gas station explodes or some cables or something; something that could burst because there's gas that's in the depths of the earth.'" (PL01)

Another two Latine participants mentioned a local bar, and that they were initially informed by friends or neighbors that the bar, rather than the fertilizer plant, was on fire.

"She [friend] says, 'Hold on. Hold on. I can see fire. I think a bar is on fire'...She hung up, then she called back and said, 'You know what? Those drunkards burned down the bar.'" (PL18)

Environmental Pollution

Pollution Prior to the Weaver Fire

Most participants did not notice any pollution that they could see, smell, or hear before the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. Some described garbage-related pollution, including seeing garbage on the road or a garbage smell from a nearby landfill and waste management facility.

Black Participants

Most Black participants said that they did not notice any pollution before the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. However, those that did mostly talked about trash-related pollution, including seeing garbage on the road or a garbage smell from a nearby landfill and waste management facility. They described this pollution as minor, with PB11 saying “there were some environmental issues, but none life threatening.”

“Only thing that we smell is the garbage, and that wouldn't have anything to do with that, but it's just the landfill.” (PB10)

“The only thing that I'm familiar with is the trash. We see a lot of that 'cause people throw stuff out the cars and you go ridin' around, that's how you see garbage and stuff on the side of the road. It didn't used to be like that.” (PB15)

“...the air got a little thick over here, and you could actually smell the city yard [waste facility] sometime. Like when it get summertime, you can smell the city yard.” (PB20)

Latine Participants

Not all Latine participants discussed the presence or absence of pollution, but most of those that did said they did not notice any pollution before the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. A couple of participants described the polluting effects of garbage.

“...there's always contamination. Sometimes it's the drainage or the garbage containers, they don't bring them every day but every eight days only. We are a little bit far away, we're not right there but it does reach us, the contamination from landfills.” (PL16)

“When it's so full, sometimes they delay in collecting the trash, and when driving by, the smell is unbearable. We have to close the windows and be careful with that. That's about it.” (PL09)

Pollution During and After the Weaver Fire

All the Latine participants and the majority of Black participants mentioned seeing and/or smelling smoke during the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. Some participants described the negative health effects of the smoke, including eye irritation and coughing. A few Latine and Black participants also described smelling a chemical or rotten smell during the fire, and a few discussed concerns about the water quality and consuming tap water. Participants reported that the pollution lingered anywhere from a week after the fire to several months.

Black Participants

Smoke

The majority of Black participants mentioned seeing or smelling smoke during the Weaver Fertilizer plant fire. Most described seeing smoke or smoke clouds, and that it made the air appear “cloudy,” “thick,” “hazy,” or “foggy.”

“It was just thick with smoke.” (PB05)

“You saw the smoke and visibility was awful.” (PB12)

Some participants described how the smoke affected them in the moment. A few participants described their eyes burning, itching, or watering from the smoke, and a few others described coughing or not being able to breathe from the smoke.

“As long as that smoke was in the air, it was really thick, and my eyes—well, my eyes did get a little itchy and watery at times, but—the coughing. The coughing was just ridiculous. I couldn’t sit outside like I’m sitting outside now. I couldn’t sit outside.” (PB20)

A few participants described the smoke smell; particularly that it was strong enough that they could smell smoke inside their homes, or at family members’ houses outside of the evacuation radius.

“When that fire started, the smoke was so thick that you could actually smell it inside the house.” (PB11)

“After, it smelled burnin’. It was horrible. The burnin’—the smell of—yeah, when I smelled it, it was horrible, strong.” (PB13)

Other Smells

A few Black participants mentioned smelling something other than smoke or burning. One described a rotten smell, like manure, that got on their clothes, lingered in their home, and extended as far as the Wake Forest campus. Others mentioned a chemical smell, and “toxins and fumes”.

“...I could just smell the chemicals in the house. I can’t use chemicals to clean because I have asthma. I have chemical sensitivities...I can’t use anything with scents to clean. It just has to be very unscented, natural, basic stuff. The house smelled like chemicals.” (PB05)

“I don’t know what it is, the dirt or manure or whatever it was. It was very rot- smellin’. It came all through this area right here.” (PB04)

Water Quality

Only one Black participant observed differences in the water, saying that it “smells like a sewer,” and tastes different.

“The water smells like a sewer... I'd rather buy bottles of water to cook with and brush our teeth with than to actual use the water...that water, even if you was to come here now and smell it, you could see it, taste it. You could tell it's a different taste.” (PB12)

However, several other participants questioned whether the water was safe to consume after the fire.

“It is mostly petroleum products that's actually seeping into the water, right? My God, it's like drinking a glass of gas. How long can you keep doing that before it has a tremendous effect on everybody's body.” (PB11)

“It may not have been the physical things that you can actually see, but worrying about your water: Was it safe to drink or use for cooking and bathing?” (PB03)

Lingering Pollution

Only a few Black participants reflected on the amount of time that it took for the pollution to clear up. One said that it took about a month to get the “rotten smell” out of their home, while another estimated that it took three months for the air quality to improve.

A few participants described the lingering pollution that they observed, including a different taste and smell to their tap water, and a lingering rotten smell. One participant remarked that they were unsure if the air quality and smell had improved since the fire, or if they had just become accustomed to the changes.

“I feel like after the fire the air was different. Since then, either it has gotten better, or I've just become accustomed to it. You know what I mean? Maybe I'm used to it feeling or smelling like this now, or maybe it's completely cleared up. I don't know because I don't have a way to really tell.” (PL06)

Latine Participants

Smoke

All Latine participants mentioned seeing smoke during the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. Some participants described the color of the smoke, with several noting that it was black and thick, and a few describing it as white. Participants also described the density and size of the smoke clouds.

“Two hours after I got home, I started smelling something burning and smoke. I came out, and yes, you could see the smoke all the way over there—black. I went to see it. I didn't get too close. I live very close, though. Yes, it looked terrible.” (PL14)

“Watching, we saw the smoke; the black smoke that was coming off the factory. I remember and I get the feeling; sad because-it was early, I was coming from the store and we just saw a lot of smoke.” (PL04)

“...oh God, you couldn't even see the cars. The street was the color of the paper. White, white.” (PL07)

Some participants explained how the smoke affected them in the moment. Some of them experienced eye irritation or coughing, while others described the smell as “toxic” (PL14) and that it “intoxicated” them. (PL16)

“After, it was ugly because the trailer was full of smoke, my eyes were burning, I had a cough, my daughter—we had to get out of there. Our clothes smelled of smoke, and the things in the fridge did, as well. Everything.” (PL05)

Other Smells

A few Latine participants described a chemical smell during the fire. One participant specifically said that it smelled like “substrate,” while another explained that it smelled like acid.

“Only when the fire was going on. There was there a bad smell. It smelled like the substrate of—what do you call that poison that they spray corn with? That substrate is unbearable.” (PL02)

“...yes, it smelled like acid, like the acid you use for cleaning or something like that; it’s strong. Even just smelling it with your nose, it made your nose hurt, smelling the odor of acid.” (PL12)

Water Quality

Two Latine participants expressed concerns about the water quality following the fire. They said that they were told that the water may not be safe but did not specify who provided this information.

“Before, I used to drink tap water every once in a while, but they told us that since then, not to drink tap water because the water would be contaminated in the pipes. I said, no more. I will not drink water from there.” (PL18)

Lingering Pollution

Some Latine participants described the pollution as lingering for “days” or “about a week,” while others said that it lingered for over a month.

Some participants described the lingering pollution they observed, including the effect of the smoke on the trees in the neighborhood.

“...I’ve noticed that the trees don’t look as beautiful as before. Yes. I don’t know if it was all the smoke because it was there for many days, and it wouldn’t go away. I don’t know if it affected the trees that much. It’s not the same now.” (PL09)

Fire Awareness & Initial Reactions

Fire Awareness and Information Sources

Participants were asked to describe where they were when they learned about the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire, and from whom. Participants frequently discussed multiple ways that they learned about the fire. Most participants were at home when they learned about the fire, and many reported that they were sleeping and were awoken by emergency personnel presence in their neighborhood. Other ways that residents learned about the fire included through conversations with neighbors, family members calling them, or from the local television news.

A few participants reported that they were not at home at the time of the fire and learned about it when they were returning from work or errands. A few Latine participants learned about the fire from their employer while they were at work.

Black Participants

The majority of Black participants reported that they were at home when they learned about the fire. More than half described some notification from the police/fire department, mostly from the fire department driving down their street and announcing over a loudspeaker that residents should evacuate the area. Only one person reported that a police officer or fire fighter knocked on their door, despite others hearing that that happened in some places. Other ways that residents learned about the fire included through conversations with neighbors, family members calling them, or from the local television news.

Emergency Services Personnel

More than half of Black participants described some notification from emergency services personnel about the fire. Several participants described hearing and/or seeing the fire department drive down their street with the lights and sirens on, and then announcing over a loudspeaker that residents should evacuate the area. Some participants noted that they were asleep when this happened.

“We were asleep. The fire department came around and said that we needed to evacuate...they just drove down the street in the fire truck. With the, I guess the siren on...over with a loudspeaker. Saying that we needed to evacuate, but that was it.” (PB09)

A few participants described the experience of hearing the sirens and loudspeaker as “scary,” “jarring,” or “traumatizing.”

“I thought the feds or something was coming in my house ‘cause you see a big flashlight on your window and then you just hear honking and then a speaker, and I’m just like oh my gosh, what, I’m scared. It was like 12:00, 1:00, 2:00 a.m. in the morning...” (PB12)

“It caught me off guard ‘cause I was like, ‘What’s goin’ on? What’s wrong?’ I was just scared. We didn’t know what was goin’ on ‘cause we were sleepin’. It was just a shock for us to have to get up and just—somebody beatin’ on your door, and then they’re hollerin’ to

evacuate the area. We didn't know what was goin' on, so it kind of traumatized me a little bit like, 'What in the world is goin' on?'" (PB13)

Only one participant reported that a police officer knocked on their door to notify them about the fire, and another participant received a phone call from the police department informing her about the fire and telling her to evacuate.

"I had just gone to bed, and my phone rang. I'm like, 'Who's that callin' me this time of night?' It said, 'This is the Winston-Salem Police Department. We have a fire at the Weaver Plant.'...They went on and said that 'You are within a certain radius—one mile radius of it. You need to evacuate.'" (PB01)

However, a few participants said that no one from the city gave them any notice about the fire either by knocking on their door or by driving through the neighborhood and making announcements.

"...for us, in this little area, we didn't hear broadcasts or like they riding around." (PB08)

"I know some people are still like, 'Oh, they came to my house, and they knock on our doors.' They didn't come to our house to knock on our doors." (PB05)

Neighbors & Family

A few participants said that a neighbor informed them about the fire, and one said that they had notified a neighbor about the fire.

"My neighbor said, 'Hey, did you hear about the fire?' I was like, 'What fire?' I thought somebody's in the neighborhood's house was on fire. She said, 'Up the street,' and I said, 'No.' I told her that I passed a lot of emergency vehicles, and it was taped off, and I said, 'That's probably what's goin' on.' She said, 'Yeah, we have to leave, evacuate.'" (PB06)

"My friend across the street, she told me what was going on. That's the only way we saw that we knew what was going on." (PB09)

A few participants described family members calling them and telling them that they should evacuate.

"My son called me and tell me, 'Mama, y'all need to leave,' because it start getting stronger and stronger." (PB16)

"I was here at the—at my home, and I got a call from my brother about 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. He was pretty alarmed 'cause he lives in the radius too, and he just told me that I needed to get outta there, so I packed up in my campervan, and I went on a campin' trip." (PB17)

Saw or Heard Something

Several participants described being on their way home from work and seeing smoke, that some of the neighborhood roads were blocked, or a general police or fire department presence in the neighborhood (but not notifying participants about the fire, which occurred later). Some described not being that concerned initially or not comprehending what was going on, until the fire was confirmed by another source—the news, a neighbor or family member.

"I was on my way home from work because I work in Salisbury. I was coming home from work, as I normally do every night. When I got to Cherry and, I believe, Indiana, I called my

husband, and I said, 'I can't get down the street.' I saw all of the firemen and the smoke." (PB03)

"Well, I was coming home from work, and I noticed a lot of smoke. I got home, and I turned the news on and found out that the plant was on fire....I just came in the house and told my husband that the plant was on fire up there. He was like, 'What?' I said, 'The Weaver Plant is on fire. They got everything blocked off.'" (PB20)

A few participants described seeing the flames.

"We saw the big flames, and we were trying to figure, 'What in the world is on fire?'" (PB08)

News Outlet

Several participants reported learning about the fire by watching the local news on television.

"I think a newsflash or something. I came and, of course, I got conscientious about the concern for it, how close it was. They did do the broadcast of like, "Leave the area if you could." (PB08)

Participants also described watching TV news during the fire for updates. Several participants mentioned that WXII/News 12 was their preferred news source.

"The TV. 'Cause they kept you up on date. They kept you up on that. The TV did. The news did. They talked about it till it was almost over. They did. It was a great thing to talk about. About what's goin' on, how long it lasted..." (PB15)

"WXII. That's my news channel. They be dead on it." (PB14)

Some participants were also asked about where they turned to for important information and news in general. Sources included TV news, online newspapers, alerts on their phone, or from kids or grandchildren.

"Definitely, the news channel. Definitely. I would say the internet here and there but sometimes it can be false news. Definitely WXII for sure." (PB18)

"I've got a 16-year-old grandson, so there are a lot times, 'Did you hear, Nana, that such and such?' They're very informative, because they're constantly on the internet." (PB08)

"I basically get all of my alerts and everything through my phone." (PB17)

Latine Participants

Many Latine participants were at home when they learned about the fire. About a third of Latine participants reported being notified about the fire by emergency services personnel, either by hearing evacuation orders broadcast over a loudspeaker, or having police or fire department personnel knock on their door and notify them. Some participants shared that the communication was only in English, which put them at a disadvantage. Other ways that residents learned about the fire included through conversations with neighbors, family members calling them, or from the local television news or phone alerts.

A few Latine participants learned about the fire from their employer while they were at work, or from seeing the presence of emergency services personnel when they returned home after working or running errands.

Emergency Services Personnel

About half of Latine participants reported being notified about the fire by emergency services personnel. Some participants described hearing the fire department's evacuation orders over a loudspeaker.

"The firemen arrived, but they only got to the entrance...they screamed really loud that we had to get out; we had to get out immediately. Then there was a car honking the horn very loudly to wake everybody up." (PL04)

Some participants said that emergency personnel knocked on their doors to notify them.

"They [firemen] knocked on our door. Otherwise, we would have suffocated from the smoke. They knocked on our door because we were sleeping. It was 2:00 in the morning." (PL05)

Others said that they did not see any police or fire department presence in their neighborhood.

"There wasn't much police activity, and nothing was closed. Everything was normal." (PL14)

"They [fire department] didn't come here. They didn't come to these apartments." (PL17)

Language Barrier

Two participants shared that they saw and heard emergency services personnel in their neighborhood, but that they did not understand the communication, because it was only in English.

"I was very scared because I saw the firemen passing by. They weren't using the siren, but a trumpet. Instead of doing that, they were trying to attract people's attention; that's what I imagined. Whistling all over; after that some patrol cars passed by with a speaker. I don't speak English, but I imagine they were evacuating people. Now, I realize they were evacuating people." (PL07)

"Then police cars went by, announcing through the speaker. I don't speak English, but I imagined they were evacuating the people... In my case, they could have talked to me in Spanish, 'Woman, get out. We're going to help you.' But it was English, and I didn't know anything. I was at a disadvantage there." (PL18)

Neighbors & Family

A few participants learned about the fire from their neighbors. One participant recalled receiving a message from a neighbor, and others said that neighbors came to their home to notify them.

"I was coming from the store...[neighbor] sent me a message saying that I should be alert because we may have to evacuate because something had happened near here." (PL04)

"That day, it was during the night, and we were here at home. The neighbors came and knocked on the door, telling us to get out." (PL17)

A few participants learned about the fire from family members or friends, who called to check in on them.

"...on the day of the fire I wasn't even watching a program to see the news. It was my mother-and-law who saw the news and let me know what was happening." (PL12)

Saw or Heard Something

Some participants described hearing the fire, describing the noise as sounding like a bomb or a shooting, which alerted them that something was happening.

"I heard like a bomb went off, so I went outside and I started to see smoke coming out."
(PL01)

"I never thought it was something so big, because what I heard was like something exploded, but at first I thought it was like shooting. Sometimes there are problems there and you hear shots, in the area where I live, and I thought it was one of those shots." (PL12)

News Outlet

Several participants reported learning about the fire by watching the local news on television or from phone alerts.

"I didn't know what it was until there was an alert on the phone, then I realized that there was a fire in the factory." (PL08)

"Once we got home in the evening, at around this time, we found out there was a fire because of the news and all that." (PL06)

Participants also watched the local television news or used their phones to get news updates during the fire.

"We had the phone handy, and for a couple of days, I kept checking to make sure we could come back home." (PL06)

One participant mentioned that Spanish-language programming did not provide a lot of information about the fire, and another said that relied on English-language news, even though they were not able to understand all of it.

"Regarding the news, we watched the local news when that happened. Hispanic programming doesn't provide a lot of information. We would watch the local channels, and they would provide more information in detail." (PL15)

"I would watch the news in English, even if I was kind of guessing what they were saying."
(PL17)

Some participants were also asked about where they turned to for important information and news in general. Sources included local television news, social media, and radio. Several described Spanish-language radio or television programming.

"...Channel 12. They also provide all the local news, and also the neighbors also inform us."
(PL13)

"The radio. I have the radio on my phone and in the car. I listen to it every day, and I try to listen to it throughout the day. I have an app on my phone where that provides live news."
(PL14)

Initial Fire Reaction

When asked about their initial feelings after learning about the fire, most Black and Latine participants expressed feeling fear and worry about their safety and the possibility of an explosion. Other feelings included stress related to not knowing where to evacuate to, or not understanding what was happening. In contrast to the majority of participants who described feeling immediately concerned, a few participants in each group said that the gravity or seriousness of the fire took a while to sink in.

Black Participants

When asked how they felt after learning about the fire, most participants shared that they felt a great deal of concern, describing themselves as “scared,” “terrified,” “frightened” or “panicked”. Participants were concerned for their safety, about the possibility of an explosion, and—once they evacuated—whether they would have a home to return to.

“When I got home, I was panickin’ because I had saw the smoke. I had saw the flames. That’s how close we were. Based off of my husband’s testimony about them hearin’ many explosions, I knew, at that point, we were in harm’s way.” (PB03)

“It was bad. It was just the psychological—psychologically not knowing if you’re going to have a home.” (PB05)

“Yes, I was frightened. I really was. I didn’t know when I left home, if I came back home, would I have a house so I was, I was frightened.” (PB10)

“I was shocked. I mean, I have never seen flames like that, like somebody dropped a bomb. I cried a little bit.” (PB15)

Several participants also expressed feeling concern for their neighbors or family member who did not evacuate, particularly the elderly, who may not have had anywhere to go or needed support to leave their homes.

“I have family members who live right down the street on Indiana. They’re senior citizens. I was very concerned about them.” (PB02)

“...’cause everybody wasn’t able to evacuate. We called to check on our neighbors to see if we could take them anywhere, and some of ‘em just said no they’re just gonna ride it out.” (PB07)

“Our neighbors were elderly, and no one supported getting them out of their property during the fire. Ultimately, they remained in the home, and that was very dangerous for them.” (PB19)

A couple of participants expressed the stress of not knowing where they would evacuate to, or if they would be able to return.

“It was really stressful in that moment because I felt pressured to leave for the safety of me and my family, but at the same time, I’m like, ‘If I get in this car, where am I drivin’ it to? I have nowhere to go.’ That was a scary feelin’. Then, I thought, ‘What do I need to grab?’ They were basically sayin’, ‘We need to evacuate now.’ It was terrifyin’ to be put in a situation where you have to make a decision about what do you take, what do you leave.

You may not come back to this home and it be this way. You may not be able to come back at all.” (PB06)

“Then, it was some people that didn't even really leave there 'cause they had nowhere to go. That was even more scary too, 'cause it's one thing they're coming around, letting us know that you need to evacuate, but for you not to have nowhere to go and you have to stay here. That just was a whole 'nother level, right there.” (PB18)

In contrast to the majority of participants who described feeling immediately concerned, a few said that the gravity or seriousness of the fire took a while to sink in. One said that they initially thought it was “a little thing” and another said that it took until the following day, when they kept seeing news footage of the fire, for them to comprehend how serious it was.

“I ain't lyin'. I could see the fire. I saw it, and I thought it was a little thing. The next day it was like, “Oh, man, this is serious,” especially when they kept on havin' it on the news. I didn't know a fertilizer fire makes another chemical that just goes up and do bodily harm.” (PB04)

“Initially, I really didn't think much about it. I thought it was just a fire, and it would be taken care of like most fires. I really didn't think a lot about it, but then after I learned a little bit more about it and after I saw more postings about it and just heard—I got scared. I was just kind of scared and tense and really didn't know what to do.” (PB07)

Latine Participants

Nearly all Latine participants expressed feeling afraid and/or worried. Many expressed fear of an explosion and fear for their safety. Participants described a desire to leave the area as quickly as possible, given their concern.

“I thought, ‘if this explodes, we won't tell the story’, because had it exploded, we would have had to run away, because an explosion would've gone everywhere not just confined to one area. Who knows how many miles? That was going through my mind. I thought of everyone that lived around, with an explosion nobody would've made it. As they say, they would have to put their passport in their mouths to be identified, because an explosion would've been devastating.” (PL03)

“They were saying that there could be an explosion that could reach several kilometers away. I worried because we are very close. If the chemicals exploded, the distance they were giving went beyond the area where we live. I got very worried for my girls.” (PL14)

One participant was worried because they did not know what was happening exactly. They explained how they could hear the firefighters and knew there was a fire, but they did not know about the chemicals that had caught fire.

“On the day of the fire, I didn't do anything. We were very worried because we could hear the firemen. We could hear everything. We knew there was a fire. We knew there was something going on, but we didn't know what had exploded. Do you understand what I'm saying? We thought that it could be a bus or something, but we didn't know it was chemicals and that we were being exposed to that.” (PL11)

In contrast to most participants who described feeling immediately concerned, a few said that the gravity or seriousness of the fire took a while to sink in. They described initially thinking that the fire was a house fire or burst electricity tank, and not as serious as it turned out to be.

“...later, on the news, they said that there was a risk of explosions. At the moment, well, you think that it’s like when a house is on fire. And that’s all... I thought that was all that was happening. When they said we were at risk of having an explosion, oh, God, that really scared me.” (PL07)

“We only thought it was smoke and that’s all. When we arrived here, my daughter told me, ‘Mommy, something fell down behind the trailer, something hard because there was even a tremor.’ ‘Oh, don’t exaggerate.’ I told her. We arrived and I stayed sitting on the couch. I never imagined that it was something so serious.” (PL04)

Protective Measures

Evacuation

Three-fourths of Black participants and about two-thirds of Latine participants evacuated from their home and neighborhood during the Weaver Plant fire for at least one night. Most stayed with family or friends. Few utilized the city-provided shelter, and those that did left because they found it ill-equipped.

Barriers to evacuation included not having family or friends to stay with and the financial cost of staying in a hotel, challenges with the community shelter, having a family member who did not want to leave their home, or feeling an obligation to stay and care for their home.

Black Participants

Three fourths of Black participants evacuated from their home and neighborhood during the Weaver Plant fire. The majority stayed with family members during the Weaver Plant fire, for anywhere from a few days to a week or more, while a few stayed in a hotel. Only two participants attempted to go to the community shelter, but both left and stayed elsewhere because they found it ill-equipped.

Stayed with Family or Friends

The majority of participants reported that they were able to stay with a family member—including a mother, a daughter, or a sister—for one or more nights during the evacuation period.

Not everyone mentioned where their family member's home was, but two participants reported that they stayed with family members who lived just outside of the evacuation radius and “might as well stayed in my own house.” (PB02)

Despite gratitude for having a place to stay, several participants discussed the inconvenience or discomfort of being away from their home.

“It was good to be with family, but there's no place like home.” (PB01)

“[My mom] helped feed us and stuff while we was there 'cause we didn't have no food, no clothes—change of clothes. It was horrible bein' there that long without any change of clothes or anything.” (PB13)

“I had recently had surgery, so it was a major inconvenience for me to be outside of the home.” (PB19)

Stayed in a Hotel

Several participants reported that they stayed in a hotel for one or more nights during the Weaver Plant fire. Two participants discussed the financial hardship of paying for a hotel.

“...we had to scrape up money to get a hotel for two days because they kept sayin, “We'll let you know when to come back.” That first day we could not come back and we were gone for about two days.” (PB18)

Community Shelter

Two participants reported taking their family to the community shelter, but neither ended up staying because they found the shelter was ill-equipped with no cots or other places to sleep. One participant spent the night in their car in the shelter parking lot, and then went to a hotel the following day, while the other returned to their home after leaving the shelter.

“...when you got up to the Coliseum, they didn't even have cots. They didn't have anything for us. We just went up there, and there was nowhere to sit. There was nowhere to lay. My husband and I, we sat in our car.” (PB05)

“...by the time we went there, it was so many people there and really nowhere to sleep...I had no where else to go, so me and my kids just had to come back here 'cause I'm like it's better than putting your head on the table and that. It's better to just go home than to be in that uncomfortable situation, especially in the middle of the night.” (PB12)

Barriers to Evacuation

Several participants shared that they did not evacuate from their home during the plant fire. Their reasoning included having an elderly parent that did not want to leave, and a strong family history in their home and a sense of obligation to care for it.

“I wasn't goin' nowhere...This is where I was. Been here ever since I was seven years old. It was, it still is my mama and daddy house and everything. I couldn't leave off the reservation.” (PB14)

“My mama said she wasn't goin' nowhere. I had to stay home with her.” (PB15)

Latine Participants

About two-thirds of Latine participants evacuated from their home and neighborhood during the Weaver Plant Fire. Nearly all stayed with family or friends, for anywhere from one night to about a week. Only one participant stayed in a hotel, and no one went to the community shelter. Barriers to evacuation included not having family or friends to stay with, the financial cost of the hotel, and lack of awareness about the community shelter.

Stayed with Family or Friends

About half of participants who evacuated stayed with family members—including siblings, children, or parents-in-law—for one or more nights during the evacuation period, and the other half stayed with friends.

“We couldn't do anything. So I said let's go, and we left. We left, and we left to see some friends that live—they live far from here, I don't remember what it's called. We went there to ask if they'd give us shelter, and they let us stay there another night.” (PL10)

Some Latine participants described strong social networks and their loved ones proactively extending invitations for them to stay with them during the fire. One participant went as far as to say that they did not think about staying at a hotel, because they had someone that they could count on during a time of need.

“...we went to stay with my sister. I actually didn't even think of getting a place at a hotel because I thought of her first, and she's always told me that if the lights go out, if you lose

electricity during a storm, come here to sleep and for whatever you need. And at —that moment, when the fire happened, I thought of her, and I went to her.” (PL12)

Stayed in a Hotel

Only one Latine participant reported staying in a hotel during the evacuation period, a decision which was motivated by their family's health concerns and not having any family or friends to stay with.

“During the contamination period, it affected us a lot. My family and I decided to go stay at a hotel because I was doing really bad, my chest. My son has asthma and allergies, so we couldn’t stay in the apartment, and we had to stay at a hotel because we had nobody to stay with.” (PL11)

Barriers to Evacuation

About a third of participants shared that they did not evacuate from their home during the plant fire. They explained that they did not have anywhere to go (e.g., did not have friends or family they could stay with) and could not afford to pay for a hotel.

“After the fire, well-in my case, since I have nowhere to go, or anybody to go with, well, I stayed here.” (PL07)

“We couldn’t go anywhere because we didn’t have anybody who could take us in for a few days, so [partner] and I stayed.” (PL15)

“Going somewhere involves expenses, so I decided to be on the lookout for what might come.” (PL08)

One participant stated that they were not able to go to a hotel for financial reasons and were not aware of the community shelter due to a language barrier.

“We were locked in because of the lack of communication with the language. We were not aware that there were shelters. Then, we didn’t have money to go to a hotel.” (PL17)

Other Protective Measures

Participants discussed the actions they took to protect themselves and their families during and after the fire. Aside from evacuating their homes and neighbors, participants also reported that they stayed inside during or after the fire, sealed their doors and windows, cleaned their homes, and wore face masks to protect themselves from the smoke. Several Black participants reported that they started consuming bottled water or using water filters as a protective measure. Participants frequently endorsed more than one protective measure.

Black Participants

About a third of Black participants stayed inside during the fire (if they did not evacuate), or once they returned home. Some participants also wore masks or purchased bottled water during and after the fire. Participants frequently endorsed more than one protective measure.

Stayed Inside

About a third of participants mentioned that they stayed inside during or immediately after the fire as a protective measure. A few participants did not evacuate or leave their home at all during the fire and stayed inside anywhere from 2-3 days to two weeks.

"[The fire] spread, and they had to get it under control and everything. They wanted everybody to stay inside. That's what we did." (PB14)

"In the house? A couple of days. We didn't go out like that unless it was an emergency. We didn't leave the house about two or three days." (PB15)

Other participants described staying inside as much as possible once they returned to their home.

"We tried to stay in after we got back home. We just tried to stay in as much as we could." (PB07)

"When we came home, we didn't come outside. We just stayed in, so that could be a way of help." (PB18)

Sealed & Cleaned Home

A few participants described closing their windows, and one said that they covered their windows with plastic and towels.

"I started putting plastic in the inside of my windows 'cause the outside doesn't really have much of a guard for the plastic to hold onto, so I put it inside and around my windows and just put a towel over them." (PB12)

One participant described how they cleaned their home following the fire, including vacuuming and using cleaning supplies. Another shared that they replaced their air filters with higher quality versions to help with their child's respiratory symptoms.

"I sprayed like crazy and vacuumed like crazy, and put down stuff like crazy. I just sprayed and everything." (PB04)

"I would change my filters once a month. I thought, 'Well, maybe I need to change the type of filter,' because I had [my son] tested for allergies to try to figure out what was causing him

to have these reactions. Since then, I've had to spend more money on a higher-quality air filter.” (PB06)

Masks

Several participants said that they wore masks during or after the fire. One said that they were advised to wear a mask in the neighborhood during the fire, but unsure of how long they should wear one or if they needed to wear a mask inside their home.

“Well, we were told to wear masks if we were gonna go here. ‘Keep your masks on because of the air.’ We were never told how long to keep the masks on...There was nothin’ from the National Weather Society that said, ‘Hey, the air quality is at this certain percent. We suggest you—‘nothin’’. If they did, I didn’t receive that information. It’s like, ‘Well, be safe, and wear your mask,’ but wear my mask at home? Wear my mask outside, my neighborhood—for how long?” (PB06)

Water

Several participants talked about buying bottled water after the fire, and some were still drinking only bottled water at the time of their interview. Another participant said that they purchased water filters.

“Well, I stocked up on a lot of water. [Laughter] Like I said, it’s just little things that you don’t really take in consideration.” (PB02)

“Eventually, when we have a lot of rain or a storm or something, isn’t it possible that that ash just goes right down in the ground and eventually get into the water?...That’s why we drink bottled water.” (PB10)

“The water smells like a sewer...I’d rather buy bottles of water to cook with and brush our teeth with than to actual use the water.” (PB12)

Latine Participants

More than half of Latine participants reported sealing their doors and windows with tape or cloth and wore face masks during the fire to protect themselves from the smoke. About half of participants also stayed inside during or after the fire, and some cleaned their homes. Participants frequently endorsed more than one protective measure.

Stayed Inside

Half of the participants mentioned staying inside to protect themselves from the adverse effects of the fire. Most of these were participants that did not evacuate during the fire.

“Lock down, yes. I closed the curtains; I blocked the spaces where smoke could come in. I tried not to open the door too much.” (PL01)

“I decided not to open the door at all. I thought, “If I open the door, all that white will come in.” (PL18)

Sealed & Cleaned Home

More than half of participants also said that they took measures to seal their homes, such as taping or placing cloths around doors and windows.

“I placed rags around the edges of the windows and doors. That’s what I did. I would try not to open the door as much as possible and stay locked in.” (PL11)

"We placed damp clothes at the doors. Yes, so they would absorb the smoke. It still filtered in with the air conditioner." (PL17)

"I tried to find a way to seal it because there was a little leak from the outside or from the inside. I tried to do that. The leak on the doors and windows was small. It didn't come into the house. If it did, it was just a tiny bit. The only thing is that I was locked in." (PL18)

A few participants mentioned that they used deodorants or air fresheners to help with the smell from the fire.

"Yes. For about eight days, that smell would come, and it was here. It invaded everything. We didn't know. We would come and go, so we would use deodorants and disinfectants to get rid of that bad smell." (PL06)

"I continued spraying things around the house, such as air fresheners and such. I couldn't spray too much because it affects me, as well." (PL14)

Masks

Over half of participants mentioned wearing a face covering to protect themselves from the smoke caused by the fire.

"We always wore facemasks. Whenever we came here, we would wear facemasks. Whenever we went outdoors, we wore a facemask." (PL02)

"Yes, we would use the facemask, and then we also would wear a handkerchief. We used a handkerchief." (PL06)

Fire Impact

Financial Impact of the Fire

Nearly all Latine participants and about half of Black participants reported some financial impact from the fire, mostly losing income from losing one or more days of work. Other costs included food or incidental costs related to being away from home, having to replace groceries that went bad, and the cost of medical appointments and/or medication.

Black participants were more descriptive about the extent of their financial impact compared to Latine participants, and their experiences varied. Only one Black participant described a significant financial impact, explaining that they spent over the \$1,000 reimbursable amount on hotel and food costs, as well as increased medical costs for her son who had worsened asthma/allergies following the fire.

Black Participants

Lost Income

About half of Black participants reported some financial impact from the fire. Most participants who reported a financial impact from the fire described losing income from missing one or more days of work.

“I missed one day of work and then missed two and a half, almost three hours of work, because I didn’t know about the bus. I had to walk, and then I was late.” (PB04)

“I missed a couple days out of work. My husband, he missed a couple, two or three days. We did use finances because of the fire.” (PB07)

Lodging and Food Costs

Other participants described the financial cost of staying in a hotel, food costs related to eating meals out while they were evacuated, or replacing groceries that went bad.

“Then the food. I had forgotten about my food. I had to throw it out. Most of it, if it didn’t smell right, I threw it out.” (PB04)

“... we had to sacrifice a couple things. But I scraped that money up to stay somewhere.” (PB18)

Extent of Financial Impact

Most described the financial impact as minimal (e.g., “not a huge financial impact,” (PB19), or no impact because they were later reimbursed or had savings, however they still spent money as a result of the fire.

“My family has emergency funding. We are savers, so it wasn’t a major impact, but a sign of appreciation for the inconvenience would have been nice to have received a reimbursement, and again, that didn’t happen.” (PB19)

“No, because I got reimbursed for the food, and I got reimbursed for the motel. It didn’t affect me that much. I paid for a little gas, but that was probably fine.” (PB16)

However, one participant described a “huge financial impact” including hotel costs, groceries and meals during the fire, but also increased medical costs for her child after the fire.

“We get checked in, and they tell me that it is \$200-somethin’ a night. I’m like, “Okay.” This really wasn’t in the budget. I literally had just gone to the grocery store and spent a little over \$200 on groceries. I didn’t bring any food. I’m like, “Wow, I didn’t even consider bringin’ any snacks for the kids or bringin’ food to put in the refrigerator.” They’re hungry, I’m hungry... we ate downstairs at the restaurant of the hotel, which was expensive, but it was just what we had to do in that moment.” (PB06)

This participant described how the financial repercussions of the fire had set them behind, and they were not able to get reimbursed for all of their expenses because it was over the \$1000 limit. (See Financial Reimbursement section for more detail).

“I am a working, middle-class citizen. I have to grind. I have to get it myself. When things happen that disrupts the system that I have in place and my livelihood, and there’s nothing in place that could help me, I’m stuck. Now, I’m behind, but then I have to catch up, but there’s no services to help me do that.” (PB06)

In contrast, some participants said that the fire did not affect them financially, mostly because they did not have to spend money to stay anywhere, because they either stayed with a family member or did not evacuate.

“It did not affect me financially at all. No. ‘Cause I didn’t have to need—I seen a lot of people goin’ up there gettin’ money. Findin’ a place to stay. But I didn’t need that. We was all right. By the man up there.” (PB15)

“Monetarily, we didn’t have to spend money to go stay anywhere, but it’s just the inconvenience of bein’ out of your home.” (PB03)

Latine Participants

Lost Income

Nearly all Latine participants reported some financial impact from the fire. Most participants missed some work due to the fire, which had a negative financial impact on them.

“Yes, because we weren’t working. My husband worked close by, and they also had to leave that area because they were telling everyone to get out of their workplaces. Yes, that is concerning. Sometimes, one week with no work could be difficult because of household expenses.” (PL02)

“Yes, I couldn’t go to work. I did go, but as I told you, when I saw that the streets were closed, I couldn’t go out. I tried, but I couldn’t go out for a few days when the streets were closed. So, I did miss a few days. And that affects the payment. The days you miss work.” (PL03)

One participant even lost their job and was only able to find a job that paid them less.

“For example, the whole week that I lost my job. Who’s going to pay for it to me? Who? No, the woman told me they were going to pay for it. She asked for a letter from my employer, she asked for many things; I took them to her and nothing. In fact, I lost that job because I didn’t go for a week. Now, I got another one. Yes, and very much. It’s sad but it’s true.

Because I earned more money there; they were paying me 15 an hour and here, where I am, I'm only making 13 dollars an hour." (PL04)

Food Costs

Some participants also mentioned that their food went bad due to the fire, which affected them financially.

"We left right away, so we had to come back and throw away what went bad." (PL06)

"I don't know what happened. There was no electricity that night. Maybe they disconnected it as a precaution. All the groceries went bad." (PL09)

Physical Health Impact

Over half of Latine participants and about a third of Black participants identified some new or worsened respiratory symptoms during or following the Weaver fire, including difficulty breathing, coughing, or congestion. Other health issues that participants experienced included frequent and severe headaches, and eye, nose, and/or skin irritation.

Some participants described the treatments they used and their experience with healthcare visits. Cost was a barrier to seeking medical care for some participants.

Black Participants

Respiratory Concerns

About a third of Black participants identified some new or worsened respiratory symptoms during or following the Weaver fire, including difficulty breathing, coughing, or congestion. Some participants also noted other allergy-related symptoms, including itchy or watery eyes.

“As long as that smoke was in the air, it was really thick, and my eyes—well, my eyes did get a little itchy and watery at times, but—the coughing. The coughing was just ridiculous. I couldn’t sit outside like I’m sitting outside now. I couldn’t sit outside.” (PB20)

“Just the whole how it impacted my breathing. I have another son. He was having some breathing issues. I think everybody was having breathing issues. I don’t think anyone wasn’t having breathing issues during that.” (PB05)

“Since the fire, my physical health, yes. I noticed a lot of allergies have resurfaced, although I was on medication. It is possible the medicine has run its course, ‘cause I’ve been on them for a while. I got some serious allergies. They affect my breathin’ and my—well, not really my seein’, but the itchin’. I go outside and I just itch.” (PB01)

Treatment

Two participants said that their children had to use a nebulizer for respiratory concerns following the fire.

“My son has some respiratory concerns. Prior to the Weaver fire, it was more so like seasonal allergies in the spring. After the Weaver fire—I’m not sayin’ that this is, by any means, a correlation to it, I just noticed that he had to go on a nebulizer and was given albuterol because he couldn’t breathe. He would cough a lot.” (PB06)

“...two of my kids had a respiratory thing going on around that time and they had to get put on I don’t wanna say they’re called ventilators, but I think they’re called ventilators...It’s like a machine that you have to put them on, like if they got asthma.” (PB12)

They both described increased doctor’s appointments for their children, following the fire, and one commented on the financial impact of these visits and the recommended treatments.

“When my son started havin’ reactions, I had to go take him to the doctor. That was a \$25 copay each visit. Then, he had to go to a specialist because a his breathing. It was a pulmonologist. That was \$50. Now, we have to get albuterol, and we need a nebulizer, and now we have to go every other week. Then, he had to get shots, so then he had to do a allergy test. All those, that’s comin’ out of my household expense on top of what I just paid for that was unexpected, and I didn’t fully get reimbursed for that.” (PB06)

Other Health Concerns

One of these parents also shared that she and her son had experienced severe headaches—like migraines—since the fire.

“Far as everything besides the headaches, we still go through those. Those are the most severe things that we are experiencing right now trying to get under control is those headaches because they’re frequently. It’s like a almost every day to a every other day thing. Besides that, I don’t think anything else got affected far as them besides headaches and stuff.” (PB12)

A few participants shared that someone they knew had been hospitalized or passed away at some point between the fire and their interview, but they provided few details indicating if there was a relationship with the fire.

“We started seeing neighbors going to the hospital. Some even passing off and things like that and the three years that I have been here, we never really had things like that, but it was a back-to-back thing. Not saying that affected anything, but it was just common.” (PB12)

“I don’t want to say that the fire had some impact on [husband’s] health, being the way it was. Like I say, he just passed in November. It was from the heart congestion and his respiratory issues and all that. It’s just no way of knowing whether that had any effect on it or whether it was just a normal process of life—if the timing was already in the numbers.” (PB08)

Latine Participants

Respiratory Concerns

Over half of Latine participants described new or worsened respiratory problems because of the fire. Participants described difficulty breathing, developing a cough, and/or experiencing sore, raspy, or dry throats.

“I feel like sometimes I’m short of breath, my chest is tight. Before you didn’t feel it, but now you do, all of that..” (PL10)

“Dryness. Like something I want to cough up, phlegm or something, I don’t know.” (PL16)

Some participants described how the smoke from the fire exacerbated their asthma.

“I think that it affected me a lot because for a long time, I suffered from asthma. Since the smoke was very thick and vicious, I felt I like it left me with some sort of exhaustion.” (PL01)

Treatment

Several participants treated their respiratory problems with natural remedies, including lemon, ginger, cinnamon, and herbal teas to help with coughing and congestion.

“...after the fire I got a cough. I took a lot of medicine. Not prescribed medicine, but rather natural medicine, like lemonade, tea, cinnamon. It helps me a lot, but at times I can’t stand the cough, but thank God, with natural medicines I’ve been okay.” (PL03)

“We took something for cough. I remember clearly—I always trust ginger and lemon tea. That’s what we drank.” (PL09)

“We were feeling something strange in our chest but that eventually disappeared. I used to gargle with lemon and vinegar...” (PL16)

A few others sought medication treatment or purchased inhalers, nasal sprays, and allergy pills to alleviate their symptoms. However, several participants described the cost of medical treatment as a barrier to care.

“Yes, it affected us a little because we had to spend separately on things we were not thinking about buying. I had to buy a nebulizer for my two-year-old daughter, the kind that you connect and you add VapoRub and all that, to get rid of the smoke and everything to clean the room, so there were expenses. Maybe that one was not much, but it did affect us somewhat.” (PL14)

“It affected me a lot because of the intoxication. I got an infection that clogged my nasal cavities. Since then, from the fire in January until July when the doctor saw me—since I don’t have insurance, it’s pricey. They saw me, and they referred me to the hospital. On September 13, I had surgery.” (PL17)

Other barriers to accessing healthcare included taking time away from work and transportation to healthcare visits.

“Yes, this was after the fire. They tell me now, ‘Go to the clinic. Go get yourself checked out.’ I tell them, ‘I will miss one day.’ You know how we have to pay rent here....” (PL06)

“...I haven’t seen a doctor. If I had visited a doctor, they would have given me something. I have nobody to take me there.” (PL07)

Other Health Concerns

Several participants described experiencing frequent headaches following the fire. Sometimes the headaches were associated with dizziness, body pain, and/or nausea.

“Yes, yes. Headaches, dizziness, terror that later it would get worse and they’d diagnose you with something. That you have this and this is going to happen to you—lots of things went through my head. And you’re left traumatized that something’s going to happen as a result of what happened, of the chemicals. Because yes, my head really hurt a lot and I had dizziness, nausea.” (PL12)

“Well, right now I’m feeling discomfort. Dizziness. Sometimes I get dizzy all of the sudden, and I am have pain throughout my body.” (PL10)

Some participants also experienced skin irritation or allergies following the fire.

“I don’t know how to explain it to you; only if it’s under the light. My skin here is like dry skin. I don’t know if it’s because of that, but my skin has been itching lately.” (PL07)

“For two days I got very sick. I developed stains on my face and some sort of allergy. That was about two days or one day later. At the time, I didn’t feel anything, but two days later, the effect was strong.” (PL11)

Mental Health Impact

About half of both Black and Latine participants described some negative mental health impact from the fire, beyond their initial reactions to learning about the fire. They described feeling scared, worried, anxious, stressed, and/or restless. Latine participants were more descriptive than Black participants when it came to explaining how they felt, and some of them described feeling “traumatized” by the fire. A few participants described turning to their faith or belief in God to cope with the fire.

Black Participants

About half of Black participants described some mental health impact from the fire. Several participants described experiencing heightened anxiety during or after the fire. Participants described anxiety related to being displaced from their home, concern for their safety, and concern for their neighbors that did not evacuate.

“I wasn’t that fearful in the beginning until I heard more and more about the dangers. I think that continued to cause a lot of anxiety with myself and concern about my neighbors that weren’t—‘cause everybody wasn’t able to evacuate.” (PB07)

“I didn’t even know if I wanted to come home. The way they had everything blocked out, and things like that, I was nervous to come home. We just stayed in the house, and really couldn’t sleep. I just was up, ‘cause you never know like, what’s going on.” (PB18)

They also described lingering anxiety and fear since the fire about something similar happening again, and anxiety about the environmental and health impact of the fire. One participant described having “remembered anxiety” each time they drove past the plant. This participant and their family had sought therapy for their mental health since the fire.

“I think we’re all mentally drained from it, though. I have anxiety now. I had depression for about two weeks afterwards about bein’ home because I was so anxious what to touch, what not to do. Is this okay? Is it safe? All of those concerns for my family, as well as myself.” (PB03)

“I definitely don’t feel like it’s safe now. Knowin’ that that plant was there, it’s an uneasy feeling to know that what if it happens again? ...I drive past it, it still—I’m not gonna say it’s traumatic or triggering, but there is a feeling of remembered anxiety from what happened.” (PB06)

Belief in God as a Coping Mechanism

A few participants talked about turning to their faith or belief in God to cope with the fire.

“When it happened, I just prayed. I told my Lord, I never saw nothin’ like this, so devastatin’ close to home. I told him, just Lord, just watch out for me.” (PB15)

“My mental health is good. It is. It is. It’s just that that time durin’ the fire, and maybe two months after that I really felt comfortable bein’ back in my house. I’m a pretty stable person, ‘cause I rely on God. I do.” (PB01)

Latine Participants

Nearly half of Latine participants described some kind of mental health impact of the fire, such as anxiety, worry, stress, restlessness, or depression.

Several participants described experiencing anxiety during or after the fire, related to concern for their safety or for their homes, or contamination from the fire.

“Yes, very worried. How can we not worry? I mean, that kept burning. It kept burning. Then they were saying not to—I mean, it wasn't on the news because I would watch the news. That it wasn't a normal fire. The fire was distilling contamination because it was a chemical that was burning. So, that chemical would have a reaction.” (PL18)

“Yes, nervousness; like fear. I was afraid that something could happen in the middle of the night and we wouldn't realize.” (PL01)

Several participants went so far as to say that they felt “traumatized,” or “desperate” after the fire.

“In terms of my mental state, I feel nervous, desperate— -anxious, sometimes I feel like I want to start running away and disappear. Doctors ask me, do you feel this? And I say no, because they don't really care, but I do, I do feel desperate sometimes.” (PL13)

“As I tell my mother-besides that, from that moment, I am more nervous, like, I get altered with any little thing. I don't know; I get altered very rapidly. [crying]. I tell my mother, ‘You don't understand me; that traumatized me.’ I called my sisters. I called my sister, the one in [city redacted]. I told her, ‘I could have exploded last night and you didn't even notice.’ ‘You were sleeping and didn't know what I was going through here.’ [crying and sniffing].” (PL04)

Some participants described feeling restless as an effect of the fire, and had trouble sleeping.

“Yes, I felt helpless and afraid. I would wake up at night, and it would take me a while to go back to sleep because I was feeling like that. I'm getting over it. I think, now.” (PL06)

“Anxiety. More than anything it's anxiety. Stress. That's what I have, and my son and my daughter, and I think my husband as well, because sometimes at night he can't sleep.” (PL12)

“It changes a lot because you no longer sleep well, you are worried about that and then coronavirus arrived—you get much worse. Everything changes. Now I am feeling sicker, I am going in for check-ups all the time, she is, too. We both have diabetes, she is going to check-ups, and so on.” (PL13)

A few participants reported feeling depressed after the fire, in addition to or independent of anxiety.

“I got very depressed—too depressed. Anxiety—too much anxiety because, since then, I'm not the same now.” (PL17)

One participant explained how they had flashbacks when they passed by the Weaver Fertilizer Plant.

“It all comes to mind. The smoke, the flame, people screaming everywhere. Every time I pass by.” (PL03)

Belief in God as a Coping Mechanism

A few participants talked about how they leaned on their faith or belief in God to cope with the fire.

“Thanks to God, everything is stable. It was worrisome when the fire was going on, but thanks to God, it was over fast, and nothing happened.” (PL02)

“I just prayed to God, I don’t know how to tell you this. It’s like—in my case, I prayed that He would enlighten us so this would be solved, it would end, it would be over.” (PL18)

Impact of Fire on Neighborhood Perceptions

Most Black participants reported that they still liked their neighborhood and felt safe living there after the fire, while Latine participants were more divided. Only a few participants reported that they had considered moving away from the neighborhood. Participants in both groups described a heightened awareness about potential dangers of living in their neighborhood.

Black Participants

Most Black participants reported that they still liked their neighborhood and felt safe living there after the fire. Some specified that they felt safe because the Weaver Fertilizer plant was no longer in operation, and that they might feel differently if it reopened.

“I feel pretty safe now that the plant is gone.” (PB20)

“Really, it did not change much. The only thing that might would have changed me from living in my neighborhood, if they would put it [Weaver Fertilizer plant] back up there. Right now, I'm okay with the neighborhood.” (PB16)

“I still love where I live, but I'm glad that company is not in business anymore, in our neighborhood anyway and hopefully they'll never be in any residential neighborhood.” (PB07)

Other participants cited their long history in the neighborhood, or other things they liked about the neighborhood, including that it is quiet and peaceful, and the neighbors are “closeknit,” (See Neighborhood Advantages for more) as reasons why they still liked their neighborhood.

“Ain't nobody goin' nowhere. No. This just a nice neighborhood. 'Cause like I say, everybody been out here like 50-plus years. Since 1970. We closeknit community and everything. We say mister or miss, and we got respect. It's good.” (PB14)

Despite feeling positive about their neighborhood, some Black participants said that the fire raised their awareness of potential dangers, acting as a “wake up call” and making them more conscious of what businesses are near their neighborhood.

“I think, now, I'm more conscious about my surroundings and places that are being zoned for specifics, because I never dreamed that that would have happened on such a large magnitude and the danger that it actually could have put us in.” (PB08)

“Oh, I'm still fine with livin' in the neighborhood, but it was a wake-up call that there are hazards that you don't even consider.” (PB17)

Only a few participants said that they had concerns or questions about staying in their neighborhood after the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. They wondered about the safety of staying in the neighborhood and the long-term health impact. However, one participant questioned where else they could go in the city that would not be affected by the fire.

“It has created some concerns as far as, ‘Do I want to stay? Do I want to reside in this neighborhood with my family? Is it safe? Is it safe to continue to live here?’ It has created a lot of questions in my mind if I want to stay on this side of town, if I want to sell my home.” (PB03)

"I'm somewhat somewhere in between not staying here, and like I said my mother bought this house new and she's been here ever since. For that reason, I think we will hold onto it, but I will be somewhat scared for the long-term effect of what that thing has done. I have some reservations about long term effects is gonna have on my health. To be honest with you, I don't know where to move 'cause wherever I move there seems like there's a problem. If I'm gonna stay in East Winston or North side of town, I'm going to be affected by this. It's like you can run, but you can't hide from this." (PB11)

Latine Participants

Latine participants were divided on their feelings about their neighborhood in the aftermath of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. Some explained that though they perceived their neighborhood as dangerous when the fire was occurring, or shortly thereafter, they no longer felt that way. One participant went as far as to say that they forgot about it as time passed.

"During the time it was happening, it did. I thought it was dangerous to continue living here. Now, since it looks more relaxed, I think it's alright. A few months ago, it did. We thought it could be very dangerous to live in this place like this; with these factories with these explosives." (PL01)

"Yes, I feel safe now. We're beginning to get confidence now. I told you I'd been here for 18 years now. If I change things now, I don't think it'll work for me. No, I think everything is going back to normal." (PL06)

Other participants expressed concern that the Weaver Fertilizer Plant would reopen, or that another fire or emergency would take place. A few even said that they were considering moving away from the neighborhood.

"I am afraid, yes. I'm afraid that they will build that factory again and it will explode again." (PL04)

"...if there's another fire there, we may not make it next time. They got the fire out, but that was still burning. There was smoke coming out, still. More and more smoke and they couldn't get it out. It took them a while to get it out. A while. A lot of people got out of the houses close to the trailers. That could start over again, and who knows what would have happened." (PL05)

"...we're looking for another place to move because, if there is an emergency, they'll simply evacuate us here, and we don't have anywhere to go, so we're worried. Yes, only the concern we have. We've mentioned that we want—we've seen that if there is another emergency, we would have to move. They could close down the place..." (PL15)

A few participants mentioned that they were more "alert" or "cautious" after the fire.

"After the fire, we've been all right. I'm not going to deny it. We've been doing well, but been more careful. We've been more cautious about what's going on in our surroundings. We've been more careful and more alert. That's the word. We've been on alert to what could happen in the future...The way I see it now, well, less secure." (PL11)

Well, now I'm more alert. Before, I didn't think about it much, but now, I'm always like alert and defensive. It's not like before. You never expect something to happen around you. You hear about it happening somewhere else, and you think it's never going to happen close to you. I'm more prepared in that sense..." (PL14)

Notably, one participant thought the fire brought them closer to their neighbors as it was a topic of conversation that improved their communication with each other.

“I feel that we’re closer now. Before, there wasn’t as much—just work and home. Now, there’s—, there’s more communication. We’re more united. That’s the only thing that changed. We are there to support each other. We have to support each other neighbors if anything happens. That changed.” (PL14)

Perceptions of Fire Response

Financial Reimbursement

About half of Black and Latine participants received some financial reimbursement after the fire. Black participants identified the Experiment in Self-Reliance (ESR) as the distributor of the reimbursements; while most Latine participants only mentioned the location where they went to apply for reimbursement.

Other Black and Latine participants filled out paperwork to receive reimbursement but did not hear back from anyone or receive reimbursement. Some Latine participants were not aware of the financial support that was available, and one Latine participant did not seek assistance because of fear of calling attention to their immigration status.

Black Participants

About half of Black participants received financial reimbursement from the city, distributed by the Experiment in Self-Reliance, following the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. Participants heard about the financial reimbursement by attending a community meeting, from a friend or neighbor, or through a television advertisement. One participant expressed frustration that they only heard about the resources from a member of their rotary club and criticized the “fragmented” communication of information.

“I saw something on TV, so I applied for it. I went up and set an appointment. I’ll tell you it was right down there in the back of Hanes Hosiery. They helped out.” (PB04)

“Well, my mom went to that thing they was talking about giving back the money. She went up there and got it. ‘Cause got some help from that.” (PB09)

All participants who received reimbursement described it as helpful, helping to cover lodging or food costs during the evacuation period.

“Yeah, ESR helped out. They gave me some money. I tried to tell everybody they kicked out a few dollars.” (PB04)

“They tried to say that they would reimburse us some of the money that we had to spend while we were out because we had to spend so much money eatin’. That was the only thing I would say that was helpful that they tried to help us give some of the money back.” (PB13)

“The one resource that I know that really helped us a little bit, that they reimbursed us for going to the motel and eating. That help us some.” (PB16)

One Black participant detailed their experience applying for reimbursement. They described spending five hours at ESR discussing their expenses and then waiting two months to receive reimbursement.

“I forget what time it started, but we were inside in about 30 minutes from the time they opened. We were some of the last people to leave....My kids were hungry, I was hungry, it was a long wait, we were tired, it was frustrating.” (PB06)

This participant was appreciative of the reimbursement but said that not all of their expenses were covered, because they exceeded the \$1,000 per household limit. They expressed

frustration about finding out how much money was unallocated, since their full expenses were not reimbursed.

"I think that it was great that they at least offered \$300 to people who didn't have any documentation, but for people who did, I feel like they should've been reimbursed for everything, especially when you had left-over money. I think she said it was like \$1 million and only \$300,000 was spent. I'm like, 'What, and y'all complained that I was \$500 over? You had all this money left?'" (PB06)

"I wasn't lookin' for anything else feelin' like money for the stress and all the mental stressors. I'm just askin' for reimbursement for money that I actually spent because of this. " (PB06)

Participants Sought Out but Did Not Receive Reimbursement

Among Black participants who did not receive reimbursement, several said that they did hear about the reimbursement. A few participants reported that they went to the community meetings and applied for reimbursement, but they were not reimbursed for their expenses.

One Black participant said they received a phone call informing them that reimbursement was prioritized for people who stayed in a hotel or had to miss work because of the fire, while two others applied for reimbursement but never heard anything back.

"I did get a phone call sayin' that—they left it on my machine—that they would be the first group of people, but they made it—the group that they were seeing first were the ones that were displaced that had to go to a hotel or somethin' like that, or they were working. They did mention working. The ones that couldn't go to their jobs and all of this, and the ones with the children." (PB01)

"There were no helpful resources. I did apply for reimbursement for food—the fact that I was out of my home, and we had to purchase meals elsewhere—and I was never compensated." (PB19)

"I went to the meetings, but they just didn't explain everything to us as well as we wanted it to be explained to us...They said that they would reimburse us, and we never heard anything back from them." (PB20)

One Black participant was aware of the reimbursement but chose not to attend the community meeting or apply for reimbursement because they did not think the time spent applying and waiting for the reimbursement would be worth it.

"I know a few people went up there to Piney Grove Rec and everything. They was tellin' me that it wasn't worth your while to put in for some assistance or nothin' like that. They say you'll spend more money tryin' to get some money. It wasn't worth it. That's why I didn't go up there....'cause you can go out there for resources and everything and it might be two or three months later before you get it." (PB14)

Latine Participants

About half of Latine participants received financial assistance from the city following the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. They were not as specific as Black participants about the source of the assistance or how they found out about the assistance. Few Latine participants mentioned attending any community meetings about the fire.

Most of the participants that received help mentioned receiving \$300. Some were dissatisfied with the amount, or were told that they would receive additional compensation, but did not.

“The only help that I received from this was the [ESR]. They sent me a check saying that supposedly they were going to pay for the week I lost my job, but they never paid that for me; only 300 dollars for food expenses and housing.” (PL04)

“They helped us with a \$300 check. We got a \$300 check, and that’s it. We came one day to the fairgrounds because supposedly they were going to help us, but they didn’t help us at all. They helped us at this other place that’s also close to the trailers. They helped us with \$300.” (PL05)

“They only gave us \$300. They gave us that much. Many people who went to hotels got reimbursed up to \$1,000. They had the means to do it, but we couldn’t do it.” (PL17)

One participant mentioned receiving \$90 and another participant mentioned receiving groceries.

“Okay. Someone told us—because I think it appeared on the phone—and we went to some offices that—I’m not exactly sure of the address. But there they told us that they were going to help, this that and the other. They asked for an interview with us, our address, to see if we were there. And yes, they gave us \$90. One resource. Leaving there I went to the Compare Foods, and I bought food.” (PL10)

“They helped us with groceries. Since we left just like that, it went bad. We didn’t come back until the third day. We left right away, so we had to come back and throw away what went bad.” (PL06)

Participants Sought Out but Did Not Receive Reimbursement

About half of the participants mentioned that they did not receive any reimbursements. Many of the participants that did not receive help mentioned that they were promised help or filled out paperwork but did not receive help after all.

“No, none. There was a promise, but they never came through...” (PL09)

“I think that my husband found out about assistance because we were trying to figure out how to recover what we paid for the hotel. I went to apply at a place, also, but when the time came, they didn’t help us at all. I found some resources from people who were saying, “Look, they can help you if you go here.” I went, but—no. It was like a public place where you had to go, give your name, and everything, but when the time came, we didn’t get anything.” (PL11)

Participants Not Aware of Reimbursement

Other participants said that they were not aware of the resources that were available, or just that they did not receive anything, and did not elaborate further.

“There were no resources, there was nothing. It was over and then everyone went back to their apartments. I didn’t see any resources at all.” (PL13)

“What resources? Nothing, at that time. Nothing.” (PL12)

Concern over Immigration Status was a Barrier to Accessing Resources

One participant discussed how they were hesitant about accessing resources that were offered to victims of the fire because of their immigration status. Since they did not have documentation

of legal presence, they thought that they would not be eligible for aid, and feared calling attention to themselves and that “authorities may want to investigate” them.

“They ask for information regarding documentation, and we don’t want to be charged or be in a situation where they won’t help us because of our immigration status...Yes, because we’re afraid that they may come—for example, the authorities may want to investigate the people here. Then, they may ask what’s going on.” (PL15)

Distrust

A few Black and Latine participants described feelings distrustful about the response to the fire, including clean-up efforts and questioned whether the city of Winston Salem was covering up the environmental damage of the fire. Some Latine participants thought that the fire was deliberately planned, and one thought that it was the result of “carelessness”.

Black Participants

A few Black participants made general comments about the city not doing enough to keep community members informed.

“It doesn't feel like they're trying to keep people in the loop of what's really going on and what's really happening. That's not how it feels, not for us. Maybe it does for other people, but it doesn't feel that way for us.” (PB05)

“The only saving force is to know that the folks in charge are really trying to do something about it and keeping us informed along the way. What I think would be most helpful to all concerns, but you can't make me believe that that's the truth.” (PB10)

One participant expressed concerns about the quality and safety of the clean-up effort and felt the city may “mask over a lot of things,” and cut costs.

“To be honest with you, I don't think it'll ever be cleaned up properly. I think they'll mask over a lot of things and the way everything costs right now. I have been in construction for about 48 years and I understand when you dig up something or cover up something, it just don't go away and putting dirt on it, can't fix it.” (PB11)

“...this is a major, major cleanup type of situation and everybody is holding on to his or her money. That ain't mine, that's his department. That's her department and we don't do that. At the end of the day though, the community is left holding the bag, and it's a empty bag as far as promises that they made to make this land an area safe.” (PB11)

Latine Participants

One Latine participant explained that they have “no evidence” that the fire had been properly cleaned up.

“The fear is that it will happen again. Because as I say, we have no 100% guarantee that it's all over. We just look at the land volcano...We don't know if they removed what was underneath. I don't think they removed it. There would need to be evidence that they removed it, in order for people to be satisfied and at ease. But if there is no evidence, people have that feeling.” (PL03)

A couple of other participants speculated that the fire was “ill-intentioned,” or “planned out.”

“...what the people tell you is that it was ill-intentioned. In the end, we don't know what happened. It's very sad that this happened in that factory...” (PL09)

“This was very, very serious. It's most likely that they had it planned out, they don't lose anything.” (PL10)

Injustice

Both Black and Latine participants describing feeling a sense of injustice related to their experience with the fire. Some Black participants described feeling dehumanized, or experiencing environmental racism, while Latine participants spoke more generally about unfairness and feeling that they deserved compensation for their experience with the fire.

Black Participants

A couple of Black participants described that they felt a sense of injustice based on how they were treated during and after the fire. One participant explained how they are not “just a number, “which alluded to them being treated as one.” (PB05)

“It’s not just about Weaver. It’s about the community that has been impacted. We’re real people. We’re human beings. We’re not just a number. How’s that gonna affect my children or any of these children, for that matter? (PB05)

Another participant described the “environmental racism” that had historically affected their community, describing how a local school, Hanes Middle School, was affected by a chemical spill but only closed once White children started attending. This experience contributed to the participant’s distrust that the city would appropriately clean up the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire. (See Distrust for more)

“This is the worst environmental racism that I’ve ever seen happening in this city. Not just with the Weaver Plant fire, but you got the next deadly spill in North Carolina history right there at that school. To be honest with you, the reason they closed that school down when they integrated and put White kids over there, and then they shut it down, but they knew it 30 years ago that that area was affected. The minute those white kids got around, they stopped it, shut it down, took them out of there. As long as those black kids was there, they ain’t opening their mouth.” (PB11)

Latine Participants

Latine participants spoke about injustice more generally. They felt it was unfair how they were affected by the fire, and thought they deserved some validation for what happened to them, through compensation or legal consequences for the Weaver Fertilizer Plant, since the fire could have unknown long-lasting effects.

Participants described themselves as “victims,” (PL10) or explained that “it wasn’t our fault that we had to swallow all that smoke.” (PL17)

One participant explained that they were already in a financially vulnerable position, which was compounded by the fire, and felt that there would be legal consequences for the Weaver Fertilizer Plant.

“I would like to have justice, because it’s not fair. We’ve gone so long suffering from financial difficulties. I haven’t been working. He [domestic partner] works in construction, and he has been working very little because of the bad weather. I’ve barely been working for two weeks. It’s not fair that they’re [Weaver Fertilizer] doing well. Imagine, they’re millionaires. I think they should see that.” (PL17)

Other participants felt that they deserved additional compensation or a “gratuity.” One thought that the fire happened due to “negligence” from Weaver Fertilizer and they felt abandoned to deal with the consequences of the fire.

“Well, what I thought is that they were going to give us some type of gratuity. Because what happened could have been negligence from that place [Weaver Fertilizer]. It’s not our fault. We’re paying rent, but we were victims in that sense of what happened. And I thought that perhaps here in the place they’ll help us in some way; but no, nothing. It was every man for themselves. It was all forgotten. But what’s left are the consequences.” (PL10)

“We put ourselves at risk, and we believed that we deserved more, at least from the government or someone who would help us out. From the factory, or I don’t know, but they didn’t do it.” (PL18)

One participant also spoke generally about not getting sufficient resources due to their race, ethnicity, and immigration status. They explained how they have paid their taxes; however, they must “settle” and cannot make “demands” due to being undocumented.

“Look, we are Hispanics and people of color, and then there are White people, when we are in front of God we’re all equal. For God there’s no color and we should all have the same value: those who are white, who are Hispanic, the people of color...we’re contributing to this country... I paid my taxes for ten years, for many years...But’s it’s like I already told you: we can’t ask for much because we don’t have papers, right? We don’t have papers, and that’s why we keep quiet, that’s why we put up with everything that happens to us, until we’re just resigned to it. We can’t make demands. Because even though I paid taxes for many years, I’m illegal. It’s something where you say, because I’m illegal, I can’t do anything. And you have to settle for what there is. With what they want, with what they say. That’s not freedom.” (PL10)

Additional Resource Needs

Both Black and Latine participants said that they desired additional reimbursement or compensation. Many Black participants desired more information about the health and environmental impacts of the fire, an improved process of notifying residents about the fire and supporting them to evacuate, and better lodging options.

Black Participants

When Black participants were asked about resources that they desired from the city, they identified the following: (1) a better process of initially informing residents about the fire and supporting them to evacuate, (2) better shelter options, (3) additional reimbursement or compensation, and (4) more information about health and/or environmental impact of the fire.

Timely Notification and Evacuation Assistance

Several Black participants discussed the lack of timely communication about the risk of the fire, as well as the lack of support for residents—especially elderly and/or handicapped residents—to evacuate from the neighborhood. They felt that city officials, police or fire department workers, or community leaders should have been going door-to-door to check on people.

“I think we could have been informed a lot earlier, because it was way into the process of the burning before we even knew. Like I said, it was our own speculation and our own visual that prompted us to react.” (PB08)

“They [commissioners and aldersmen] should have been knocking door-to-door. ‘Is there anything we can do? Do we need to do anything for you?’ Some people just couldn’t leave because of the elderly, so I think about all of my elderly people that live over here that could not leave or did not have the access to leave. I think they should have come out and checked on them. They know who they are.” (PB20)

“...they could have come and knocked on the doors instead of doing the way they did it with the loud speaker and stuff. ‘Cause most people would be like, they hard to—they hard sleepers, and they’re not gonna get up and hear anything. They could have come and knocked on the doors from door to door.” (PB09)

Lodging

Several participants commented on the inadequacy of the shelter and how they desired a more comfortable and better-equipped shelter that was farther away from the affected area. One participant suggested that the city could have put residents in hotels.

“All of this that they put in the paper, how Winston-Salem did such a great job. No, they didn’t. They dropped the ball when you have people in wheelchairs showing up and there’s no place for them to lay down and be comfortable.” (PB05)

“I think better shelter options would have been a nice resource to have. I don’t really know how many people stayed there. I don’t know how successful it was for them to be there....I work in Greensboro at a day center for people experiencin’ homelessness, and we have them in hotels durin’ the winter for three months. You just expect people to leave their home? These are people who sleep outside in tents, and they can go and now stay in a hotel where they’re nice and warm and safe. You’re talkin’ about home owners, people who

live in a home, who now have to evacuate and now go to a shelter, just one big room.” (PB06)

“Safe shelter outside of the radius, even if it was temporary, such as—something other than the Coliseum. That would not have been comfortable, so maybe if The Salvation Army or the community could have put us in a hotel or even reimbursed us, as they said they would do.” (PB19)

Additional Reimbursement or Compensation

Several participants felt that the city should have provided additional reimbursement for hotels, transportation costs (e.g., Uber trips, gas), or other costs. All but one of the participants that mentioned this were aware of and reported receiving some reimbursement from the city.

“Well, I think they ought a at least helped out for people who had to go to a motel, didn't have family to go to. For the people who didn't have transportation, I think they ought to be compensated for that.” (PB11)

“I feel like if you had adequate receipts that were valid that showed the money that you spent, then you should be reimbursed for that.” (PB05)

One participant, who did not receive or report needing reimbursement said that “a sign of appreciation for the inconvenience” would have been nice. (PB19)

“My family has emergency funding. We are savers, so it wasn't a major impact, but a sign of appreciation for the inconvenience would have been nice to have received a reimbursement, and again, that didn't happen.” (PB19)

Information about the Health and Environmental Impact of the Fire

Several participants shared a desire for more information about the environmental and health risks and long-term impact of the fire.

“Communication and keeping us informed as a community, providing a place, somewhere where we can all meet away from that area to discuss and just keep us informed about the risk.” (PB07)

“...now, you have all these studies comin' out about air quality and water quality and, 'Oh. Well, we've been in it for a whole year now.' Now, it's just comin' about that these may be potential dangers. That's unsettling within itself....If they did have these air quality contraptions out to test the air, why weren't we notified that this was goin' on to give us a little bit of sense of ease? They said they were testin' the water. Where's the information? Now, the mayor is sayin' she's gonna get this now, but it wasn't then. It hasn't been going on, and we've been livin' in this for a year now.” (PB03)

Two participants referenced discussion at a community meeting about air quality results, and the desire to see a formal report, since they did not agree with the data that was presented.

“At that meeting that we were at—and I think it was the fire chief. He was somebody from—he represented the fire department. He was giving the numbers for air quality. I didn't agree with those numbers. [Laughs]...The air quality—it wasn't just bad here. It was bad all over the city.” (PB05)

"I had gotten a report that it was all clear, and Air Quality Control, they had been in. I'm like, 'Well, no. I don't agree with that.' I didn't, because I don't know if they were just doin' quality control in close proximity to where the plant is, but did they go out? How far out? Did they go out of the perimeter?" (PB01)

Latine Participants

When Latine participants were asked about resources that they desired from the city, they mostly mentioned financial assistance. Some participants were more specific, saying that they wanted money to be able to buy food. One Latine participant mentioned that they would have liked to have received more information to know if they have been exposed to "something serious." (PL11)

Additional Reimbursement or Compensation

The majority of participants mentioned wanting to receive more monetary assistance. Many of these participants mentioned that they wanted some sort of compensation for "negligence" from the plant. (See Injustice for more detail).

Some participants mentioned wanting monetary help to pay for food, because theirs went bad due to the fire.

"Necessary stuff like money in cash. But, at least, some groceries because around that time, everything started going bad." (PL06)

"Well, regarding groceries, I remember clearly that—I don't know. Actually, it was only the evening and night—the night that we weren't there, and I don't know what happened. There was no electricity that night. Maybe they disconnected it as a precaution. All the groceries went bad." (PL09)

Better Notification about Risks

One participant mentioned wanting more information about the gravity of the fire and the need to evacuate.

"We would like to get more information, have more information available, to be informed thoroughly. That, when something like this happens, please knock on our doors and tell us, 'Look, you're exposed to a huge problem. You're exposed to something serious. It's not just a simple fire. These are chemicals, and if you don't leave, it could have negative consequences for your health.' Things like that. I would like to be better informed and to be told what is going on." (PL11)

Employer Response to the Fire

Only a few participants spoke about how their employers responded to the Weaver Fertilizer Plant, with mixed experiences.

Black Participants

Only two Black participants spoke about their employer's response. One participant spoke about a negative experience, while another participant spoke about a positive experience.

One participant mentioned that their employer "didn't care if I [he] was out there in that chemical stuff." They were still expected to work and explained how their employer should have been okay with them not coming into work.

"They didn't care if I was out there in that chemical stuff. They wanted me to work. Then gettin' off the bus and comin' back and gettin' the chemicals. They don't know if I was carryin' somethin' there to where I work or not. All the businesses should've. You know what I'm sayin'? If you were stayin' in the area, they should've been okay with you not makin' it into work until everything is cleared out." (PB04)

Another participant mentioned that their job helped them set up hotel accommodations (PB06).

"I'm like, 'Gosh, it's so late at night. I'm tired. I just have to figure this out.' I called my job, and I basically told them what happened, and they said, 'Okay, why don't y'all come to Greensboro, and we'll book you a reservation for one of the hotels that we use?'" (PB06)

Latine Participants

A few Latine participants spoke about their employer response, and most of them had positive things to say about how they were supported; however, one participant said that they were fired since they could not come into work due to the fire (See Financial Impact of the Fire for more).

A few participants said that they had employers that were flexible, and that they were told that they could come to work when they were able to.

"...we reached an agreement with the person we worked for, the boss. We explained what was going on. He said, 'Not a problem. Come on over, even if you're a little late.' We told him that we were living somewhere else." (PL06)

"And at work, they found out about what had happened, and they gave us—they were more flexible, they understood what had happened. They said that we'd have to return after those three days were up, once we could get to our home. But we missed those two days, and of course you're nervous about losing your job." (PL12)

One participant went as far as to say that their employer was willing to pay for a hotel for them.

"I was at work when the human resources person arrived and asked, is your name, [name redacted]? I said, yes, a factory where you live caught fire, she said. I just want you to tell me, if you cannot get back in, we will pay a hotel for you to live in because you can't go back because the chemical is all over. Alright, I said, but the lady was very nice, she said, we're going to help you, we're going to pay for the hotel for you to stay there a week. In that time that should be solved. Because the fire was still going." (PL13)

Limitations

There were several limitations of the data collection for this project. First, interviews were completed over a year after the Weaver Fertilizer Plant fire, which may have contributed to recall bias. Second, while interviewers were racially or ethnically congruent with participants (a strength), they were not residents of the affected area, and their occupations (e.g., a radio host, clergy member, university student, etc.) may have impacted how participants responded. Additionally, one of the study Co-Investigators conducted several of the interviews with Black participants, and her role as a clinician and identity as White may have impacted how participants responded. Third, though interviewers received training in qualitative interviewing and all used the same interview guide, there was variation in how interviews were conducted. Some questions were asked differently or not at all depending on the interviewer, some interviewers asked questions in a leading manner, and there was variation in the extent of probing. These factors contributed to differences in the depth of data between participant groups and made comparison difficult in some instances.

There were also limitations of data management and analysis. Spanish language interviews were transcribed and translated by an external translation service, before being reviewed by a Spanish-speaking researcher for accuracy and authenticity. Despite following best practices for translation and review, some meaning may have been lost during this process. Additionally, the analysts did not have shared experiences with participants (see reflexivity statement). Conducting member checking with community members is a rigor step that could address this and help to validate the authenticity of the analytic findings.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Findings Mapped to Environmental Health Disparities Framework

EHD Domain (3)		Corresponding Report Section	Key Findings
Community Level Vulnerability	Neighborhood Resources	Neighborhood Advantages	Black participants described having a long history in their neighborhood and close ties with their neighbors.
	Community Stressors	Neighborhood Disadvantages	- Participants observed some crime in their neighborhood, as well as disrespectful behaviors of some neighbors. - Black participants described feeling that their neighborhood had been abandoned by the city.
	Structural Factors	Neighborhood Structural Characteristics	- Prior to the fire, Black and Latine participants lacked awareness of the nature of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant. - Participants identified waste facilities, other factories, a gas station, and a bar in their neighborhood.
	Environmental Hazards and Pollution	Environmental Pollution	- Before the fire, few participants observed any pollution; those that did described garbage-related pollution. - During the fire, the smoke clouds and smoke smell were most apparent. Pollution lingered for anywhere from a week to several months.
Individual Level Vulnerability	Individual Coping	Protective Measures	- Most participants evacuated during the fire and stayed with family and friends. Some participants took additional protective measures including staying inside their homes, sealing doors and windows, wearing face masks, or drinking only bottled water. - A few participants described their belief in God as protective of their mental health.
		Mental Health Impact (Belief in God as a Coping Mechanism)	
	Health Effects of Stressors	Physical Health Impact	- Many participants identified new or worsened respiratory symptoms as a result of the fire. Other health issues included headaches and eye, nose, or skin irritation. - Many participants described worsened anxiety as a result of the fire.
		Mental Health Impact	