

Chessie line neighbors ask to be relocated

When a railroad car carrying 9,000 gallons of hazardous sulfuric acid overturned last week in the Chessie switching yard in Fairfield, Mary Palmer looked out her front door, about 25 feet from the tracks, and thought how she and her seven children had narrowly escaped serious injury.

NEWS AMERICAN

"If that thing had broke open and kept rolling, it would have ended up right in my living room," Palmer said Sunday in a shrill, indignant tone. "Right in my living room."

Though the car did not break open and no one was hurt in the derailment, 700 public housing residents in Fairfield had to be evacuated from their homes until the car could be set back on the tracks.

MAY 14 1979

Now that the rails are in use again — carrying up to 500 loads of dangerous materials a day along the tracks directly past the barracks-style homes of Fairfield — some residents of the low-income housing complex say they want the city to move them out and close down the long-neglected housing development.

A group of Fairfield residents has arranged to meet today with City Councilman Joseph Murphy, D-6th, and the group's leaders say if Murphy doesn't promise to satisfy their requests, they will pack the City Council meeting tonight with Fairfield residents who want the city to move them out. Tenant leaders say as many as half of all Fairfield residents want to move.

"We want to know what the city can do to help us get out of here. How they're going to do it, when and where," said Juanita Davis of the 3400 block of Childs Court.

NEWS AMERICAN

Formerly a barracks for World War II industrial workers, the Fairfield public housing project is isolated from the rest of south Baltimore, surrounded on all sides by heavy industry.

To the southwest, huge rail cars rumble past, sometimes shaking pictures off walls and knocking parlor knickknacks to the floor. To the south and east, huge oil and chemical tanks tower over the community. To the north, mounds of scrap metal at a junkyard pile high above the horizon.

It is a community that often has been cited as one of the poorest, least-served areas in the city.

MAY 14 1979

The older sections of Fairfield only recently received sewers and street lights. The neighborhood school, Victory Elementary, is housed in a building that originally was built as a temporary structure. The nearest supermarket is four miles away.

NEWS AMERICAN

A heavy, rotting odor hangs constantly over the bleak, box-shaped brick buildings of the public housing project. Residents of the area have complained of skin rashes, headaches and respiratory problems. Some days the stench is so bad, neighbors say, they are forced to close their doors and windows and stay indoors.

MAY 14 1979

"It smells like something's died and been dead a long time," says Juanita Rhue of the 3400 block of Chessell Court. A Fairfield resident for four years, she says she is determined to push city offi-

cials into agreeing to relocate anyone in the project who wants to move.

"If Mayor (William Donald) Schaefer can put that aquarium downtown, he can help get us out of this place.

"It's a health hazard down here. Nobody wants to listen, but they're going to listen this time because we can take just so much. I'm ready to get out of here and somebody's got to listen.

Among their other worries, Rhue said Fairfield residents have been trying for

years to open a food store in the community, but have been unsuccessful because the area is zoned for heavy industry and the city Health Department refuses to allow a supermarket to open. 5-14-79

The Health Department's position on the store, Rhue said, contributed to the feeling among some residents that the complex should be shut down.

"If it's not safe enough for a can of food to be around," said Rhue, "how can it be safe for my kids?"

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