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I think that the “good neighbor agreements” presented in the Illsley article are fraught with danger for the communities living in close proximity to polluting industries. One of the first aspects of the agreements which proponents tout is that the agreements provide community members with access to important information. In the specific case studied by the article, the company, DERL, did not provide the promised information. While, in principle, additional information is beneficial to community members, I think that polluting companies could easily distort any information which they choose to distribute. Good neighbor agreements do not seem to contain any checks to ensure that the information released by the company is complete or accurate. Given the possible complexity of the information, it is also possible that, while the data may be complete and accurate, it is deceiving.

Proponents also claim that good neighbor agreements limit pollution to levels below national standards. While this may be true, it is unenforceable. It seems that so long as a specific company complies with EPA guidelines, the surrounding community is going to have only shaky legal ground to stand on if a company does not fulfill its part of a good neighbor agreement.

Furthermore, limited pollution is much different than no pollution. When the surrounding community becomes a partner in a good neighbor agreement, it legitimizes whatever pollution the company does produce. In doing so, I believe that the community defeats several of the main goals of environmental justice. One of the main principles of the EJ

movement is the equitable distribution of environmental harms. Good neighbor agreements, while they may reduce environmental harms slightly, convey that an inequitable distribution is acceptable. This implicit acceptance of inequitable distribution is especially harmful to the EJ movement because it is coming from the people and communities that the EJ movement strives to protect. Any community which accepts a good neighbor agreement harms not only itself with the pollution generated by the partner company, but everyone else fighting for environmental justice. In the future, other companies and opponents of environmental justice will be able to point to good neighbor agreements as examples of why the EJ movement is completely unnecessary.

Finally, I fear that good neighbor agreements may create an imbalanced partnership between communities and industry. From the way Illsley described the agreements, the surrounding communities come to depend on the polluting company for many things: emissions information, pollution reduction, emergency action procedures, and local employment. In contrast, the community does not have much to offer the company except “local goodwill.” If a good neighbor agreement falls apart, the surrounding residents have much to lose while the polluting company has very little to lose. The community may file a lawsuit if the company is violating any laws, but this is not a quick solution. In addition, the community may be suddenly left without any information about the polluter and without many local jobs. For all of these reasons, good neighbor agreements do not seem like a wise solution to the problem of environmental injustice.