

I belatedly happened across an interesting [paper](#) by Michael Greenstone. The Abstract summarizes the key finding:

We are the first to examine the effect of Superfund cleanups on infant health rather than focusing on proximity to a site. We study singleton births to mothers residing within 5km of a Superfund site between 1989-2003 in five large states. Our “difference in differences” approach compares birth outcomes before and after a site clean-up for mothers who live within 2,000 meters of the site and those who live between 2,000-5,000 meters of a site. We find that proximity to a Superfund site before cleanup is associated with a 20 to 25% increase in the risk of congenital anomalies.

That’s a striking finding: **a 20-25% increase in birth defects near Superfund sites prior to clean-up.**

[Greenstone](#) is an MIT economist who can’t be accused of being an environmentalist cheerleader — for example, his most [recent paper](#) argues that cook stoves may not deliver their promised benefits to the global poor or to the environment. So the Superfund finding has a certain degree of credibility.