Commentary: Barrio Logan has faced environmental racism for generations. We want justice.

An 18 wheeler made its way down 26th street in the Barrio Logan neighborhood of San Diego on Wednesday, August 27, 2019 despite the fact that it is posted for no truck traffic over 5 tons allowed. (John Gibbins/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Are you nervous to jog in your own neighborhood because you know deep breaths will bring life-shortening toxins into your lungs?

Do screeching train whistles startle you from sleep at 2 a.m.? Do 18-wheelers drive by your bedroom window at 5 a.m. and make your house rumble?

Do your children maneuver around semi-trucks making dangerous turns in front of them on their way to school?
Do you constantly worry about how limited your children’s lung capacity will be when they reach adulthood?

I do. All the time.

I live in Barrio Logan, a historically BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community. Beginning in the 1920s, Chicanx, Mexican, Black and Asian populations moved here, lured by bayfront industry jobs and affordable housing. Our community thrived — people canned tuna, brewed beers, built homes and churches, swam in the bay.

In the 1960s, racist land use policies began to decimate our neighborhood and endanger our families with pollution. Interstate 5 was constructed, tearing down homes and splitting the neighborhood into two. The San Diego-Coronado Bridge was built, clearing away more homes and bringing more traffic and toxic fumes. Then the community was rezoned from strictly residential to mixed-use, and San Diego's undesirable businesses were shuffled into Barrio Logan and away from White neighborhoods.

Auto shops, junkyards and warehouses were established next to homes and schools. Industries emitted carcinogenic fumes into children's bedroom windows. The Port of San Diego and shipbuilding industries expanded, polluting our waters and cutting off public access to the bay. Health hazards mounted and people got sick.

In 1970, the community began fighting back. They reclaimed the land under the Coronado Bridge and created Chicano Park. Since then, we’ve banned the use of toxic methyl bromide at the Port, banned chrome plating businesses in the neighborhood, established a truck route to keep diesel trucks off residential streets, built Cesar Chavez Park, and planted a community herb garden.

However, we are still the community most impacted by air pollution in our region. In fact, according to CalEnviroScreen, we are in the top 5% of most polluted communities in the entire state. We rank No. 1 in San Diego County for diesel particulate pollution and overall pollution burden, and cancer risk is in the 80th to 96th percentile nationally. More needs to be done.

Because we are and have always been a majority BIPOC community, our wellness was repeatedly ignored when land-use decisions were made. We were deemed disposable and made to inhale the rest of the city’s pollution at the expense of our lives. In this time of reckoning, city and county officials need to advance policy that remedies the environ-
mental racism Barrio Logan has long endured. We know what those policies are because we’ve been fighting for them for generations.

**Read more here:**

We need an updated Barrio Logan Community Plan! The city must adopt a plan that separates industry and polluters from residences, and protects the culture and affordability of our community.

We need clean air! The Port of San Diego must make the leap to zero-emission heavy duty trucks and adopt a Clean Air Plan.

We need street calming measures to keep trucks from violating the truck route and spewing diesel near our homes and schools.

We need more green space! Build Boston Avenue Linear Park and rehabilitate Chollas Creek. Support Chicano Park preservation and the Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center.

We need much, much more deed-restricted and naturally occurring affordable housing to preserve our culture and history.

I live in Barrio Logan — not only because it’s where I can afford to rent a three-bedroom house. I live here because I am a poet and Barrio is mecca for Chicanx artists. Because when I walk into my favorite restaurant, I hear my mother’s music in the air and see her favorite dishes on the menu. Because in the evenings, I hear drums coming from Chicano Park and smell copal in the air. When I walk down the street to enjoy a craft beer, I taste cinnamon in the stout; I see myself painted on the walls and feel my neighbor’s warm hand on my back. I live here because I am a community organizer and political activist, and Barrio Logan is a longstanding pillar of resistance among my people.

I know that living here will shorten my life and that of my children. I’m angry and I’m devastated for my children and my neighbors — but we aren’t going anywhere. Barrio Logan residents deserve a safe place to live, work and play — we deserve environmental justice. Y la lucha continua.

**Corrales** is a policy advocate with Environmental Health Coalition and on the leadership council of People Over Profits San Diego. Her poetry has been published in Acentos Review, *Anacua Literary Arts Journal* and *Azahares Literary Magazine*. 