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Houston religious leaders protest concrete crushing plant near hospital

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston joins local organizations in sending 1,600-plus letters of opposition to governor's desk.

By [Eric Killelea](#) Feb 24, 2024

In early November 2023, 73 percent of Harris County voters [approved a \\$2.5 billion long-term bond issue](#) to build a new Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital on the existing campus in the [Kashmere Gardens](#) neighborhood in northeast Houston. Plans also included expanding the current facility to include mental health and outpatient services.

Ultimately, the move would create the county's third Level I trauma center and its first outside of the Texas Medical Center, [according to Harris Health System](#), marking a significant upgrade, as the current LBJ Hospital is the state's busiest Level 3 trauma center serving more than 80,000 annual emergency patients.

But in January, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) approved a permit for a concrete crushing facility near the LBJ Hospital campus. That news has met pushback from nearby residents and religious leaders, who are calling on Gov. Greg Abbott to reverse the permit and effectively shut down the project they say would impose health risks on both hospital patients and community members.

"The concrete crushing plant is an absolutely absurdity," Sister Maureen O'Connell of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston said Friday. "It's just an easy, quick way to make some money."

Texas Coastal Materials LLC applied for an air quality standard permit in July 2023 to build the plant at 5675 Kelley St, as [reported by Julian Gill of the Houston Chronicle](#). At the time, TCEQ officials noted that the permit requirements met national air quality standards.

However, O'Connell [a former Chicago police officer turned Archdiocese's director for the Secretariat of Social Concerns](#), said the concrete crushing facility set to be built in an industrial

site about 1,500 feet from the LBJ Hospital's emergency room entrance would introduce dust and other pollutants to Kashmere Gardens, a neighborhood where around 29 percent of residents [live below the federal poverty line](#), and are at greater risk of health disparities. O'Connell noted that the TCEQ admitted it last reviewed those air quality standards in 2008. "This just doesn't make sense," O'Connell said. "Why are we going to do this to people who are already at risk?"

O'Connell said numerous churches located near LBJ Hospital are opposed to the concrete crushing facility, including the St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church on Dabney Street, near the medical campus. While waiting for Abbott's response, the archdiocese partnered with Harris Health System and the Metropolitan Organization of Houston, an association of local churches, in sending 1,600 letters of opposition to the governor's desk in Austin. Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee said his office would take legal action after the state agency approved the permit.

At a press conference last week, Pastor Father Martin Eke of St. Francis said it was "unconscionable" for Texas Coastal Materials to build the concrete crushing facility there.

"This community already bears the burden of too many pollutant-heavy industries," Eke said, [according to Joy Smith of Houston Public Media](#). "For them to be saddling us with yet another one, this close to where some of the poorest and sickest seek medical attention—it's a slap in the face."