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Community Sentinel Awards come to the Gulf South for the first time tonight

Five frontline leaders will be honored in New Orleans, including Lake Charles advocate Loice Malvo. The ceremony streams free online at 6:30 p.m. Central.

NEW ORLEANS, La. — The Community Sentinel Award for Environmental Stewardship honors individuals from across the United States who demonstrate extraordinary courage and commitment in their efforts to protect their communities from environmental injustice. Established in 2015, the award recognizes the pivotal role of individuals championing change on the front lines of the environmental movement, and specifically honors those who work to stop the harms of the fossil fuel industry on their communities and their environment. Tonight, five people will receive the 2026 awards at a ceremony in New Orleans that will also stream online for free.

"This year we will be gathering in Louisiana for the first time to further strengthen the connective tissue of the environmental justice movement," said Shannon Smith, executive director of FracTracker Alliance. "The Sentinel Awards are a time to celebrate and lift each other up. Our communities face many challenges in the face of powerful, polluting industries. The Sentinel Awards remind us that when we confront these challenges together, we are all stronger."

The Gulf South has long borne the brunt of pollution and toxic industry. It is also home to leaders who have done the seemingly impossible, defeating some of the largest corporations in the world to protect the health and well-being of their communities.

"In the Gulf South, we have an incredible heritage and culture that we are always itching to share with everybody. But unfortunately, a lot of people know us because of the pollution that's in our area," said Jo Banner, founder and director of The Descendants Project in St. John the Baptist Parish, who will give tonight's keynote. "I think it's a real sign of just how far we've come as a movement to host us in a place that has been known for so much hurt. We can also have it to represent healing."

One of this year's five Sentinels is Loice Malvo of Lake Charles, Louisiana. Malvo, who is 80, was born and raised in Louisiana and has spent the last 40 years fighting dirty and polluting industries in the southwest corner of the state, a region crowded with petrochemical plants and, more recently, LNG export terminals. She founded Fisherville Environmental Action Now after toxic chemical train derailments affected her family and community. She has opposed a pipeline near an elementary school and helped residents who were living on a dump site move to cleaner, safer housing.

"I never thought that I would ever see this day of being awarded for my work," Malvo said. "We have no air monitors. We have no one come to see about us. So we have to see about us. We have to stand up, come together, and fight back. Because the power is in the people."

The other 2026 Community Sentinels are:

- **Zulene Mayfield** of Chester, Pennsylvania, chairperson of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living
- **Eboni Neal Cochran** of Louisville, Kentucky, co-director of Rubbertown Emergency ACTion (REACT)
- **Qiyam Ansari** of Pennsylvania's Mon Valley, executive director of Valley Clean Air Now, who receives the Emerging Leader Award
- **Karen Feridun** of Berks County, Pennsylvania, co-founder of the Better Path Coalition and No False Climate Solutions PA, who receives the Community Choice Award

Twenty people were nominated for this year's awards. The judges were Andrea Pierce of the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition, a 2024 Community Sentinel; Natasha DeJarnett of the University of Louisville; Jennifer Hadayia of Air Alliance Houston; and Mike Schade of Toxic-Free Future.

The Sentinel Awards are presented by FracTracker Alliance and Halt the Harm Network. This year's host committee also includes The Descendants Project, Habitat Recovery Project, Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania, Crude Accountability, the Natural History Museum and the Center for Organizing.

Tonight's ceremony includes music by New Orleans musician Bruce "Sunpie" Barnes, a land acknowledgement by Chief Lora Ann Chaisson, Principal Chief of the United Houma Nation, and the keynote by Banner. Emin Bayramli will speak about his father, Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu, an economist and human rights defender arrested in Azerbaijan in 2023. The Sentinel Awards also honor people the environmental justice movement has lost in the past two years, in a segment led by Pastor Gregory Manning of Broadmoor Community Church.

How to watch: The online program begins at 6:30 p.m. Central (7:30 p.m. Eastern). It is free. Register at luma.com/j4io1mpa. The full program is at fractracker.org/sentinels-program.

Press: To attend in person or to interview one of the Sentinels, contact Sam Law at the email or phone number above.

About FracTracker Alliance: FracTracker Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that maps, analyzes, and communicates the risks of oil, gas, and petrochemical development. To learn more, visit fractracker.org or connect with us @FracTracker.

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