



Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Environmental Justice Frequently Asked Questions



National Center for Environmental Health
Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is environmental justice?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, culture, education, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal environmental programs and policies.”

The EPA definition goes on to say “Meaningful Involvement means that:

- a. potentially affected community residents have an appropriate opportunity to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environment and/or health;
- b. the public’s contribution can influence the regulatory agency’s decision;
- c. the concerns of all participants involved will be considered in the decision-making process; and
- d. the decision-makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.”

For more information, visit <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/index.html>.

2. How have federal agencies addressed environmental justice issues?

President William Clinton signed Federal Executive Order 12898 on February 11, 1994. The Executive Order, titled “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations” focuses on environmental and human health conditions of minority and low-income populations. The Order aims to achieve environmental protection while helping federal agencies implement activities, programs, and policies where disparities are found between the overall disease and survival rates among minority and/or low-income population, and/or Indian tribes when compared to the general population, as a result of environmental exposures.

From this Order, an Interagency Working Group on environmental justice was created (<http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/interagency>). This group involves 12 federal agencies that, along with the White House, work together to reduce disparities between minority and non-minority communities concerning exposure to environmental hazards.

Executive Order 12898 says that:

- government should improve ways to review and reduce the growing number of exposures
- studies should include culturally different areas where people work and live
- data should be collected and analyzed that compares the differences in environmental and human health risks among groups identified by race, national origin, or income
- minority and low-income communities should be able to participate in matters relating to human health and the environment and should have access to public information
- minority and low-income populations should submit recommendations to federal agencies for incorporating principles of environmental justice into agency programs or policies.

Read the full executive order at <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12898.pdf>.

3. What is a minority population?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander are racial and ethnic minority groups.

Read the federal bulletin about standards for classifying federal data on race and ethnicity at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/bulletins/b00-02.html>.

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4. What is a low-income population?

The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income levels that vary by family size and makeup to define low-income. If family's total income falls below the relevant income level (<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html>), then the family is classified as being below the poverty level.

The Census Bureau updates poverty figures once a year in a publication called U.S. Census Bureau Population Reports on Income and Poverty. For example, the average poverty level for a family of four was \$20,614 in 2006 and \$21,203 in 2007.

This grouping is important in environmental justice because many low-income communities or groups of persons living near each other may have common harmful environmental exposures or effects.

5. What is the relationship between environmental justice and childhood lead poisoning?

Environmental justice says that no group of people should bear an uneven burden of harmful environmental results. Environmental injustice occurs when environmental effects have a harsh impact on minority and/or poor populations that is greater than the harsh impact on the general population. Environmental justice finds and deals with inequalities in environmental exposure to control and reduce the effects of harmful exposure.

Progress has been made in reducing children's blood-lead levels in the United States. However, average blood-lead levels remain unequally high among non-Hispanic Black children when compared to Mexican-American and non-Hispanic White children. This is an example of a disproportionate disparity.

Risk factors for higher lead levels (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/nhanes/nh3data.htm>) include older housing, poverty, and being non-Hispanic Black. Many children with high blood lead levels are also unequally affected by other environmental issues in their communities.

6. How is a disproportionate disparity determined?

A disproportionate disparity exists if differences are found between the overall disease and survival rates of a minority, low-income population, or Indian tribe when compared to the general population, as a result of environmental exposures.

Here are some factors that may contribute to environmental disparities:

- cumulative or multiple exposures to environmental hazards
- low social and economic status
- limited access to community resources
- land-use patterns
- quality of and access to health care
- substandard housing
- crowding
- community stress
- residential segregation
- lack of resources such as grocery stores with healthy foods.

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7. What does the CDC Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program do to work toward environmental justice?

CDC's Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program is focused on primary prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>). That means CDC takes action to avoid injury and death from lead poisoning. To do this, CDC works in areas where children are at highest risk of exposure to high levels of environmental lead. CDC works to control or eliminate lead sources before children are exposed. CDC is expanding its role to address many home-related health conditions while also working toward the goal of eliminating childhood lead poisoning. CDC and its partners plan to focus on housing factors that may help to reduce disproportionate health issues such as increased risk for asthma, injuries, and homelessness among low-income and minority populations. CDC will work with environmental justice organizations and consult with environmental justice experts to communicate how healthy homes are an environmental justice issue. CDC is using scientific policies that include environmental justice as an operating principle.

8. How does environmental justice relate to healthy homes?

Childhood lead poisoning is one of many negative health conditions related to poor home conditions. Many low-income and minority groups live in poorly built or substandard homes. These groups often do not have the opportunity to live in healthy environments that promote a safe quality of life. Children living in lead-safe housing are over 4 times less likely to have higher blood-lead levels than children living in homes with lead hazards. Removing disparities in access to healthy, safe, and affordable homes is essential to improving the quality of life for minority and low-income populations. This creates sustainable communities and supports the principles of environmental justice.

Read more about housing and childhood lead poisoning from the American Journal of Public Health article "Effectiveness of Housing Policies to Reduce Children's Lead Exposure." Brown MJ, Gardner J, Sargent J, Swartz K, Hu H, and Timperi R. c. *AJPH*, 2001;91:621–624.

9. How do environmental justice organizations work together with CDC's Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program?

Environmental justice organizations work together with state Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Programs (CLPPP) through project officers at CDC's Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program. Project officers provide help to state and local Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes Programs. They also provide information about state and local environmental justice organizations, and assist those partnerships.

10. How can a state Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program find out about environmental justice organizations in its community?

CDC's Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program has a directory of more than 400 environmental justice organizations that help community groups solve their environmental concerns and issues. This directory is the 2000 Edition People of Color Environmental Groups Directory. Lead poisoning prevention project officers will help state CLPPPs find environmental justice organizations with which they can partner. More information can be found in the "**Resources**" section at the end of this fact sheet.

11. How can a state Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program identify communities with environmental justice concerns? Do certain risk factors or characteristics exist?

Many low-income and minority communities live in areas with environmental hazards driven by cultural, social, and economic conditions. State CLPPPs can usually identify communities with environmental justice concerns by looking

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for factors such as unequal level of substandard housing in a poor area. CLPPPs can also determine when residents in a low-income or minority community are exposed to environmental hazards at levels that are greater than those of wealthier nearby communities. Concerns may develop into a community effort that focuses on important environmental issues, such as childhood lead poisoning. In many cases, community organizations try to partner with state CLPPPs. State CLPPPs are encouraged to reach out to communities so community members can voice their concerns.

12. Does CDC provide funding for state Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Programs to address environmental justice issues? May these state programs hire staff to address environmental justice issues?

CDC's lead program does not provide specific funding for environmental justice partnerships. However, state CLPPPs may use CDC funding for projects that are in line with laws and regulations for primary prevention, health education, and other activities that contribute to childhood lead poisoning prevention, including partnerships with environmental justice organizations. EPA's Environmental Justice grant program provides financial assistance for eligible organizations to address environmental justice issues and build partnerships that empower, educate, and provide outreach to the community.

13. Is the National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (NCEH/ATSDR) addressing environmental justice issues?

Yes. NCEH/ATSDR addresses environmental justice issues. CDC and ATSDR are dedicated "to promoting health and quality of life by preventing and controlling disease, injury and disability for everyone, especially those populations that are disproportionately affected by threats to health and safety." This agency goal is in line with environmental justice principles. NCEH/ATSDR will work with other federal, state, and local governments to address environmental injustice issues.

Resources for more information on environmental justice issues¹

Federal agencies

Department of Health and Human Services

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
 - » Office of Minority Health <http://www.cdc.gov/omhd/default.htm>
 - » ATSDR Office of Tribal Affairs <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tribal/>
 - » Minority Initiatives Coordinating Committee <http://www.cdc.gov/omhd/CAMICC/CAMICC.htm>
- Office of Minority Health <http://www.omhrc.gov/>
- Indian Health Service <http://www.ihs.gov/>
- National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Centers for Population Health and Health Disparities <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/supported/centers/disparities/>

Department of Transportation

- Environmental Justice <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/ej2.htm>
- Office of Civil Rights Environmental Justice Program <http://www.dotcr.ost.dot.gov/asp/ej.asp>

Department of Justice

- Environment and Natural Resources <http://www.usdoj.gov/enrd/>

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Environmental Protection Agency

- Office of Environmental Justice <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/>
- Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) Program <http://www.epa.gov/tri/>

Department of Housing and Urban Development

- Environmental Justice <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/environment/review/justice.cfm>

Disclaimer of External Links: Links to nonfederal organizations are provided solely as a service to our users and do not constitute an endorsement of this organization by CDC or the federal government, and none should be inferred. CDC is not responsible for the content of the individual organization Web pages found.

Tribal resources

- Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium – Division of Environmental Health and Engineering <http://www.anthctoday.org/dehe/index.html>
- Alaska Native Science Commission <http://www.nativescience.org/>
- National Indian Health Board <http://www.nihb.org/>
- National Tribal Environmental Council <http://www.ntec.org/>
- Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency <http://www.navajonationepa.org/>
- United South and Eastern Tribes <http://www.usetinc.org/>

Community resources

- Clark Atlanta University / Environmental Justice Resource Center <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu>
- People of Color Environmental Groups Directory, EJRC 2000 <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/poc2000.htm>
- Deep South Center for Environmental Justice <http://www.dscej.org/>
- Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law Environment & Justice Center <http://www.tsulaw.edu/>
- Florida A&M University Center for Environmental Equity & Justice <http://www.famu.edu/index.cfm?environmentalscience&CEEJ>
- West Harlem Environmental Action Inc <http://www.weact.org>
- University of Michigan School of Natural Resources & Environment http://www.snre.umich.edu/about_snre
- National Hispanic Environmental Council <http://www.nheec.org/>
- Environmental Law Institute <http://www.eli.org/index.cfm>

Faith community

- National Religious Partnership for the Environment – Environmental Justice http://www.nrpe.org/issues/justice_intro01.htm
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – Environmental Justice Program <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/>
- United Church Of Christ – Environmental Justice Ministries <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/>
- Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987 - 2007: A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries <http://www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs/toxic20.pdf>

Environmental justice networks

- Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) <http://www.ienearth.org/>
- Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) <http://www.apen4ej.org/>
- Farmworker Economic and Environmental Network <http://www.farmworkers.org/fwspage.html>
- Southwest Network for Environmental & Economic Justice (SNEEJ) <http://www.sneej.org/>
- Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN) <http://old.weact.org/nejn/>
- National Black Environmental Justice Network (NBEJN) <http://www.nbejn.org/>

Other Resources

- Natural Resources Defense Council – Environmental Justice <http://www.nrdc.org/ej/default.asp>
- Scorecard – A Pollution Information Site <http://scorecard.goodguide.com/community/ej-index.tcl>

1Websites for resources accessed July 2011.