

Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Environmental Justice Frequently Asked Questions

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>.

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.

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.

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.





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/>

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>

¹Websites for resources accessed July 2011.