

What is Environmental Justice?

Every Marylander has the right to breathe clean air and drink clean water, but too often pollution is concentrated in low income and non-white communities.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” – DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Environmental Protection Agency Definition of Environmental Justice:

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

History of the Movement

During the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King traveled to Memphis to help striking Black sanitation workers obtain better working conditions and pay. **Civil Rights leaders like Dr. King fought for all people to have safe places to live, learn, work, play, and pray—with the knowledge that access to these rights was not equal.** The American environmental justice movement continues this legacy, guided in major part by Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, with defining moments that include:

- In the 1970s African-American residents filed the first lawsuits on environmental discrimination against companies who built landfills in their neighborhoods in Houston.
- In the early 1980s residents of Warren County, North Carolina fought against the construction of a polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) landfill in their rural, predominantly African-American community.
- By the late 1980s, two groundbreaking studies from the U.S. General Accounting Office and The Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ provided evidence that supported the claims of grassroots EJ activists.
- In 1991, The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was held and attendees outlined 17 guiding principles.
- President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898 in 1994, ordering all federal agencies to identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations.
- EPA released their EJ 2020 Action Agenda in November 2016, outlining strategies for addressing environmental and public health disparities throughout the nation.



Seeking to learn more? Contact:

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Achieving Environmental Justice *(Statement adopted from Dr. Bunyan Bryant's work)*

Environmental Justice is only achievable when people can realize their highest potential, without experiencing the 'isms' (racism, sexism, etc.) Communities that promote environmental justice are communities where both cultural and biological diversity are respected and highly revered and where distributive justice prevails.

Examples of Documented Environmental Justice Findings in Maryland (Government & Academia)

- 1999 – Maryland Advisory Council on Environmental Justice identified disproportionate environmental burdens throughout Maryland¹
- 2005 – greater cancer risk documented in poor and in African-American census tracts²
- 2007 – after years of lead poisoning disparities, Baltimore is the first city in the nation to adopt demolition standards aimed at suppressing lead dust³
- 2014 – many populations suffer from a double disparity: living near a polluting facility and far from health promoting infrastructure⁴

Environmental Justice, Health and the Economy

- A person's ZIP code is a much more powerful predictor of health than their genetic code, especially in those communities and populations experiencing the greatest health disparities.^{5,6}
- In Baltimore County, low-income households face a 54 percent greater risk of exposure to toxic chemical releases, a 16 percent greater risk of cancer from air pollution and far greater concentrations of highly polluted sites per square mile than those in high-income neighborhoods.⁷
- Treatment for asthma and other health problems can be costly to the sufferer and to taxpayers. According to the CDC, Asthma cost about \$56 billion in 2007 due to medication, lost work days, and early deaths. It costs the U.S. an average of \$3,300 per person every year (average from 2002-2007).⁸
- In 2009, Maryland spent \$99.2 million on asthma-related hospital visits was \$99.2 million, and about 1/3 of that cost was incurred solely in Baltimore. An average emergency room visit in Baltimore for asthma is about \$826 and the average cost of hospitalization is \$7,818.⁹
- Taken together, the disproportionate share of social and environmental costs borne by low-income households and their relative lack of access to these amenities amplifies the effects of income inequality and lowers quality of life for all as long as the inequality divide keeps growing.¹⁰



Case studies have demonstrated that early community engagement is more cost-effective in the long run. Economic growth should be net positive for the community. Community members should not have to choose between having a good job and having good health.

¹ Maryland Advisory Council on Environmental Justice Report. November 1999. Retrieved from http://www.mde.state.md.us/programs/CrossMedia/EnvironmentalJustice/EJImplementationinMaryland/Pages/Programs/MultimediaPrograms/Environmental_Justice/implementation/ej_reports.aspx

² Apelberg, BJ, Buckley, TJ, and White, RH. Socioeconomic and Racial Disparities in Cancer Risk from Air Toxics in Maryland. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 113(6), 693-699.

³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The East Baltimore Revitalization Initiative: Responsible Redevelopment. June 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/resources/responsible-demolition-a-baltimore-case-study-with-national-implications/>.

⁴ Wilson, S, et al. Being Overburdened and Medically Underserved: Assessment of this Double Disparity for Populations in the State of Maryland. *Environmental Health*. 13(1).

⁵ <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/zip-code-better-predictor-of-health-than-genetic-code/>

⁶ Slade-Sawyer, P. (2014). Is Health Determined by Genetic Code or Zip Code? Measuring the Health of Groups and Improving Population Health. *North Carolina Medical Journal*, 75(6), 394-397.

⁷ GoodGuide. 2011. Distribution of Environmental Burdens in Baltimore County. Retrieved from http://scorecard.goodguide.com/community/ej-summary.tcl?fips_county_code=24005&backlink=cap-co#map.

⁸ CDC Vital Signs: Asthma in the U.S. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/asthma/>.

⁹ Maryland Asthma Control Program. Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Jurisdiction Profile: Asthma in Baltimore City. August 2011. Available from http://phpa.dhmm.maryland.gov/mch/documents/asthma_control/Profile_BaltimoreCity.pdf

¹⁰ Talberth, John. Closing the Inequality Divide: A Strategy for Fostering Genuine Progress in Maryland. March 2013.