

Environmental Justice

*“It really boils down to this:
that all life is interrelated.
We are all caught in an
inescapable network of
mutuality, tied into a
single garment of destiny.
Whatever affects one
directly, affects us all
indirectly.”*

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
December, 1967





Envi•ron•men'tal Jus•tice—

fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people—regardless of race, ethnicity, income or education level—in environmental decision-making. Environmental Justice programs promote the protection of human health and the environment, empowerment via public participation, and the dissemination of relevant information to inform and educate affected communities. EM Environmental Justice programs are designed to build and sustain community capacity for meaningful participation for all stakeholders in DOE host communities.

www.em.doe.gov/public/envjust

The President issued Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” on February 11, 1994. It challenges each Federal agency to make environmental justice an integral part of its mission:

- to focus attention of federal agencies on the human health and environmental conditions in minority communities and low-income communities with the goal of achieving environmental justice (EJ)
- to foster non-discrimination in federal programs that substantially affect human health or the environment
- to give minority communities and low-income communities greater opportunities for public participation in, and access to public information on matters relating to human health and the environment.

EM’s Role

The Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Environmental Management (EM) is fully committed to promoting environmental justice and public involvement in the EM program. The overall goal is to create an open and accessible decision-making process, resulting in decisions that are:

- Technically and economically feasible
- Environmentally sound
- Health and safety conscious
- Designed to address public values and concerns
- Readily implemented.



EM’s Strategy

Commitment

- To identify and address DOE programs, policies, and activities that may have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on low-income communities and communities of color
- To enhance the credibility and public trust of DOE, by making public participation a fundamental component of all program operations, planning activities, and decision-making
- To improve research and data collection methods relating to human health and the environment of low-income communities and communities of color; by incorporating full characterizations of risks
- To integrate effective environmental justice principles, as appropriate, with activities and processes related to human health and the environment.



“We are bolstering public confidence through ongoing communication, stakeholder involvement, tribal consultation, and community outreach.”

–Melinda Downing, *Environmental Justice Program Manager*

Fulfilling the Commitment

EM is fulfilling its commitment to environmental justice through projects designed to build and sustain meaningful participation for all stakeholders in DOE host communities. EM is providing citizens with ready access to computers and the Internet, exposure to environmental cleanup information, and the means to attain available technical assistance. EM is creating community technology centers that provide electronic access to interested stakeholders. In addition, EM is conducting training workshops to equip citizens with the knowledge required to use these tools effectively.

EM has established direct communication links with Hispanic communities and organizations to ensure their participation in cleanup decisions and activities. EM has designed a Hispanic Heritage exhibit with explanatory brochures in English and Spanish, developed other bilingual publications, and designed the EM Spanish language homepage. EM also participates in Hispanic conferences to disseminate information on its policies and programs directly to community leaders nationwide.

EM is fulfilling its unique legal commitment to Indian communities by working with Tribal Nations on a government-to-government basis. The DOE American Indian Policy provides managers with a framework for interaction with Tribes as specific programs are implemented. In addition, possible impacts on cultural resources and Native American lifestyles are carefully considered and addressed in environmental impact statements for major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.

EM collaborates with other federal agencies in its effort to boost citizen involvement in the cleanup process. EM is a partner with EPA and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to assist the National Coalition for People of Color and Disenfranchised Communities in conducting environmental health summits. These summits bring people of color and disenfranchised communities together in a dialogue with federal agencies on ways to ensure meaningful and effective public involvement in the environmental justice process.



Accomplishments

Community Capacity-Building

EM has developed a community capacity-building project in partnership with Howard University in Washington, DC, to provide disadvantaged citizens with electronic access to computers and the Internet. By creating community technology centers and providing excess DOE computers, this project offers citizens the opportunity to explore environmental cleanup information and obtain technical assistance using internet-based information sources and computer-based information systems and models.

This community capacity-building project also conducts workshops that offer training in basic electronic communication skills. Environmental Justice and Public Participation Through Electronic Access workshops offer training in the following areas:

- Basic computer use
- Internet research
- Using community technology centers for knowledge and profit
- Using geographic information systems (GIS) for community decision-making
- Assessment and risk communication tools.

Another activity initiated through the EM/Howard University partnership involves working with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other environmental professionals to ensure community stakeholders receive the best technical assistance available. This puts stakeholders in a position to make sure environmental decisions are made in the best interests of the community.

Partnership with the National Conference of Black Mayors

EM is a partner with the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc. (NCBM) to build the capacity to effectively participate in environmental

management decision-making processes within NCBM communities. The NCBM is a non-profit, non-partisan service organization headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. It provides management and technical assistance to black mayors.

"Computers for Black Mayors" Initiative

The NCBM, the National Urban Internet (non-profit organization), the General Services Administration (GSA), and the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Energy (DOE/EM) have also partnered in the "Computers for Black Mayors" initiative to ensure that all NCBM member mayors, nearly 500, have Internet ready computers. Computers are donated from the agencies' excess inventory. Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide on-line training.

Augusta Brownfields Commission

In Augusta, Georgia, DOE and EPA collaborated to build community capacity for environmental decision-making by creating a community technology center. Howard University Urban Environment Institute provided technical assistance. Paine College provided Internet access to the center. Once the center was in operation, Howard University, EPA, and DOE provided training sessions that included basic computer operations, GIS, risk assessment, risk management, and other subjects such as grants research and proposal writing. With the skills gained through this training and the support of the Mayor of Augusta, the community was able to draft, submit and receive an EPA Brownfields Pilot grant.

DOE continues to work with the Augusta Brownfields Commission as a member of the Augusta Brownfields Partnership to assist the community in achieving its revitalization goals.



Savannah River Public Participation

EM partners with the DOE Savannah River Operations Office, Savannah State University, Citizens For Environmental Justice, and EPA to build the capacity of communities near the Savannah River site to foster an understanding of the decision-making processes of the site relative to environmental cleanup and future missions. The local communities are given access to federal and university experts to gain information, increase knowledge and receive technical assistance.

Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice

DOE collaborates with other Federal agencies as part of a Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice. The purpose of this Interagency Working Group (IWG) is to coordinate federal agency environmental justice efforts and develop a dialogue and strategy for future environmental justice projects in communities around federal sites. Federal agencies represented on the Working Group include DOE; EPA; the Departments of Justice, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, Labor, and Transportation; the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; the Center for Disease Control; and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Furthering EM's Commitment

The commitment of EM to environmental justice initiatives is ongoing. EM continues to pursue an integrated approach by all its components to:

- Formulate clear strategies for environmental justice
- Emphasize community participation and empowerment of stakeholders and communities
- Encourage modified approaches to structure models for occupational and environmental science research of high-risk communities and workers
- Embrace interagency coordination to ensure environmental justice
- Heighten the sensitivity of DOE managers and staff to environmental justice responsibilities.

EM continues to give community groups the tools they need to participate more effectively in environmental decision-making. When citizens are active in environmental decision-making, and have a working knowledge of the process and substance of an issue, they can better protect themselves and produce decisions that reduce conflict and protect resources. Environmental justice means that all people who are impacted by a decision have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in a process that concludes with an action. With more meaningful public involvement and opportunities for a dialogue among parties, affected communities and agencies will be able to make more just and cost-effective decisions.



For More Information

DOE Center for Environmental Management (CEMI)

800.736.3282

e-mail: eminfo@cemi.org

EM Spanish Language Homepage

www.em.doe.gov/public/spanish

DOE American Indian Policy

www.ci.doe.gov/indianbk.pdf

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