



Environmental Justice

People of Color and Disenfranchised Communities Environmental Health Network (the Coalition)

Since 1997, Federal agencies, including the Department of Energy, have been working with the Coalition to respond to the recommendations in their Implementation Plan. The recommendations and plan describe activities which are aimed at building more positive relationships with agency officials and building the means for community empowerment to seek effective redress of the problems which continue to plague such communities.

- **Background**
- **Partnership Activities**

Background: In May 1997, the People of Color and Disenfranchised Communities Environmental Health Summit was held in Waveland, MS. This Summit was a major landmark event in bringing together people of color and disenfranchised communities to dialogue with federal health agencies. At that Summit, it was recognized that the U.S. Government has actively developed nuclear weapons facilities for approximately 50 years and that many individual citizens, environmental organizations, and advocacy groups believe that DOE operations of the nuclear weapons complex have caused adverse health effects and that these facilities continue to threaten human health and the environment. As a result of the Summit, the participants generated an "Implementation Plan." The plan described activities which were aimed at building more positive relationships with agency officials and building the means for community empowerment to seek effective redress of the problems which continue to plague their communities. Subsequent to that Summit, Federal Agencies have been involved with the Coalition to provide responses to the 17 recommendations from the Implementation Plan. "The Summit was the result of many years of work by people of color living near federal facilities managed by the Department of Energy and Department of Defense. The actual seeds for the Summit were planted in 1993 at a small gathering held in Chimayo, New Mexico, where the idea was discussed and a decision made to begin the initial work. Collaborative efforts were immediately launched by the Citizens for Environmental Justice (CFEJ), the Rural Alliance for Military Accountability, Tribal Environmental Watch Alliance and the New Mexico Alliance to secure resources to organize a conference for People of Color to deal with the health issues associated with the nuclear weapons production chain. "The significant participation of People of Color in the 1994 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Workshop on Community, Tribal, and Labor Involvement in Public Health Service Activities at Department of Energy Facilities provided the opportunity for further expansion of the Summit. From the 1994 Workshop, a People of Color caucus met with Dr. David Satcher, Executive Director of CDC, to discuss the possibility of his agency sponsoring a health conference focusing on People of Color and Disenfranchised Communities. The proposal was approved and Mike Sage of the Radiation Division was given the management and program responsibility for implementing the Summit in collaboration with a planning committee. A major decision was made early on to expand the concept to include disenfranchised communities as a part of the targeted constituency for the gathering." - *1997 People of Color and Disenfranchised Communities Environmental Health Summit Report, August 1997.*

Current Partnership Activities: Since 1997, Federal agencies, including the Department of Energy, have been working with the Coalition to respond to the recommendations in the Implementation Plan. The recommendations and plan describe activities which are aimed at building more positive relationships with agency officials and building the means for community

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empowerment to seek effective redress of the problems which continue to plague these communities. In conjunction with EPA's NEJAC meetings being held in Washington, DC and Atlanta, GA, the Coalition met with Federal Agency representatives on December 2, 1999 and May 23, 2000 to further the partnership building process. The Department participated, along with the following Federal agencies: the National Center for Environmental Health (CDC/NCEH), Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA Headquarters and Region 4).

The Federal Agencies and the Coalition agreed that the meetings were an opportunity to dialogue on common issues and concerns. All parties agreed to conduct these kinds of interactions as a new way of doing business, to keep communication ongoing, to find ways to partner and build relationships between the communities and Federal Agencies.