



Environmental Justice & Your Municipality

- Local stewardship
- Empowering municipalities
- Meeting our communities' needs
- Protecting health and the environment



New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Environmental Justice Program
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James E. McGreevey, Governor
Bradley M. Campbell, Commissioner

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Environmental Justice Program encourages community stakeholders to improve the quality of life for those who live and work in our developed cities and suburbs. Environmental justice initiatives seek to engage and empower local municipal officials and concerned citizens to participate in environmental decision making in all levels of government.

Environmental justice initiatives can help municipalities effectively address a host of concerns that are unique to New Jersey's cities and older suburbs. Once thriving industrial centers, many cities and older suburbs today face significant challenges to development and to environmental protection. Massive factories now stand idle, abandoned on land contaminated by industry. Pristine open space is limited, leaving little room for parks and preservation. And while population growth has shifted away from cities and into new suburbs, older municipalities, struggling to maintain tax rates, are often forced to accept polluting industries just to increase the community's tax base.

Under the leadership of Gov. James E. McGreevey, New Jersey is focused on smart growth initiatives that will revitalize densely populated cities and older,

developed suburbs to make these communities cleaner, healthier places to live, work and raise families. These municipalities are equipped with the infrastructure to support growth and a wide array of benefits including easy access to major metropolitan areas, ports, affordable housing, public transportation, cultural venues, government agencies and health facilities.

What is environmental justice?

Various studies show communities of color and low-income communities are exposed to a disproportionate number of environmental hazards. To help rectify environmental inequities, the DEP launched an environmental justice program to ensure fair treatment for people of all races, cultures, and incomes, in the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. Environmental justice issues are among the DEP's environmental priorities.

Implementing environmental justice locally

New Jersey’s unique system of home rule enables communities to chart their own course for development, and environmental decisions at the local level are increasingly important to every community. Using environmental justice as a framework, municipal officials can strategically address local environmental concerns. Implementing a local environmental justice program rarely requires additional resources. In fact, many communities already have the tools to begin considering environmental decisions that often impact the quality of life for community members and the municipality’s economic viability.

In July 2003, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) released the third of its reports on environmental justice, entitled “Addressing Community Concerns: How Environmental Justice Relates to Land Use Planning and Zoning.” In the report, NAPA recommends several ways local officials can implement environmental justice locally:

- Identify, understand, and communicate local environment concerns to community members, county, state and federal officials.
- Understand which municipal officials have authority to address environmental issues, such as members of the city council, zoning

board, housing authority, environmental commission, school board, and the solid waste and recycling departments.

- Review local policies and regulations to find areas in which public participation can be increased.
- Collaborate with county, regional, state and federal levels of government to respond to environmental justice concerns.
- Eliminate existing land uses that present public health and environmental hazards, and adopt flexible zoning techniques.
- Share information and work with other municipal departments to ensure responses to environmental justice issues are effective.
- Support programs that educate the community and youth about the importance of protecting and preserving the environment.
- Invite residents, including minorities and low-income community members, to participate in planning and zoning decisions to ensure their concerns are considered.
- Establish overlay zones that impose additional requirements for environmental protection.
- Train municipal staff on environmental justice concerns.

- Use Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to understand your municipality’s environmental assets and liabilities.
- Take advantage of DEP’s resources to help ensure protection of public health and the environment in your community.

Taking action on environmental concerns

Achieving environmental justice hinges on identifying and correcting environmental concerns in your community. Municipal officials can take action to:

- Improve controls on existing industrial facilities, including zoning regulations, hours of operation, truck routes, noise control
- Identify priority areas for brownfields redevelopment
- Create opportunities for tree planting
- Understand watershed issues and their relationship to nearby municipalities
- Develop plans for open space/park development
- Create incentives for using mass transit
- Make road network improvements
- Understand and collect data on health issues

- Facilitate environmental infrastructure improvements such as lead line replacement in water distribution systems
- Establish environmental authorities or commissions to implement action plans
- Develop community master plans

Resources for environmental justice

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
www.nj.gov/dep

New Jersey Work Environment Council
www.njwec.org

National Academy of Public Administration
www.napawash.org

New Jersey Public Interest Group
www.njpirg.org

New Jersey Environmental Federation
www.cleanwateraction.org/njef/

To learn more, contact:

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