

Environmental Justice

Obj. 10.7: Discuss environmental justice and the impact of environmental health disparities.



The Facts

A Commission for Racial Justice study found that three of the five largest waste facilities dealing with hazardous materials in the United States are located in poor black communities. This study also showed that three out of every five African American and Latinos live in areas near toxic waste sites, as well as live in areas where the levels of poverty are well above the national average.

Source: www.dosomething.org

Reflect upon the facts above:



What is Environmental Justice?

Read the EPA definition of environmental justice below. As you read, circle, highlight, underline, or mark up in some way words that stand-out or seem especially important.

Environmental Justice is 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. EPA has this goal for all communities and persons across this Nation. It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

Source: EPA, <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/>



Presidential Proclamation

Read the Presidential Proclamation from President Obama and discuss the questions that follow.

For Immediate Release
February 10, 2014

Presidential Proclamation -- 20th Anniversary of Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 12898
ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
A PROCLAMATION

Two decades ago, President William J. Clinton directed the Federal Government to tackle a long-overlooked problem. Low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and tribal areas disproportionately bore environmental burdens like contamination from industrial plants or landfills and indoor air pollution from poor housing conditions. These hazards worsen health disparities and reduce opportunity for residents – children who miss school due to complications of asthma, adults who struggle with medical bills. Executive Order 12898 affirmed every American's right to breathe freely, drink clean water, and live on uncontaminated land. Today, as America marks 20 years of action, we renew our commitment to environmental justice for all.

Because we all deserve the chance to live, learn, and work in healthy communities, my Administration is fighting to restore environments in our country's hardest-hit places. After over a decade of inaction, we reconvened an Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group and invited more than 100 environmental justice leaders to a White House forum. Alongside tribal governments, we are working to reduce pollution on their lands. And to build a healthier environment for every American, we established the first-ever national limits for mercury and other toxic emissions from power plants.

While the past two decades have seen great progress, much work remains. In the years to come, we will continue to work with States, tribes, and local leaders to identify, aid, and empower areas most strained by pollution. By effectively implementing environmental laws, we can improve quality of life and expand economic opportunity in overburdened communities. And recognizing these same communities may suffer disproportionately due to climate change, we must cut carbon emissions, develop more homegrown clean energy, and prepare for the impacts of a changing climate that we are already feeling across our country.

As we mark this day, we recall the activists who took on environmental challenges long before the Federal Government acknowledged their needs. We remember how Americans – young and old, on college campuses and in courtrooms, in our neighborhoods and through our places of worship – called on a Nation to pursue clean air, water, and land for all people. On this anniversary, let us move forward with the same unity, energy, and passion to live up to the promise that here in America, no matter who you are or where you come from, you can pursue your dreams in a safe and just environment.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim February 11, 2014, as the 20th Anniversary of Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice. I call upon all Americans to observe this day with programs and activities that promote environmental justice and advance a healthy, sustainable future.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of February, in the year of our Lord two thousand fourteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-eighth.

BARACK OBAMA

DISCUSS

Reflect & Discuss

1. What are some examples of ways that environmental hazards might reduce opportunities for residents of low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and tribal areas?
2. According to President Obama's Proclamation, what role does the government play in reducing environmental health disparities?
3. Do you think Obama's Proclamation was effective? Why or why not?



Data Mining for Environmental Justice in Your Community

1. Team up! Together, navigate online to Scorecard--The Pollution Information Site at: <http://scorecard.goodguide.com/community/ej-index.tcl>
2. Search for your community using your zipcode.
3. Explore the website and the wealth of data provided. Take notes on what you find in the box below.
4. Select the most striking, important, or interesting data you find and prepare to share with the class.



Your Summary

Describe environmental justice and give one example of an intervention or solution that can help reverse environmental health disparities.



Your Response

After data mining to see what is going on in your community, develop a response to the problems of disparities in environmental health. Think creatively--what could you do to make a small contribution to the environmental justice movement?