

# "Environmental Justice for All"



## WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

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.

The concept of environmental justice started in the 1980s when people who lived in poorer areas voiced out about what they believe to be environmental discrimination. It seemed that environmental regulations were not benefiting these areas as much as the richer areas. This was due to a lack of political and economic power plus a lack of awareness of environmental issues.

The origins of the environmental justice movement can be traced back to Shocco Township, North Carolina. In 1982, the state selected this town to have a landfill for containing PCB-contaminated soil. Shocco Township has the third lowest per-capita income in the state, and is 69 percent non-white. It was at this incident

that advocacy groups began claiming environmental racism, and the environmental justice movement was born.



Since then, there has been legislation passed that **mandates** efforts to try to keep citizens informed. In 1986, the Community Right-to-Know Act was passed, which required industry to disclose information to the public on what chemicals are stored, used, and released in the area. In 1992, the Bush Administration established the Office of Environmental Justice within the EPA.

In 1994, the Clinton Administration directed federal agencies to consider how their activities would negatively impact the environment of minority communities, including Tribal Communities.

### ALASKA TRIBES ATTEND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE SESSIONS

At the 2011 Alaska Forum on the Environment (AFE) two environmental justice sessions were held. In the first session, the Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice (IWG EJ) presented their current activities on coordination efforts on environmental justice and what strategies they are working on to address environmental justice issues in Tribal communities and other low-income minority communities across the nation -- specifically, how they will solicit increased public and Tribal input into their action plan(s). The multiple federal agency presence at the AFE was one step towards meeting this goal; a goal which was set at the first ever [White House Forum on Environmental Justice](#) held this past December in Washington D.C.



The second session was set up for the IWG EJ to listen to the environmental concerns from Tribal communities in Alaska. Elders, Tribal Leaders and Tribal Environmental Staff took this opportunity to voice their environmental justice concerns, issues and recommendations. Also present at this session was Winona Wilson of the EPA who was tasked to bring Alaska's concerns directly to Lisa Jackson, the EPA Administrator. The next sections list the issues brought up at AFE 2011 EJ sessions.

# ALASKA TRIBES SPEAK UP FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ON 4 MAJOR ISSUES

## 1. Children's Health:

- Ⓢ Children are more vulnerable to environmental exposures, as they are still developing.
- Ⓢ Children experience more frequent exposure to environmental contaminants.
- Ⓢ Need to consider social and economic impacts on individual families.



Young people walking on beach in Hooper Bay.  
We need to protect our beaches and waterways for all generations to come...doing this *is* Environmental Justice.

## 2. Subsistence:



Gathering greens from the tundra.

- Ⓢ Alaska Tribes need to be at the table where decisions are made in regards to subsistence.
  - Ⓢ Need contaminant source identification as it relates to potential health effects.
  - Ⓢ Need to coordinate better on consultation efforts.
  - Ⓢ Accept traditional knowledge as a more valid source of information.
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- Ⓢ System for monitoring fish to better identify and resolve location of problem.

### 3. Contaminants:

- 🌐 Need technical assistance to understand documents/data.
- 🌐 Communication should be translated into action/accountability.
- 🌐 Bring people to the table early and often.
- 🌐 Need better diagnosis and treatment for environmental health effects (regardless of the source of contamination).
- 🌐 Clean up known contamination with consideration of health and community welfare (cultural traditions) in assessing and cleaning up the site.



**Hazardous wastes should be covered and stored off the ground. Showing a funding agency that you limited or no safe areas to store your oil and antifreeze drums can help to receive funding for a hazardous waste storage shed.**

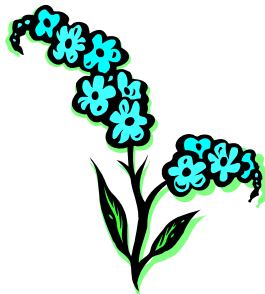
### 4. Resource Extraction:

- 🌿 Clean water - consider that water also provides a spawning habitat
- 🌿 Resource extraction threatens traditions.
- 🌿 Need to consider catastrophic effects on subsistence, culture, and way of life.
- 🌿 If development occurs, Tribes need to be in a position to conduct monitoring.



## RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY AK TRIBES AT THE AFE 2011 EJ SESSIONS TO MEET THESE ISSUES:

- ✱ Environmental studies/testing are needed, and these studies should incorporate traditional knowledge, be culturally relevant, focus on vulnerable populations and age groups, and specifically explore health effects as they relate to contaminants, subsistence foods, and climate change.
- ✱ For new developments and resource extraction, environmental and public health baseline studies are needed, as well as ongoing human and environmental health surveillance.
- ✱ When creating policies, programs, or research studies, consider social, economic, human health, and cultural factors and, in particular, cumulative impacts.
- ✱ Communities need to see action as a result of their participation; meaningful involvement should be followed by tangible government accountability.
- ✱ Capacity building resources are needed. For example, data needs to be made accessible at local level, resources should be allocated to Tribes to do their own monitoring, and technical assistance should be provided to communities to understand and use data, tools, and policies.
- ✱ Ensure that all communities have clean air, water, food, and adequate sanitation systems.



- ✱ Protect subsistence food systems by including indigenous communities in decision-making and considering the potential disproportionate impacts of policies, programs, and developments on Alaska Native Villages.

- ✱ Government agencies need to better streamline their processes and coordinate services internally and externally.

## **One Example of an Environmental Justice Project in Alaska**

The Metlakatla Indian Community Master Plan seeks to clean up contamination of the Annette Island Indian Reserve in southeastern Alaska and plan redevelopment to promote economic growth through tourism and commercial fishing. Federal agencies made a commitment to work in partnership with Metlakatla to address contamination issues that have resulted from the construction and operation of defense facilities over the past five decades. Extensive soil contamination has occurred around fuel storage sites. In addition, lead, asbestos and oils containing PCBs have been found. Especially pertinent to attempts to properly address the issues of Native Americans and Alaska Natives are issues such as the proper implementation of federal trust responsibilities and the building of tribal capacity to manage and conduct environmental programs. Metlakatla has also been designated a national Brownfields Showcase Community.

**If you would like to learn more about Environmental Justice in Tribal Communities these websites are a good place to start:**

✚ **Alaska Community Action on Toxics**

<http://www.akaction.org/>

✚ **Tribal Court Clearinghouse: Environmental Resources**

<http://tribal-institute.org/lists/environ.htm>

✚ **Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice**

<http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/interagency/index.html>

✚ **EPA Office of Environmental Justice**

<http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/>

✚ **American Indian Policy Center: Environmental Justice**

<http://www.airpi.org/projects/envrjst.html>

✚ **Haskell Indian University: Environmental Justice Research Center**

<http://www.engg.ksu.edu/CHSR/outreach/tosnac/resources.html>