

00-07

STATEMENT OF POLICY Environmental Justice

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports national, state, and local resources, policies, regulations, programs, and research that will enhance the ability of local health departments (LHDs) to promote safe, healthy, productive, and sustainable environments in all communities. NACCHO supports the following:

- LHD capacity to support safe places for physical activity, access to fresh and healthy foods, clean air and water, healthy housing, and more;
- LHD efforts to identify and mitigate disproportionate exposures to environmental health hazards including, for example, preventing and eliminating disproportionate sitings of hazardous facilities, preventing the enactment of discriminatory (including unintentionally harmful) land use laws and policies, and ensuring nondiscriminatory compliance with all environmental, health, and safety laws;
- Public and corporate policy that prevents, mitigates, or eliminates environmental burdens which disproportionately affect the health of some populations over others;
- Efforts to hold accountable producers of hazardous waste and materials for the contamination their actions produce and the detoxification and associated costs required to remediate that contamination;
- The right of all people potentially affected by harmful environmental exposure to participate as equal partners in decision-making (including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation) about the production, use, and disposal of hazardous materials;
- Decision-making at the local, state, and national levels that is preceded by a public and transparent analysis of potential health impacts of policies and activities so that they may be understood, minimized, and equitably distributed;
- Policy-making at the local, state, and national levels that creates incentives for businesses and capital-seeking organizations to minimize health inequities;
- Ethical, balanced, and responsible use of land, water, air, human and capital resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for current and future generations; and
- LHD involvement in the identification and response to new and emerging environmental justice issues such as the inequitable distribution of health effects related to climate change.

Justification

The fundamental prerequisites for population health are peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice, and equity.¹ The inequitable distribution of these prerequisites has occurred, in part, due to intentionally and unintentionally discriminatory laws and policies. Penalties imposed under hazardous waste laws at sites located within communities with a greater proportion of white population have historically been about 500 percent higher than penalties imposed at sites within communities with a greater proportion of people of color and more rapid and thorough cleanups occur for environmental violations in non-minority communities.²



Communities of color are disproportionately exposed to hazardous wastes, dioxin, and air pollution. Black Americans are 79 percent more likely than white Americans to live in neighborhoods where industrial pollution is suspected of posing the greatest health danger.³ Among all population subgroups, children of color are most exposed to air pollutants lead, and pesticides.⁴ Compared to other neighborhoods, the odds of locating commercial hazardous waste facilities are 1.9 times higher in neighborhoods that have a significant population of people of color.⁵

The inequitable distribution of environmental burdens and lack of an equitable infrastructure for supporting the prerequisites for good health produce inequitable health outcomes. Threats are also posed by poor quality housing, absence of mass transit, unhealthy working conditions, poverty, and high levels of pollution production.⁶⁻⁸ In addition, environmental justice requires attention to issues of child health, air pollution, climate change, brownfields, diet (access to fresh fruit and vegetables), housing, pesticides, e-waste, mining, open space and recreation, school sitings and operations, smart growth, transportation, land use regulation, and waste management, quality, and delivery.⁹

Because decisions about land use, community and transportation design can have a tremendous impact on the social, economic, and environmental vitality of communities, LHDs can, through local leadership and partnerships, promote environmental justice. LHD involvement is paramount because LHDs can affect the population health of an entire community. LHDs should work to empower their communities, help remediate existing inequities, and influence policies and decisions which will prevent greater inequity and stimulate greater environmental benefits.

Record of Action

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