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Obama Administration Announces Commitments to Focus on Health Protections for Every American

Agencies publish environmental justice strategies designed to ensure that all communities are protected from environmental harm and benefit from federal programs

WASHINGTON — Today, federal agencies, led by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), released environmental justice strategies, implementation plans and progress reports, outlining steps agencies will take to protect communities facing greater health and environmental risks. These strategies represent a significant step forward in the Administration's commitment to integrating environmental justice into federal decision-making and programs in areas such as transportation, labor, health services, housing and others.

"Working together we have been able to make environmental justice a focus not just for EPA, but for agencies across the administration. Each of our federal partners plays a unique role in serving the American people, and each has a unique opportunity to ensure that our communities get the health and environmental protections they deserve," said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "If we aspire to build an economy and a society that works for every American, we can't allow the heaviest burdens of pollution and health threats to fall on our poorest citizens. Bringing together our federal partners to tackle these challenges is a major step toward health, environmental and economic benefits in communities across the nation."

"We know that all too often, low-income and minority families live in the shadows of some of the worst pollution, leading to higher rates of diseases and threatening the economic potential of their communities," said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. "With these environmental justice strategies, Federal agencies are following through on the Obama Administration's commitment to reduce public health threats."

The Administration believes that all Americans should be able to live in healthy communities, share in the benefits of federal programs and initiatives, and have a voice in the federal decision-making process. Yet too often that is not the case, particularly for low-income, minority and tribal populations. To make progress toward addressing these inequities, federal agencies have reviewed their portfolios, to assess how their programs, policies, and activities may have disproportionately adverse health and environmental effects. Through this review, they have identified overarching strategies, as well as specific programs and initiatives, to reduce environmental or health hazards, ensure access to beneficial programs, and increase community participation in agency decision-making. For example:

- The Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Transit Administration is finalizing an environmental justice circular to help grantees determine whether there are any minority or low-income populations that may be adversely affected by a transit project or decision. DOT's Federal Highway Administration is working with the National Highway Institute to revamp their course on environmental justice and Title VI.
- The U.S. Department of Labor is translating educational materials and hazard alerts into Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese to ensure that minority workers have access to information they need to avoid environmental hazards on the job.
- The U.S. Department of Energy's Pueblo Project in Los Alamos, N.M., provides four tribal governments the opportunity to run pollution monitoring programs and provide technical input on National Nuclear Security Administration decisions.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is helping to provide green jobs and workforce development opportunities for veterans in minority and low-income communities.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is working with communities to use Health Impact Assessments, to help proactively address the potential impacts a policy or project might have on minority and low income populations. For example, in Baltimore, MD, work is under way to evaluate the human health impact of a vacant property redevelopment program.

"Communities that have historically been the reluctant hosts to the country's environmental burdens have endured the consequence of poor public health, housing, employment and education inequities to name a few," said Elizabeth C. Yeampierre, Executive Director of the United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park and chair of EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council. "The Administration deserves praise for recognizing that these complex problems require a holistic approach."

"The newly revived Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice holds enormous promise to find direct and efficient ways to provide resources to the communities most in need," said Sue Briggum, Vice President for Federal Public Affairs at Waste Management. "Moreover, its participants welcome public private partnerships that bring government, communities and businesses together in efforts for the common good."

"At the Department of Transportation, we are committed to working directly with disadvantaged groups to choose, plan, and build transportation projects that will create jobs and spur economic growth," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "When we talk about environmental justice, we don't just mean avoiding harm to disadvantaged communities: we want to invest in projects that will create healthy, vibrant neighborhoods, revitalize communities, and connect all Americans to jobs, housing, schools, and medical care."

"The Department of Labor's environmental justice strategy demonstrates our commitment to ensuring safe and healthy workplaces, and vibrant communities for the American workforce to call home," said Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis. "Environmental justice is a key component of my vision of *Good Jobs for Everyone*, and means making sure that the department's programs and policies foster health, safety and adequate training for all people, including minority, low-income, and tribal workers."

"At the Department of Health & Human Services we understand the important connection between our environment and our country's health but we also know that our department cannot do this work alone." said Secretary Sebelius. "We look forward to our continued collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency and others to focus on building safe and healthy communities."

The release of these strategies, implementation plans, and progress reports is a part of a broad effort the Administration has undertaken to reinvigorate the federal commitment to environmental justice. After more than a decade of inaction, the Administration reconvened the Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group and engaged more than 100 environmental justice leaders at a White House Forum on Environmental Justice. Throughout 2011, federal agencies participated in more than 15 listening sessions across the country to learn from stakeholders how the federal government can better partner with overburdened communities to reduce environmental and health burdens. Then, in August 2011, 16

federal agencies committed to finalizing environmental justice strategies and releasing annual implementation progress reports.

Federal agencies releasing new environmental justice strategies by February 2012 include: the Department of Agriculture, Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Transportation, Department of Interior, Department of Veterans Affairs, and General Services Administration. The EPA and the Department of Energy published new strategies in 2011 and 2008, respectively, and released annual implementation plans last year. They both continue to take public comment on their strategies and will update each strategy, as appropriate. The U.S. Department of Justice recently released its annual implementation progress report. The Department of Defense released its strategy in 1995 and this year will be releasing an annual implementation progress report. The Department of Education, Department of Homeland Security and Department of Commerce have taken public comment on their draft strategies and are working to finalize their strategies and implementation reports.

More about agency strategies and implementation plans:

<http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/interagency/iwg-compendium.html>

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