

**Environmental Justice as a Cornerstone of EPA's  
Environmental Agenda**

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It is a privilege to have the opportunity to address this conference on an issue that is as basic to environmental protection as clean air, clean water and land that provides a safe and productive foundation for home, work and play.

I commend the Department of Energy, the Department of Agriculture, and the other federal agencies, including offices within the EPA, for their leadership in organizing this conference. EPA is pleased to be a co-sponsor.

I also recognize, and want to thank, the board of directors of the EJ Conference, Inc, the organization that coordinated and managed this conference. Ben Wilson, of Beveridge and Diamond; Tim Fields, former Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, Phyllis Harris, former Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, Sue Briggum, Waste Management, Inc, and John Rosenthal.

This conference demonstrates that there is a great deal of enthusiasm, as well as opportunity, within the federal family and among all environmental justice stakeholders to provide for environmental justice.

But don't be mistaken - it will take more than enthusiasm and opportunity to make environmental justice a mainstream consideration in all that we do and in all the decisions we must make.

It will take a concerted effort to keep environmental equity in the forefront as a major consideration as we develop climate change policies, energy policies and environmental regulations. Until environmental equity is as common a consideration as risk/benefit and cost/benefit analyses, disproportionately impacted communities will continue to bear the brunt of this nation's adverse environmental impacts.

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Not until each and every American enjoys the same high degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision making process will we be able to honestly say that here in America, we have environmental justice for all.

The conference agenda includes sessions on how to create green jobs, build green economies, address climate change, enhance water infrastructure, reduce emissions in the movement of goods, highlight youth initiatives to provide for EJ, as well as other important topics.

I am pleased that several of the conference sessions correspond to EPA's current EJ focus areas: Goods Movement, Water Infrastructure, Climate Change and Green Economy, Geographic Initiatives, and Regulatory Means to Address Disproportionate Impacts.

As you know, President Obama and EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson care a lot about EJ. I know that the Administrator would have very much liked to be here today, had she not been out of the country.

As the lead agency for the federal government on Environmental Justice, EPA takes our responsibility seriously. Administrator Jackson's first memo to all EPA employees emphasized that we need to ensure that our efforts are helping people in underserved and highly vulnerable populations.

She has since stated that environmental justice is "not an issue we can afford to relegate to the margins. It has to be part of our thinking in every decision we make."

The inauguration of the first African American president, and Administrator Jackson's subsequent confirmation as the first African American administrator of EPA, has significantly changed the face of environmentalism in this country.

It sends a clear signal that environmental protection does not come in one shape or size. In addition to protecting wilderness and saving the polar ice caps, it's about ensuring our urban and rural communities are safe, clean places to live, work, play, pray, and raise a family.

Too often, the burdens of pollution and environmental degradation fall disproportionately on low-income and minority communities. EPA is committed to showing communities that have been left out and left behind that the issues of environmental protection are their issues, and our work is their work.

We also find ourselves in the midst of the worst economic crisis in a generation. Low-income areas are feeling the full weight of the downturn. Some people might be inclined to see this as a limiting factor. The Administration believes that on the contrary, it opens up a whole host of new opportunities.

We reject the perspective that there is a dichotomy between the environment and the economy. We know, in fact, that our economic future and our environmental future are

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fundamentally linked. As such, I am pleased to be participating in this conference with the Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis, who will be speaking tomorrow morning.

When she was a member of Congress, she introduced the Green Jobs Act in 2007, stating, “I know that we can achieve the goals of becoming energy independent and reducing our global warming emissions... Through targeted job training efforts, we can support both our nation’s innovation and technological leadership and lift people out of poverty.”

In the case of communities with environmental justice concerns, we can create green jobs in places where “green” and “jobs” are most needed.

We also recognize the connection between environmental justice and the issues that are of major concern to the American people and are the pillars of President Obama’s agenda.

For example, health care: The people that get sick at two and three times the average rate because of pollution in their neighborhoods are the same people that predominately get their health care in emergency rooms.

This drives up costs system-wide and slows down much needed reform.

Education: When children are repeatedly missing school with asthma or allergies, it affects educational outcomes and long-term economic potential.

Not to mention the toll it takes on working parents that have to stay home to tend to their sick children. These are setbacks we can’t afford in this, or any, economy.

Energy: Low-income communities stand to benefit the most from energy efficiency measures that can reduce overall load, cut costs, and lower the amounts of harmful emissions in our air.

Climate change is no longer an academic discussion, and we can no longer afford to put off addressing it. So, for the first time, we are embarking in earnest on an aggressive effort to protect public health and the environment.

The President has committed to double our clean energy use in the next three years, and we have set an ambitious goal of cutting more than 80% of harmful greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050.

In March, EPA proposed the very first national reporting requirements on greenhouse gas emissions. And we did it in a way that ensures that we are getting the best possible information without putting undue burden on small businesses.

Just this last week, Administrator Jackson joined President Obama in announcing new national fuel economy and emissions standards. These groundbreaking standards require an average

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fuel economy of 35.5 mile per gallon in 2016, preventing greenhouse gas emissions of approximately 900 million metric tons.

One of the central initiatives of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides billions of dollars to weatherize low-income housing. That will put Americans to work at the same time that it saves families hundreds of dollars a year in energy bills and cuts harmful emissions.

By focusing our attention on projects or activities that can make a tangible improvement in the environment and public health of communities which need it the most, we can make the best use of our resources.

The work you do – the work you have been going for years – has nothing less than the full support of President Obama and his Administration.

We are guided by an ambitious vision to protect public health and the environment – and environmental justice is central to that vision.

EPA looks forward to working with you, our sister agencies, and other EJ stakeholders as the we work to improve the environment and public health while implementing its goals of building and expanding green economies, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities.

Thank you for having me here tonight.