

# ***Environmental Justice Recommendations and Considerations for the Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group***



## ***Alaska Forum on the Environment: Notes from the Environmental Justice Break-Out Sessions\* February 9, 2011 - Anchorage, Alaska***



### **Summary of Requests from Environmental Justice (EJ) Break-out Sessions and Presentations**

- New 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.

\* Participants in the EJ session break-out groups included elders and other tribal members from Alaska Native Villages, community members from across Alaska and elsewhere in the U.S. and Canada, and representatives from state, tribal, and local agencies and organizations. Federal agency representatives were present at each table to listen and, as needed, to facilitate and take notes for each group.

## Recommendations from Each Topic-Specific Break-Out Table



### Children's Health

- Children are more vulnerable to environmental exposures, as they are still developing
- Children experience more frequent exposure to environmental contaminants (i.e. hand to mouth activities)
- We need to consider their vulnerability at various life stages (i.e. infant, toddler, youth, teen)
- Generation and location specific studies are needed (e.g. allergies, cancer)
- We need testing on Native/traditional foods for contaminants
  - We need *new* testing
  - Traditional knowledge should be incorporated into studies
- Consider social and economic impacts on individual families (consider abuse, neglect, suicide, etc.)
- Bring the National Institute of Environmental Studies to the table
- Provide resources to determine/study the illnesses, disease, and cancer in our communities
- Ensure that all communities have clean air, water, food, running water, flush toilets, etc.

### Resource Extraction

- EPA – classification of water quality – need baseline
- There is a lack of baseline information
- Need funds for baseline studies
  - Water
  - Tier 3 classification
- Clear water and clean water; consider that water also provides a spawning habitat
- Resource extraction threatens traditions
- Offshore oil and gas development – need to consider catastrophic effects and effects on subsistence, culture, way of life (fish, birds [nesting], whales, etc.)
- Consider the cumulative effects of mining/oil and gas development
- “No watershed left untouched”
- If development occurs, Tribes need to be in a position to conduct monitoring (e.g. air/water)
- Need to ensure EPA water quality standards are kept to EPA classifications and that all Tribes are educated to those standards

## **Subsistence**

- What is the process for involving Alaska Tribes and for follow-up?
- Alaska Tribes need to be at the table where decisions are made in regards to subsistence
- Streamline agency processes
- Capacity building for meaningful involvement is needed
- Need contaminant source identification as it relates to potential health effects
- Need for health surveillance
- Need to resolve issues related to differences in interpretation of environmental and biomonitoring data (EPA step into doing this)
- Need for information – easy access
- Improves coordination
- Fear of over-requests of information
  - Need to coordinate better on consultation efforts (consultation overload)
- Consideration of model laws that are working (e.g. Marine Animal Protection Act)
- Accept traditional knowledge as a more valid source of information
- System for monitoring fish to better identify and resolve location of problem
- More sharing of information, analysis, and federal policy (coordinated use and definition of traditional knowledge into management)

## **Contaminants**

- Issues and observations
- Consider social aspects versus technical language and indicators, e.g. parts per billion, parts per million.
- Health studies on contaminant(s) needed
- Need technical assistance to understand documents/data
- Focus on one front
- Communication should be translated into action/accountability
- Bring people to the table early and often
- Burden of proof on us
- 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

## Handwritten Comments from One Participant

- Proposal for Tribal Consultation and Data Clearing house
  - This entity would supply to all Federal, State, as well as public sector entities, the information they need to conduct meaningful Tribal Consultations as well as public sector contracts
  - This entity would supply
    - Religious information
    - Cultural and traditional information
    - Subsistence times and activities
    - Current tribal leadership
    - Ability to make introductions and act as a liaison when requested by a tribe or entity
  - The Clearinghouse could be established with representatives familiar with already recognized Tribal regions with residency and participation in traditional as well as cultural activities as a prerequisite to employment not what educational degrees they hold
  - For more ideas or conversation on this topic e-mail [tgreenenanwalek@gmail.com](mailto:tgreenenanwalek@gmail.com)

Any changes or corrections may be submitted to  
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