

## Environmental Justice: Indoor Air Quality and Community-Based Action

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines environmental justice (EJ) as “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<sup>1</sup>”.

To effectively address EJ concerns, the Agency recognizes that communities must be the driver for local solutions. However, far too many communities lack the capacity to truly affect their environmental conditions<sup>2</sup>. This includes some conditions found indoors. Many reports and studies indicate that low-income, minority, tribal and indigenous communities may be disproportionately impacted by indoor asthma triggers, secondhand smoke, mold, radon and other indoor pollutants. EPA’s Indoor Environments Division (IED) provides guidance and programs to build community capacity and improve indoor air quality in buildings where people live, learn and work.



Americans spend over 90 per cent of their time indoors, and poor indoor air quality (IAQ) is considered a top environmental health risk. IED’s programs are non-regulatory and focus on

achieving measurable improvements in reducing risks from indoor pollutants. IED employs partnerships, training, information tools and technical assistance to promote best practices at the national, state and local levels. IED’s goal is to promote behavioral change at individual and institutional levels in order to achieve sustainable, improved health, environmental, and economic outcomes.

### Partnerships for Community-based Action

IED supports community-based action to promote healthy indoor air quality by engaging communities through stronger state/tribal/local partnerships. IED partners with respected organizations with extensive regional and local networks to effectively target tools and resources toward areas and populations that are disproportionately affected by adverse environmental impacts.

#### *Asthma*

IED’s [asthma strategy](#) supports capacity-building in communities to



deliver comprehensive asthma care. Activities that reach underserved communities include the [National Childhood Asthma Media Campaign](#), partnering with non-profit organizations to host asthma education and awareness events; educating families and children about tailored environmental interventions, and training healthcare providers.

#### *Secondhand Smoke*

The prevalence of secondhand smoke exposure is highest among low-income families, regardless of race or ethnicity. IED collaborates with other federal agencies,

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Interim Guidance on Considering Environmental Justice During the Development of an Action*. Available at: <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/ej/resources/policy/considering-ej-in-rulemaking-guide-07-2010.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Plan EJ 2014. September 2011

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states, communities and public health organizations to reduce secondhand smoke exposure. Partnerships have included the Department of Agriculture's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program, and the Department of Health and Human Services' Head Start Program. Other activities include collaboration with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Centers for Disease Control to reduce secondhand smoke exposure in public and multifamily housing at the state and local level.

### *Radon*

IED collaborates with state and tribal [radon](#) programs that are aimed at reducing radon risk. These programs implement a variety of activities including partnerships with affordable housing non-profit organizations, faith-based projects and technical support to local housing authorities. IED also supports the development of standards of practice for radon mitigation that will help harmonize practices across state and local programs.

### *Schools*

IED works to improve [indoor air quality in all schools](#), which creates healthier learning environments for underserved populations. Improving school environmental quality, including indoor air quality, not only protects the health of students and staff, it also can enhance academic performance, as well as teacher and staff productivity and retention. IED provides technical resources and training to schools and highlights the activities and accomplishments of schools that implement good indoor air quality practices. The *IAQ Tools for Schools Connector* serves as the program's communication hub which includes e-newsletters, a discussion forum and webinars.

### *Homes*



Many of the disparities in health status among subpopulations may be linked to poor access to safe and healthy homes, which is most prevalent among lower income populations, populations with disabilities, and minority populations<sup>3</sup>. IED has several projects that focus on improving indoor air quality in homes including those in disproportionately impacted communities. For example, IED works closely with organizations like Habitat for Humanity to improve indoor air quality in the affordable housing community through EPA's [Indoor airPLUS label](#) for new homes and [Healthy Indoor Environment Protocols for Home Energy Upgrades](#).

### **Federal Interagency Collaboration**

IED actively collaborates with other Federal agencies to improve and leverage a wide range of federal programs to protect disproportionately impacted populations and address environmental health risks.

### *Coordinated Federal Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Asthma Disparities*

The goal of the [Coordinated Federal Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Asthma Disparities](#) is to reduce the burden caused by asthma among children, in particular, minority children and children with family incomes below the poverty level. IED works closely with federal agency partners in building the nation's capacity to control asthma and reduce exposure to asthma triggers thereby improving the quality of life for millions of Americans in communities across the country.

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. 2009. The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Healthy Homes. US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General

### *Federal Radon Action Plan*

The [Federal Radon Action Plan](#) aims to decrease radon exposure in homes and school that the federal government owns or directly or indirectly has influence over. ED is collaborating with eight other federal agencies to implement the plan, which has a particular emphasis on protecting low-income Americans.

### *Federal Healthy Homes Strategy for Action*

IED actively collaborates with other federal partners as part of the interagency Healthy Homes Work Group. [The Federal Healthy Housing Strategy for Action](#)<sup>4</sup> outlines goals and strategies for healthy housing. IED is working to help implement the strategy through its efforts to improve indoor air quality in disproportionately impacted communities throughout the U.S.

### **Making a Difference:**

IED's EJ efforts are making a real difference in the lives of Americans who are disproportionately impacted by indoor asthma triggers, secondhand smoke, mold, radon and other indoor pollutants. IED is providing targeted support to communities, directly and through partnerships to expand their capacity to promote behavior change at individual and institutional levels and achieve sustainable, improved health, environmental and economic outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup> Federal Healthy Homes Strategy for Action - <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=ExecSummary013113.pdf>

### **Indoor Air Quality Resources Available in Many Languages**

Culturally appropriate indoor air quality resources are available in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and tribal languages and dialects at [http://www.epa.gov/iaq/test/environmental\\_justice.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/test/environmental_justice.html). Go to the top right of EPA's main page -- [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) -- to access web pages that address a variety of environmental topics in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Indoor Air Quality and other environmental publications are available in more than 20 languages from the National Center for Environmental Publications at [http://nepis.epa.gov/EPA/html/foreign\\_index.html](http://nepis.epa.gov/EPA/html/foreign_index.html).

## Resources

- Indoor Environments Division, EPA - <http://www.epa.gov/iaq>
- Asthma Community Network - <http://www.asthmacommunitynetwork.org/>
- Multilingual Indoor Air Quality Resources - [http://www.epa.gov/iaq/test/environmental\\_justice.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/test/environmental_justice.html)
- Office of Environmental Justice, EPA- <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>
- Coordinated Federal Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Asthma Disparities [http://www.epa.gov/childrenstaskforce/federal\\_asthma\\_disparities\\_action\\_plan.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/childrenstaskforce/federal_asthma_disparities_action_plan.pdf)
- Federal Radon Action Plan - [http://www.epa.gov/radon/pdfs/Federal\\_Radon\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/radon/pdfs/Federal_Radon_Action_Plan.pdf)
- Federal Healthy Homes Strategy for Action - <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=ExecSummary013113.pdf>
- Healthy Indoor Environment Protocols for Home Energy Upgrades <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/homes/retrofits.html>