

From Environmental Racism Towards Environmental Justice

A guide from Maria Droste Counseling Center

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM?

Environmental racism is the disproportionate burdening of communities of color with health hazards through policies and practices that locate sources of pollutants or toxic waste in or near these communities (1).

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

Environmental justice is a response to environmental racism. The EPA defines it as the "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" (2).

HOW DOES ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM AFFECT ME?

Exposure to environmental pollutants negatively affects mental and physical health. Air pollution is linked to increased mental health visits, cancers, heart disease, stroke, asthma, dementia, diabetes, allergies, autoimmunity, and other diseases (2, 3).

DENVER & POLLUTION

- In North Denver, Globeville and Elyria-Swansea sit in two active Superfund sites (hazardous waste sites) (4). Residents of these neighborhoods experience higher rates of cancer, asthma, and respiratory problems than other Denver neighborhoods (4).
- "Redlining"—or federal policy that caused the historic exclusion of residents of color from certain neighborhoods—enabled facilities that produce pollution to be located in communities of color since the 1930s in Denver (5). Today, continued housing discrimination has caused lower income, Black, and Latinx residents to reside in these areas (6).
- When compared to affluent parts of Denver, there is a lack of green spaces and trees in formerly redlined neighborhoods (5). Green spaces improve mental health, filter air, and blunt high temperatures (7). While there has been recent governmental focus on greening Denver, there are concerns that areas that get more parks could become unaffordable (5).

125

MILLION TONS
of hazardous gasses
released into Colorado's
air each year (8)

8

QUARTERS

Denver Water Board utility
was in violation of any
federal drinking water
standards between 2016-
2019 (9)

5°F

WARMER

on average in North Denver
than the rest of Denver due
to environmental racism (5)

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

INDIVIDUALLY:

- Sign up for air quality alerts through the Colorado Air Quality website: <http://bit.ly/COAirAlerts>
- Refrain from exercising outside on days with high particulate counts or ozone action days.
- Filter your family's and pet's water. You may qualify for a free lead test through Denver Water's Lead Reduction Program: <http://bit.ly/WaterLeadTest>
- Help your body combat pollutants with antioxidants by eating fresh and organic vegetables with every meal.
- If you're able, consider investing in a HEPA air purifier: <http://bit.ly/HEPAAirPurifierGuide>

COMMUNALLY:

- Get involved with a local organization—from neighborhood orgs to townhall meetings to testifying at the Capitol, you can advocate for your health!
- Vote! Find out which candidates value your family's health:
 - <https://leg.colorado.gov>
 - Register to vote and find general election information here: <http://bit.ly/COelectionsSOS>
- Join a community garden to grow your own vegetables! <https://dug.org/gardens/>
- Visit the website of any of the organizations below to find concrete actions you can take.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS:

Conservation Colorado

Organize frontline communities, take local action, engage local leaders, and more direct actions at www.conservationco.org

350 Colorado

Join campaigns, sign petitions and letters, and volunteer with or join over 350 local groups at www.350colorado.org

Colorado People's Alliance

Get involved in action for clean drinking water free of perfluorinated chemicals in Commerce City at www.coloradopeoplesalliance.org

Environment Colorado

Take action for clean water and air in Colorado at www.environmentcolorado.org

REFERENCES:

1. <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>
2. <https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/air-pollution-linked-to-increased-mental-health-outpatient-visits/>
3. [https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692\(18\)32722-3/pdf](https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692(18)32722-3/pdf)
4. <https://conservationco.org/2020/01/28/blog-fighting-unhealthy-air-pollution-in-denver/>
5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/climate/city-parks.html>
6. <https://conservationco.org/2020/04/28/blog-environmental-injustices-worsen-the-impacts-of-coronavirus/>
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3799530/>
8. <https://www.denverpost.com/2020/01/19/colorado-air-pollution/>
9. <https://www.ewg.org/tapwater/system.php?pws=CO0116001>