

Environmental Justice Frequently Asked Questions

What is Environmental Justice?

The United States (U.S.) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines Environmental Justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, culture, education, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal environmental programs and policies.”

What are the fundamental concepts of Environmental Justice?

There are three fundamental Environmental Justice principles:

- e To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.e
- e To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.e
- e To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority populations and low-income populations.e

Is Environmental Justice a new requirement?

No. The recipients of Federal-aid have been required to submit assurances of compliance and must ensure nondiscrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and many other laws, regulations and policies. In 1997 the Department issued its U.S. Department of Transportation Order to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations to summarize and expand upon the requirements of Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice.

What is a minority population?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander are racial and ethnic minority groups. Read the Federal bulletin about standards for classifying Federal data on race and ethnicity at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/bulletins/b00-02.html>.

What is a low-income population?

“Low-income” is defined as a person whose household income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines (HHS). If a family’s total income falls below the relevant income level, then the family is classified as being below the poverty level. The most current HHS poverty guidelines can be found at HHS’s website: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/12poverty.shtml>.