



## Fast Facts

The American Lung Association's 2006 health disparities study revealed 65% of African Americans and 80% of Hispanics live in areas that failed to meet at least one of the EPA's health-based air quality standards.

The same study also revealed the asthma rate among African American children is 26 percent higher than the asthma rate among whites.

A 1982 U.S. General Accounting Office study surveyed eight southern states, Georgia among them, and revealed that three out of every four commercial hazardous waste landfills were in predominantly African American communities.

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# Afford Environmental Justice

## What's at Stake?

Georgia communities of color bear a disproportionate burden of pollution from incinerators, smelters, sewage treatment plants, power plants, chemical industries, landfills, and a host of other polluting facilities. This is not surprising as the landmark report, *Toxic Waste and Race*, by Robert Bullard of Clark Atlanta University, revealed that race was the most potent variable in predicting where polluting facilities were located—more powerful than poverty, land values, and home ownership.

Communities that sustain a higher concentration of polluting facilities also bear the burden of increased health problems associated with pollutants from these facilities.

For instance, increased exposure to air pollution is related to rising asthma rates and can cause serious respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-sponsored study showed that pediatric emergency department visits at Atlanta's Grady Memorial Hospital increased by one-third following peak ozone levels.

While we all suffer the consequences of poor air quality, African Americans are hospitalized for asthma at higher rates than Caucasians and asthma deaths among African Americans are significantly higher than among Caucasians, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Furthermore, according to MSB Energy Associates, 68% of African Americans compared to 56% of whites live within 30 miles of a power plant, the distance within which the maximum effects of the smokestack plume are expected to occur. Many of the pollutants emitted from power plants are associated with a host of respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses.

Unfortunately, implementation of environmental laws continues to fall short of the goal of ensuring fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people. The differences in environmental quality across communities often result from inequitable siting of polluting industries, inadequate public participation and access to resources, inequitable enforcement of environmental laws, and unequal environmental clean-up efforts.

## Challenges

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is not required to consider the demographics of the area surrounding a proposed facility when reviewing permit applications. Further, in deciding whether to issue a permit, EPD rarely considers cumulative impacts or the current environmental burden being experienced by a community.

## Next Steps

Environmental Justice is 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. In order to achieve this goal:

- Lawmakers should require that EPD and other environmental agencies consider the demographics of an area and cumulative impacts from existing environmental burdens when issuing or modifying permits to ensure that no community bears either a disproportionate level of or unacceptable health risk due to pollution and waste that would result from the enterprise seeking a permit.
- Lawmakers should also ensure that impacted communities receive actual notice of pending decisions in time to become involved in the decision-making process.