

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

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**March 4, 2010, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., Eastern Time**

**The Use of Race in Environmental Health Research: What Does/Could It Mean?**

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*Purpose:* The upcoming symposium, “Strengthening Environmental Justice Research and Decision Making: A Symposium on the Science of Disproportionate Environmental Health Impacts,” will focus on the science to support consideration of different factors that may contribute to disproportionate impacts as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other governmental agencies address environmental justice in their programs, policies, and activities. EPA works to achieve its mission to protect human health and the environment through a variety of actions and decisions, including regulatory decisions (setting standards, permitting, enforcement, information/data collecting, site cleanup, etc.), programming, policy making, scientific research, outreach, and education. EPA uses scientific evidence to support its policy and regulatory decision making. Data and research on racial disparities in health outcomes and environmental exposures will greatly inform discussions at the symposium. Two key questions are: (1) What does it really mean when racial differences are observed? and (2) How can this inform environmental health policy? These questions are particularly salient as we continue to learn about scientific advancements in understanding genetic polymorphisms and molecular level biology, which seem to lead scientists to conclude that racial differences observed in health status or in biological pathways relevant to metabolism, distribution, and excretion of environmental toxicants are genetically based. At the same time, human genome mapping also has shown that there are more similarities between racial groups and seems to affirm social scientists’ assertion that race is a social construct and has no basis in biology. To facilitate common understanding among symposium participants who come from diverse backgrounds, we are hosting this pre-symposium Webinar on the interpretation of racial differences in health disparities and environmental health research.

**The specific objectives are to:**

- Understand changes in the meaning of race over time and the challenges they present for health disparities research and public health surveillance
- Learn what the human genome tells us about race, particularly in the U.S. context
- Learn how race is conceived cross-culturally and relates to health impacts

**Speakers**

**Devon Payne-Sturges**, Dr.P.H., Assistant Center Director for Human Health, EPA National Center for Environmental Research: Moderator

**Gilbert C. Gee**, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Public Health, University of California at Los Angeles

“Scientific Challenges in Studying Race and Ethnicity and Health”

**Charmaine D. M. Royal**, Ph.D., Associate Research Professor, Institute for Genome Sciences and Policy, Duke University

“Race and Human Genetic Variation”

**Clarence C. Gravlee**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Florida

“How Race Becomes Biology: Genes, Environment, and Health”

**Hal Zenick**, Ph.D., Director, National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory, EPA: Discussant