

# Environmental Justice

## What is Environmental Justice?

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.

## Background

Executive Order 12898, entitled [Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations](#) (1994), requires each Federal agency to make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations in the United States.

In August 2011, HHS and 16 other Federal departments and agencies signed the [Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Justice and Executive Order 12898](#). A purpose of the Memorandum is to identify and address environmental justice considerations in agency programs, policies, and activities. One of the areas of focus is Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. At HHS, this law is enforced by the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Community residents and advocates have frequently cited Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 12898 as important levers for achieving environmental justice.

Recently, HHS released the [2012 HHS Environmental Justice Strategy and Implementation Plan](#), which provides goals, strategies and actions to address environmental justice in minority and low-income populations and Indian tribes. The Strategy recognizes that effective implementation of regulations, executive orders, policy directives, and program guidance can serve as critical tools in achieving health equity and reducing the health disparities that may result from disproportionate exposures to environmental hazards in minority and low-income populations and Indian Tribes. Encouraging the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of affected parties supports HHS's environmental justice goal of building healthy, resilient communities.

## OCR's Involvement in Environmental Justice

[OCR's Title VI enforcement program](#) is allied with Executive Order 12898 and the HHS Environmental Justice Strategy and Implementation Plan, and is an essential component of HHS's efforts in achieving equitable health outcomes for all. HHS OCR is charged with Title VI enforcement and ensuring that Federal money for health care and social service programs is not used to support programs or activities that discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin. Title VI can be used as a vehicle to help ensure that all people can effectively participate in and benefit from federally funded programs and activities. OCR recognizes that lack of meaningful access to programs and activities can impact health outcomes, especially in

communities facing environmental injustice, and OCR is committed to educating local communities on what OCR does and soliciting public input on how OCR can best serve local communities.

[Learn more about your rights under Title VI](#)

[Visit the EPA Environmental Justice Page](#)