

# Environmental Justice Definitions

**Environmental Equity** - An ideal of equal treatment and protection for various racial, ethnic, and income groups under environmental statutes, regulations, and practices applied in a manner that yields no substantial differential impacts relative to the dominant group--and the conditions so-created. Although environmental equity implies elements of "fairness" and "rights", it does not necessarily address past inequities or view the environment broadly, nor does it incorporate an understanding of the underlying causes and processes.

**Environmental Justice** - The right to a safe, healthy, productive, and sustainable environment for all, where "environment" is considered in its totality to include the ecological (biological), physical (natural and built), social, political, aesthetic, and economic environments. Environmental justice refers to the conditions in which such a right can be freely exercised, whereby individual and group identities, needs, and dignities are preserved, fulfilled, and respected in a way that provides for self-actualization and personal and community empowerment. This term acknowledges environmental "injustice" as the past and present state of affairs and expresses the socio-political objectives needed to address them.

**Environmental Racism** - "Racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, enforcement of regulations and laws, and targeting of communities of color for toxic waste disposal and siting of polluting industries," according to Reverend Benjamin E. Chavis, Jr., Ex-Chairman of the NAACP. Racial discrimination can be intentional or unintentional and is often a manifestation of "institutional racism." This term acknowledges the political reality that created and continues to perpetuate environmental inequity and injustice.

**Environmental Classism** - The results of and the process by which implementation of environmental policy creates intended or unintended consequences which have disproportionate impacts (adverse or beneficial) on lower income persons, populations, or communities. These disparate effects occur through various decision-making processes, program administration (e.g. Superfund clean-up schedules), and the issuance regulatory actions such as compliance inspections and other enforcement measures such as fines and penalties, and administrative and judicial orders. Flawed policies formation processes coupled with agency norms, priorities, traditions, and professional biases often make implementation subject to these disproportionate consequences.

**Environmental Justice Community of Concern (EJCOC)** - A neighborhood or community, composed predominantly of persons of color or a substantial proportion of persons below the poverty line, that is subjected to a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards and/or experiences a significantly reduced quality of life relative to surrounding or comparative communities. EJCOCs provide valuable opportunities to better understand environmental justice problems. EJCOCs should be targeted by policy-makers for environmental reparations or remedies to compensate or restore

environmental quality to comparable levels and should be afforded special protection from additional adverse impacts.

Source: NRE 392 Coursepack (Welsch). University of Michigan. Winter 1997.