

State of New Jersey Environmental Justice Advisory Council 2024 Work Plan

The projects listed below highlight the priority issues that New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) and its working groups (WG) plan to focus on during 2024. However, EJAC remains available to provide feedback and advice on issues, policies, and decision points as requested by DEP and other state agencies through the Environmental Justice Interagency Council (EJIC).

Air

The Air Working Group is committed to addressing the unhealthy, cumulative, and disproportionate air pollution exposures faced by minority and low-income communities in New Jersey.

Community Air Monitoring

Develop a framework for community air monitoring projects that overburdened communities (OBCs) may request from their local transportation management associations (TMAs). The North Jersey Transportation Authority will use Federal Transportation Block Grant funds to enable TMAs to provide air monitoring at the request of municipalities, community groups or residents, similar to their current provision of traffic speed studies. EJAC will advise the development of the program; identify potential TMAs and communities for a pilot project; and publicize the service to overburdened communities. EJAC will also advise DEP in the development of a suite of resources for TMAs and interested overburdened communities including:

- Training to TMAs participating in the pilot project. A recording of that training will be a resource for all TMAs after the full launch of the program.
- Community air monitoring fact sheet to be included in NJDEP Office of Environmental Justice's (OEJ) resource library.
- Lessons learned from NJ community groups that have already implemented community air monitoring programs. The working group will also explore options for how to use such data to influence decision making impacting the health and air quality of communities.

Addressing ongoing Air Quality Concerns

The Air Working Group will continue discussions to better understand and brainstorm potential solutions to the following issues related to air quality that have been of ongoing concern to EJ communities:

- Emergency Communication: EJAC wants to understand and propose improvements to the public communication protocols, particularly for OBCs, following emergency incidents that have air quality impacts, such as fires at industrial facilities.
- Scrap Yards: Scrap metal facilities are not currently regulated under solid waste regulations. EJAC wants to discuss and understand potential solutions for this regulatory gap.
- Odor: Many OBCs deal with odors from multiple industrial, waste, or other facilities. The process to address these occurrences includes community members reporting odor incidents through DEP's WARN-DEP hotline, followed by DEP enforcement inspectors investigating the incident to determine any violations by facilities with DEP permits. EJAC has requested clarity and discussions to understand and propose improvements.

Water

The Water Working Group is committed to making certain that everyone in the State of New Jersey, regardless of where they live or what they look like, has safe and affordable drinking water and access to clean waterways.

Watershed Grant

Conceptualize the most productive and efficient way to distribute the \$1 million in grant money for a watershed-related initiative for Overburdened Communities within the DEP. Create a proposal for the DEP that outlines multiple program options. Determine ways for EJAC to support the implementation of the chosen grant program.

Green Infrastructure

Explore strategies to advance green infrastructure in OBCs. Examine current projects and programs by the DEP to identify intersections for environmental justice and stormwater management and provide recommendations to ensure community needs are met. Investigate barriers, like funding and staff capacity, in the successful implementation of programs, such as Long-Term Control Plans, and assist in identifying systems of support. Use this evaluation to develop policy recommendations for the DEP.

Public Participation

- Identify opportunities for public participation and community engagement in the new MS4 permit framework including permit renewal, stormwater management facilities, and Watershed Improvement Plans. Create a brief useable resource guide for communities to understand the five-year permit cycle and identify resources to help navigate where in the process there are opportunities for public engagement and comments.
- Evaluate the community engagement sections of CSO Long Term Control Permits in order to determine if they are sufficient. Assess how to improve public engagement and communication between the residents and the municipality.

Land

The Land Working Group is committed to addressing land use decisions and their effects on overburdened communities in New Jersey.

Urban and Community Forestry

Help promote OBC participation in a \$11.25 million grant opportunity from the Inflation Reduction Act for Urban and Community Forestry, which aims to expand urban tree canopy and the resulting benefits provided. Assist in outreach to OBCs that are not currently participating in the NJ Urban and Community Forestry Accreditation program so that said OBCs have equitable access to state grants for the active planning and management of trees and forests in their communities. Help identify barriers to capacity for sustaining local tree and forest management programs, and provide recommendations to the NJ Urban and Community Forestry Program to improve programming to address identified barriers.

Brownfield Revitalization

Assess the quality, accessibility, and availability of information within the online DEP Brownfield Inventory. Communicate strategies to facilitate creative and adaptive uses for brownfields to increase the public health and quality of life in EJ communities. Continue to amplify existing guidance on brownfield clean up and adaptation.

Waterfront Public Access

Assist NJDEP's Land Resource Protection Program in identifying areas within regulatory purview that are of significance to OBCs. Determine methods to address those priorities when reviewing permit applications that are not captured by the EJ Law and influence where procedural reviews can be adapted to reflect those needs. Identify areas of program overlap and how procedures could result in unintended consequences for the public. Areas of exploration could include understanding perceived or real public access challenges and developing recommendations for the kinds of public access projects that may be helpful to coastal or coast adjacent OBCs (e.g. shuttle services).

Environmental Education & Communication (EEC)

The Environmental Education and Communication working group assists the DEP and state departments and agencies with increasing outreach to and engagement with EJ communities.

Environmental Seminar Series for EJ Communities

Work with DEP to plan a series of environmental seminars for EJ advocates, residents, and community-based organizations to learn how to navigate DEP systems and processes.

EJ Primer

Draft an EJ primer, tentatively titled "EJ and You," for NJDEP to publish as a resource designed to provide basic information about EJ, opportunities to engage on EJ issues with the DEP, and the activities of EJAC in supporting DEP's Office of Environmental Justice. Develop a marketing plan for the primer and provide primer in Spanish and potentially other languages based on need assessment. Lastly, identify ways to connect NJ teachers with EJ materials to support lesson development.