



## WE DON'T ALL BREATHE THE SAME AIR.

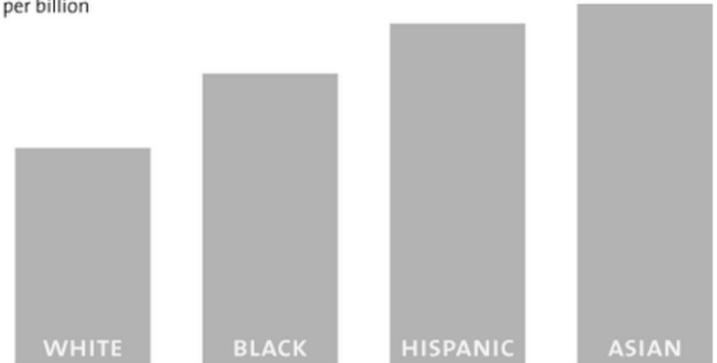
People of color are exposed to 46% more nitrogen dioxide pollution each year than white people.

Average NO<sub>2</sub> exposure in parts per billion

15 ppb

10 ppb

5 ppb



## NEPA and

## Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is a critical part of the struggle to improve and maintain a clean and healthful environment, especially for those who have traditionally lived, worked, and played closest to the sources of pollution.

At a time when communities of color have increasingly been disenfranchised and cut out of the government decisionmaking process, it is more important than ever to ensure that low-income and minority communities have a strong voice in the decisions and policies that impact the health of their communities and the environment that we all depend on.

**The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is an essential tool in the fight for environmental justice.** NEPA promotes environmental justice by:

1. Requiring federal agencies to study and disclose a proposed project's potential environmental, economic, social, and health impacts on low-income, minority, and rural communities;
2. Providing opportunities for meaningful input from those affected communities.

### NEPA Gives disenfranchised communities a voice in the decisionmaking process

- Industry groups and their friends in Congress want to undermine NEPA because it's a powerful tool for our communities to exercise their right to participate in important government decisions.
- NEPA is one of the few tools the federal government possesses to help it assess whether proposed infrastructure projects will have unexpected consequences and costs.
- By mandating meaningful public input, NEPA draws on our democratic values to ensure that projects are undertaken with the benefit of our communities in mind. This public input leads to better-developed projects with greater consensus and protections for our health and environment.
- Any law that provides broad opportunities for public participation in government decisions should be embraced and strengthened.

### FACT: Low-income, minority, and rural communities are disproportionately impacted by pollution and other environmental risks to health

- It is a statistical fact that low-income, minority, and rural communities are disproportionately exposed to pollution and toxins on the job, at school, and in their homes. Nearly half of all Latinos live in our country's most polluted cities, in "hot spot" areas where incinerators, power plants, and factories are clustered together.
- NEPA helps protect these communities and workers by requiring project sponsors to engage in an environmental review process designed to identify any major environmental impacts and significant dangers to workplace safety prior to the start of construction.
- Without NEPA, the federal government would be able to rubber stamp permits for corporations to build oil pipelines and toxic waste dumps without adequate environmental review.

## NEPA helps to protect vulnerable communities and ensure robust worker protections for all

- Shortcutting environmental reviews doesn't just cost taxpayer money, it jeopardizes worker safety as well as the health of our local communities. As sea levels continue to rise and extreme weather events become more frequent, NEPA ensures our roads, bridges, and other infrastructure are engineered to be more resilient to the increasingly severe effects of climate change.
- When projects are excluded from NEPA review and due diligence is not done, the consequences can be disastrous. The catastrophic flooding that occurred on the US-Mexico border in the city of Nogales in 2008, which killed two people and caused tens of millions of dollars in damage as a result of a border project that was exempted from environmental review, is one such example. The NEPA process doesn't just protect the environment, it helps save lives.
- In short, NEPA is the law that makes sure that federal projects get done right, from the first brick laid to the last wage paid.

## NEPA isn't just an environmental law – it's a critical civil rights tool

- NEPA doesn't just protect US citizens – it protects everyone. It protects the health and safety of every family and community that stands to be threatened, regardless of income level, ethnicity, or citizenship status.
- When a new power plant is being developed, NEPA helps ensure appropriate workplace safety. When an immigration detention center is planned, NEPA ensures health care for its detainees. And when the Trump administration seeks to militarize the border and build a wall, the NEPA process helps to demonstrate the devastating impacts it would have on the environment and residents on both sides of the border.
- NEPA isn't just an environmental protection statute, it's a critical tool for civic engagement we cannot afford to lose.

### References:

- [1] "[Trump's EPA Concludes Environmental Racism Is Real.](#)" *The Atlantic*. February 28, 2018.
- [2] "People in Poor Neighborhoods Breathe More Hazardous Particles." *The Scientific American*. November 1, 2012.
- [2] "[Port, Community, North Charleston Launch Historic Partnership.](#)" *South Carolina Ports Authority*. December 6, 2007.

## NEPA in action: Leatherman Container Terminal (Charleston, SC)

In the 2000s, the South Carolina State Ports Authority (SPA) proposed building the new \$762 million Hugh K. Leatherman Terminal in Charleston on top of a former Navy base in order to accommodate the increased shipping traffic.

Predominantly low-income North Charleston community members immediately voiced concerns about reductions in air quality and diminished housing prices. Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities (LAMC), a group of seven neighborhoods near the container site, worked with the city of North Charleston and the SPA to minimize negative impacts and secured \$4 million in neighborhood and economic development projects.

A total of \$3 million was used to reconstruct a new recreational center for the community, and the remaining \$1 million was used to fund additional affordable housing, educational scholarships, and youth programs.

The LAMC continues to use the NEPA process to improve other planned projects in North Charleston, including the expansion of I-26.



***"LAMC members, most with no prior environmental or transportation planning experience, had to teach ourselves NEPA policies...While we were concerned about air quality, there were other environmental issues as equally important to us: diminished housing values, environmental protection during construction, and the port access road alignment."***