

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVE

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FACT SHEET: CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- ⇒ **Climate change** refers to the warming of the planet, due largely to burning fossil fuel for cars and industry, that could induce crop failures, famines, flooding, health issues, and a host of other environmental, economic, and social problems.ⁱ
- ⇒ **Environmental Justice** means the fair treatment of people of all races and economic groups in the implementation and enforcement of environmental protection laws.
- ⇒ The United States emits one quarter of the world's gases that cause global warming.ⁱⁱ
- ⇒ People of color are concentrated in urban centers in the South, coastal regions, and areas with substandard air quality.ⁱⁱⁱ Approximately 80 percent of people of color in the United States live in coastal regions.^{iv} New Orleans, which is 62 percent African-American and 2 feet below sea level, exemplifies the severe and disproportionate impacts of climate change in the U.S.^v
- ⇒ Climate change harms the health of communities of color. Communities of color are burdened with poor air quality and are twice as likely to be uninsured than whites.^{vi} Yet, these communities will become even more vulnerable to climate-change related respiratory ailments, heat-related illness and death, and illness from insect-carried diseases.^{vii}
 - ⇒ Air pollution already hits people of color especially hard. Over 57 percent of whites, 65 percent of African Americans, and 80 percent of Latinos live in 437 counties with substandard air quality^{viii}. Global warming is expected to double the number of cities that currently exceed air quality standards.^{ix}
 - ⇒ People of color are twice as likely to die in a heat wave. A study of the fifteen largest American cities found that climate change would increase heat-related deaths by at least 90 percent.^x
 - ⇒ People of color are almost three times more likely than whites to be hospitalized or die from asthma and other respiratory illnesses linked to air pollution.^{xi} Asthma accounts for 10 million lost school days, 1.2 million emergency room visits, 15 million outpatient visits, and over 500,000 hospitalizations each year in the United States.^{xii}
 - ⇒ Global warming will hit the uninsured hardest. There are 44 million Americans, including 11 million children, without health insurance today.^{xiii} The uninsured rate for people of color is twice the rate for whites.^{xiv}
- ⇒ Global warming will increase the number of flood, drought and fire occurrences worldwide. Wealthy homeowners are able to move, whereas low-income people (who

usually rent) cannot.^{xv} Also, low-income people typically lack insurance to replace possessions lost in storms and floods. Only 25 percent of renters have renters insurance.^{xvi}

- ⇒ If forced to move, people of color face a housing search complicated by housing and insurance discrimination. One of every two African Americans and Latino Americans is met with discrimination in the housing rental and owner market and by insurance coverage and premium rates.^{xvii}
- ⇒ Climate change will reduce discretionary spending because prices will rise across the board. Low-income families will have to spend even more on food and electricity, which already represent a large proportion of their budgets.^{xviii}
- ⇒ Indigenous people are losing traditional medicinal plants to a warming climate, and subsistence households are suffering from the loss of species that are unable to adapt.^{xix}

ⁱ Miller, A. and P. Brown. 2000. "A Fair Climate For All". Oakland, CA: Redefining Progress.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Energy Information Administration. 2001. *International Energy Annual 1999*. Table H1: World Carbon Dioxide Emissions from the Consumption and Flaring of Fossil Fuels, 1990-1999. Washington, DC.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bullard, R.D. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000.

^{iv} US Census Bureau. 1999. "American Housing Survey". Washington D.C.: US Government

^v Metrovision Factbook. "Tables and Exhibits". www.metrovision.org

^{vi} Bullard, R.D. *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996.

^{vii} Miller, Ansjie and Gautam, Sethi and Wolff, Gary. 2001. "What's Fair?: Consumers and Climate Change". Oakland, CA: Redefining Progress.

^{viii} Wernette, D.R. and L.A. Nieves, "Breathing Polluted Air: Minorities are Disproportionately Exposed," *EPA Journal* 18 (March, 1992): 16-17.

^{ix} Cline, William. 1992. *The Economics of Global Warming*. Washington, D.C.: Institute of International Economics.

^x Kalkstein, Laurence S. 1992. "Impacts of Global Warming on Human Health: heat Stress-Related Mortality." In *Global Climate Change: Implications, Challenges and Mitigation Measures*, eds. S.K. Majumdar, L.S. Kalkstein, B. Yarnal, E.W. Miller, and L.M. Rosenfeld. Easton, Pa.: Pennsylvania Academy of Science.

^{xi} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Asthma Mortality and Hospitalization among Children and Young Adults—United States, 1980-1993," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 45 (1996): 350-353.

^{xii} NEA Health Information Network, "Asthma," Web site <http://www.neahin.org/4c.html>.

^{xiii} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2000. *Healthy People 2010*. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health. 2 vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.

^{xiv} Lewers, D. Ted, "AMA: Uninsured Americans Constitute a National Health Crisis," American Medical Association Web site <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/article/1617-4463.html> (April 4, 2001).

^{xv} Bullard, R.D., J.E. Grigsby, III, and C. Lee, *Residential Apartheid: The American Legacy*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for African American Studies Publication, 1994.

^{xvi} Insurance Information Institute. 1999. *The I.I.I. Insurance Fact Book 2000*. New York: Insurance Information Institute.

^{xvii} Turner, M.A. Turner, R.J. Struyk, and J. Yinger, *Housing Discrimination Study: Synthesis*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996.

^{xviii} Miller, Ansjie and Gautam, Sethi and Wolff, Gary. 2001. "What's Fair?: Consumers and Climate Change". Oakland, CA: Redefining Progress.

^{xix} National Assessment Synthesis Team. 2001. *Climate Change Impacts on the United States: The Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change*. Report for the US Global Change Research Program. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.