

Sustainability Spotlight

With climate change becoming one of the top issues on people's minds, environmental justice issues come to the forefront of the conversation as well. While extreme weather events are on the rise, disruptions to the power grid, water systems, communication networks, and transportation services drastically increase. Communities of color are less likely to have adequate protection or prompt responses in times of disruptions and emergencies. It is not an accident that some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country are also the most polluted. It also comes to no surprise that communities of color have been the top locations for chemical plants, landfills, and other industrial sites that produce toxic waste. As the fight against climate change continues, so too does the fight for justice for the environment around you.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), environmental justice is the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other activities that affect human health and the environment. The environmental justice movement in the United States began as a community in North Carolina organized to stop the construction of a landfill within 1,500 feet of a school in 1980. Other instances of groups seeking justice from environmental wrongdoing have been littered throughout history. Just recently, the Flint water crisis brought national awareness to a disadvantaged community with declining infrastructure. Many times, the injustices come against people of color and other minority groups in the United States. Fortunately, the environmental justice movement is not just an American idea, it is sought by groups of people around the world.



So how can you fight and support environmental justice within your community?

1. **Educate yourself:** As you learn more about the historical inequities of environmental injustices, you are more aware of the signs of future inequities. Educating yourself, your friends and family, and your neighborhood is the first step in understanding the policies being enacted and implemented around you.
2. **Hold your elected officials accountable:** Calling on officials, both locally and nationally who are making decisions, to be informed on the history of environmental justice and the concerns that you have for certain policies and projects is a way to ensure that your voice is heard.
3. **Put your money where your mouth is:** Holding your community and elected officials accountable for the choices they make can be hard. However, one way to make a large impact is to use your wallet to amplify your voice. Not by donating it, but by withholding it. Investigate the practices of companies and the environmental efforts that they take part in. If a company does not align with your environmental values, shop elsewhere. Rather than relying on large companies to provide you with everyday products, find a local business that can offer the same product or service, or find a way to make it yourself.

Environmental justice is a collective effort that requires raising awareness, not only in ourselves, but those around us. By fostering education on the issue and embracing personal and social responsibility. Only then can we correct the historical injustices of the environment around us and build an equitable future for everyone.



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