
Office of Environmental Justice – Highlights February 20, 2020

Initiatives

Roundtables – OEJ has hosted 7 roundtable meetings over the past 2 years. Our next roundtable is scheduled in the Lehigh Valley on March 24, 2020. These events invite approximately 20-25 stakeholders from the community to discuss pertinent environmental justice issues and find potential solutions between DEP and other state and community partners.

Workforce Development Initiative – OEJ is developing a workforce development initiative to create a pipeline to drinking water and wastewater operator careers. These jobs are in demand, secure and provide sustainable wages with a minimum education requirement of a high school diploma for entry in the field. OEJ is collaborating with Delaware County Community College and William Penn School District in eastern Delaware County to pilot the program which aims to begin in school year 2020-21.

Environmental Education – DEP’s Environmental Education Center, OEJ and PA Department of Education (PDE) are partnering to establish initiatives that will infuse EJ principles in PDE training around environmental education for students, educators and municipal staff. DEP’s Environmental Education Center, OEJ and PDE hosted an environmental education workshop for the City of Harrisburg’s Environmental Teen Corps (ETC) program in summer 2019. OEJ will continue to work with Harrisburg ETC to offer a train-the-trainer workshop in spring 2020 and work on using the framework of program to create an environmental education model that can be applied to other programs.

Shamokin Brownfields Grant – EPA awarded DEP a Small Communities Assistance pilot grant to assist a small, disadvantaged community on providing training, research and technical assistance for addressing brownfields redevelopment. Shamokin was identified as the community to implement the work. For the past several months, DEP and OEJ have been working with city officials, non-profit leaders in the community and Bucknell University to implement the grant and provide the resources to the community to support redevelopment efforts.

University Partnerships with EJ Communities – OEJ staff is coordinating a College Underserved Community Partnership Program (CUPP) project in Nanticoke City, which includes partners from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Nanticoke City, and Misericordia University. The project creates a partnership between academic institutions and local communities to provide technical assistance, in this case from marketing and communications masters’ degree students who are looking at strategic planning, communications, and marketing needs in the City.

Partnership Development

Tri-State EJ Meeting – OEJ convened a meeting with environmental justice staff from Delaware and New Jersey on Thursday, December 12, to discuss environmental justice initiatives and infrastructure among the respective state agencies. OEJ will continue to facilitate bi-annual calls of this tri-state group.

EJ Stakeholder Call – OEJ convened a call on Monday, December 16, with stakeholders representing EJ organizations statewide to discuss planning a quarterly EJ call in order to provide information about DEP work and initiatives and gather feedback from EJ orgs.

Environmental Justice Advisory Board (EJAB) and Interagency Collaboration – EJAB members recently formed a Subcommittee on Environmental Justice and Environmental Health, which will be working to assist OEJ and DEP around issues involving environmental justice and environmental health, particularly those issues involving people in EJ Areas. In addition, EJAB members started planning an Environmental Justice symposium to honor John Waffenschmidt, a long time EJAB member who passed away in 2018.

Internal/EJ Infrastructure

Environmental Justice Policy – OEJ completed its final draft of the EJ Public Participation Policy and Comment-Response document. The Comment and Response document and revised policy are under final review.

Internal Working Group – OEJ convened the Environmental Justice Internal Work Group on December 4. The Work Group was utilized to solicit feedback on environmental justice indicatives and to discuss EJ considerations in compliance and enforcement actions, proposed EJ legislation, among other topics.

Annual Report – OEJ is working to produce an annual report that will be released in 2020. The annual report will document work and outcomes throughout 2019.

Climate Action Plan Outreach – OEJ is working with the Energy Programs Office (EPO) to develop an outreach strategy to Environmental Justice Areas on the plan and help facilitate outreach generally. OEJ and EPO are planning presentations with EJ partners in all 6 regions of the state.

Grants – OEJ worked with the Communications Office, Legislative Affairs Office and Grants Center to update DEP’s internal Grant Management Policy. The Policy now contains language stating that program staff will ensure that applications submitted from Environmental Justice Areas are given additional consideration, as appropriate.

Boards and Commissions – OEJ is working with The Policy Office to identify vacancies on DEP boards and commissions and connect and engage candidates from Environmental Justice Areas to open positions.

Regional Updates

EJ Coordinator Hiring – OEJ and SWRO staff conducted interviews for the Western Regional EJ Coordinator position and anticipate extending an offer in early 2020.