

# Office of Environmental Justice

Solid Waste and Recycling Fund Advisory Committee Meeting  
March 19, 2026

JOSH SHAPIRO, GOVERNOR | JESSICA SHIRLEY, SECRETARY



Pennsylvania  
Department of  
Environmental Protection

# Department of Environmental Protection, Environmental Justice Overview

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# Our Mission

The Department of Environmental Protection's mission is to protect Pennsylvania's air, land and water resources and to provide for the health and safety of its residents and visitors, consistent with the rights and duties established under the Environmental Rights Amendment (Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution).

We will work as partners with individuals, organizations, governments, and businesses to conserve and restore our natural resources and to address all current and future environmental challenges including climate change and environmental justice.





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# Our Vision

To be a model environmental agency that moves at the speed of business and leads the way in science, innovation, and best practices to ensure clean air, land, and water for the health and safety of present and future generations.



# Our Values

- Environmental Stewardship
- Public Service
- Communications
- Excellence and Continuous Improvement
- Commitment to Customers
- Accountability





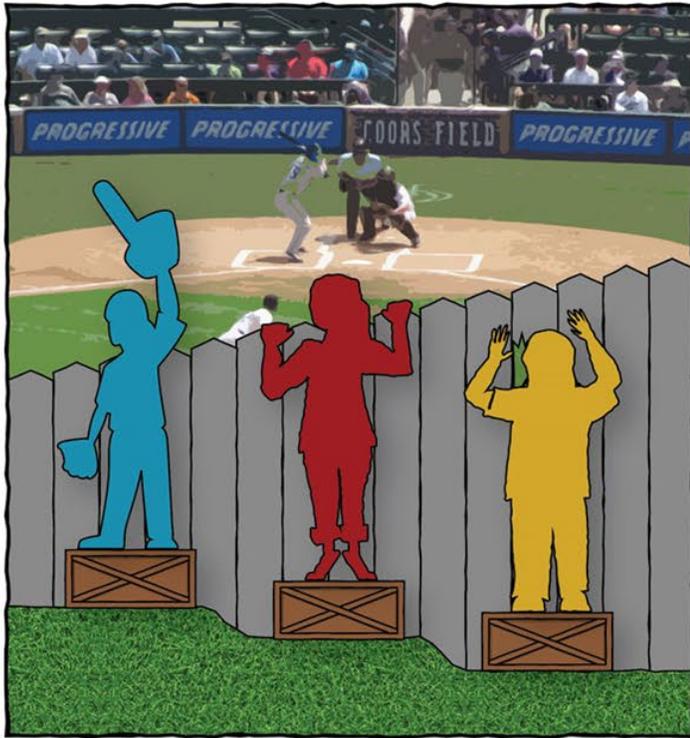
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# Environmental Justice Defined

“Environmental justice means the **just treatment and meaningful involvement** of all people, regardless of income, wealth, race, color, national origin, area of residence, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other activities that affect human health and the environment so that people: are **fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects** (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and **the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers**; and have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices. It further involves the **prevention of future environmental injustice and the redress of historic environmental injustice.**”



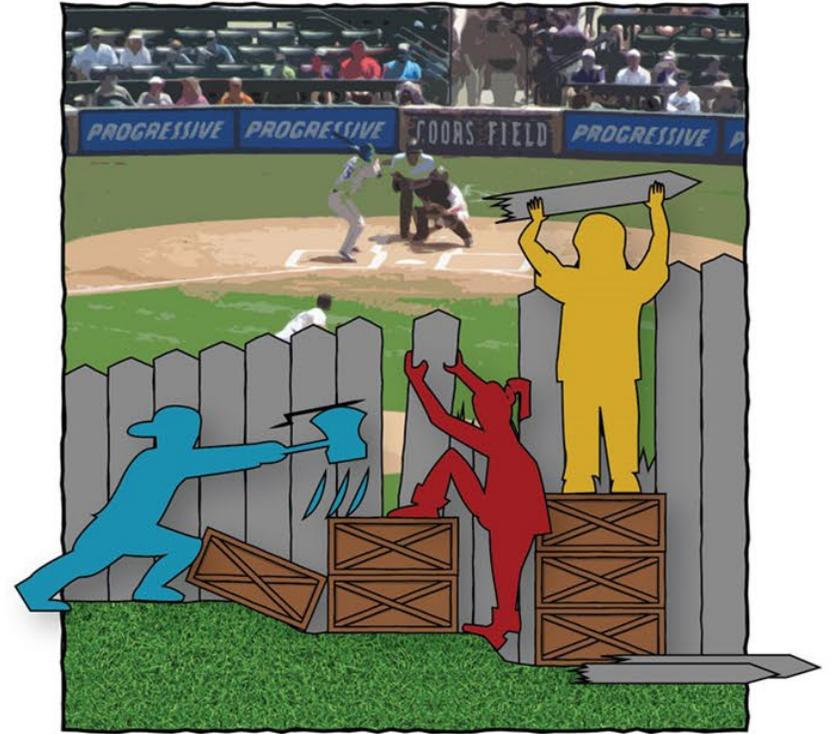
# Equality, Equity, & Justice



**EQUALITY**



**EQUITY**



**JUSTICE**



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# The Science Behind Disproportionate Environmental Impacts



**Environmental injustice  
is a force multiplier**

## DRIVERS

- Built Environment: Proximity to pollution sources (e.g., stationary and mobile air emissions)
- Natural Environment: Disasters (e.g., wildfires, heat waves, pandemics)
- Social Environment: Health disparities (e.g., asthma, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes)



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# History of Environmental Justice



Warren County,  
North Carolina (1982)



United Church of  
Christ Study (1987)



First People of Color  
Environmental  
Leadership Summit  
(1991)



Executive Order  
12898 (1994)

The EJ movement, started by people (primarily people of color) to address inequitable environmental protection and environmental services in their communities was grounded in civil rights and the environmental movement. The movement builds on the lived experience of disproportionately impacted communities. The work of these early advocates paved the way for program development starting in the early 1990's, over the past 30 years, have resulted in significant progress at all levels of government.

Graphics Source: [U.S. EPA](#)

# History of Environmental Justice Federal Executive Administration

Revoked Core EJ Orders: Rescinded EO 12898 and Justice 40—eliminating federal accountability for EJ.

Abolished EJ Programs: Ordered termination of agency EJ offices and staff positions.

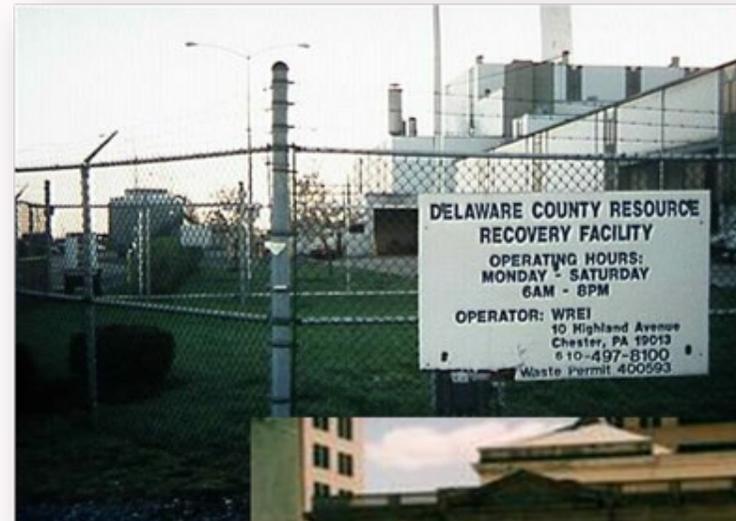
Defunded EJ Initiatives: Canceled \$1.7 billion in air, water, and climate justice grants.

Erased Public Data: Removed EPA's EJScreen and other transparency tools.



# Roots of EJ in Pennsylvania

- Organizing of Chester in early 1990s
- Environmental Risk Study by EPA in conjunction with DER in 1993
- Chester residents (CRCQL) lawsuit against DEP in 1996
- DEP Environmental Justice Work Group (EJWG) created in 1999 Report and Recommendations released in 2001





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# Roots of EJ in Pennsylvania

- In 2002, the Office of Environmental Advocate (OEA) and the Environmental Justice Advisory Board (EJAB) was created.
- In 2015, the Office of Environmental Advocacy was renamed as the Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ).
- The 1996 Title VI lawsuit, although dismissed, elevated national awareness of environmental racism.
- Lessons from Chester directly shaped DEP's establishment of environmental justice focused offices and advisory structures.
- These milestones mark the institutionalization of environmental justice principles within DEP policy.
- While positive, we still receive criticism from people in Chester and other places.



# Why Does DEP Focus on EJ?



**Environmental Rights Amendment (ERA) Article 1 § 27.**  
The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania’s public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.



# 2021 Executive Order

- An [Executive Order](#) on environmental justice was issued on October 28, 2021.
- Formally establishes the Office of Environmental Justice.
- Formally establishes the Environmental Justice Advisory Board
- Creates an Environmental Justice Interagency Council
- Outlines activities that executive branch agencies should take to further environmental justice goals.





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# How DEP has Prioritized EJ

- Appointed a Special Deputy of Environmental Justice to lead the Office of Environmental Justice at the Executive Level.
- Added Environmental Justice Regional Coordinators in each of DEP's six regions.
- Published The Environmental Justice Policy and PennEnviroScreen mapping tool
- Developed proactive community outreach and engagement program



# Environmental Justice Policy Overview

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# Policy Revision Process

- 2018: Initial policy revision begins with publication of Draft EJ Public Participation Policy, which was ultimately withdrawn.
- 2020 – 2022: DEP conducts public engagement.
- September, 16 2023: DEP Publishes Interim-Final EJ Policy
  - Held 12 in-person and virtual public comment meetings.
  - Presented to over 60 community organizations, advisory boards and commissions, business interest groups, and others.
  - Video and social media tools were also used.
- January 3, 2026: EJ Policy published as final
  - External outreach
  - Internal trainings on implementation



# Policy Sections & Focus

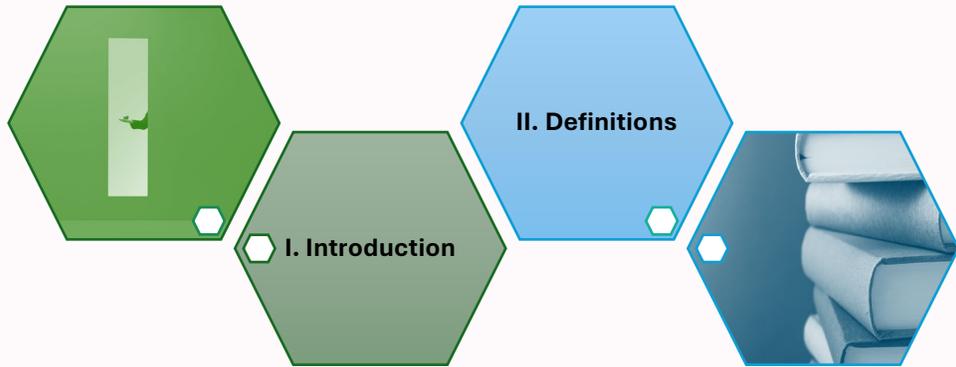


- I. Introduction
- II. Definitions
- III. Environmental Justice Area Criteria
- IV. Proactive Community Engagement
- V. Enhanced Public Participation
- VI. Inspections, Compliance, and Enforcement
- VII. Community Development and Investment
- VIII. Climate Initiatives
- IX. Policy Updates



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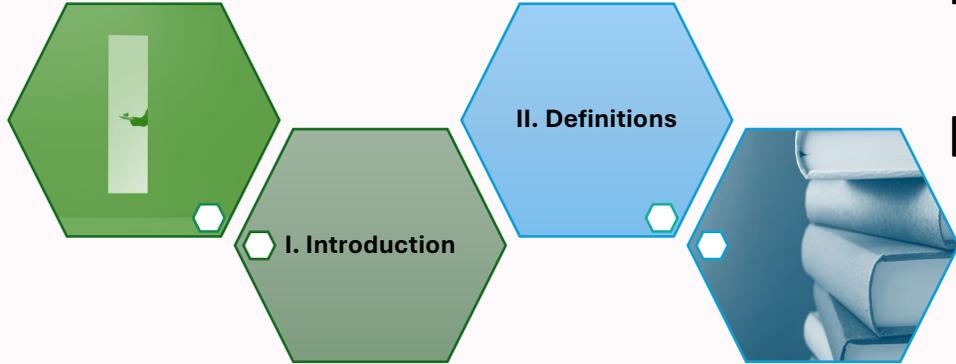
# Policy Sections & Focus



- I. Introduction
  - Background and history on the policy
- II. Definitions
  - Robust definitions section defines terms ranging from applicant to public meeting.
  - Assist in clarifying the document and ensuring that it is similarly interpreted by the public, DEP staff, and permit applicants.
  - Enhances the overall readability and accessibility of the document.



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# Policy Sections & Updates to Final

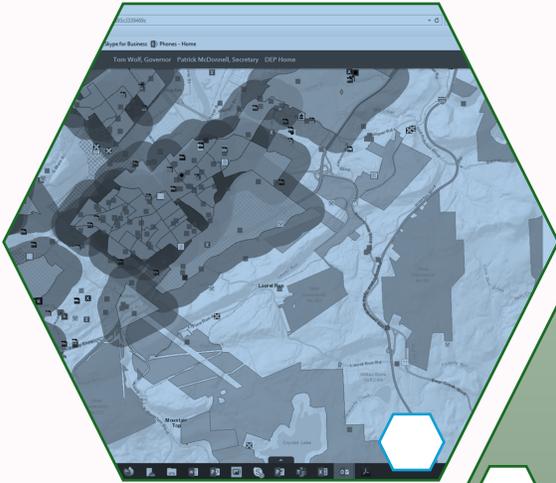
- I. Introduction
  - Removal of Title VI from the Authorizations
- II. Definitions
  - Minor updates to definitions based on comments. Specifically Environmental Justice, Community, Community-Based Organization (CBOs), Community Liaison, & Trigger Permit



# Policy Section & Focus

## III. Environmental Justice Areas

- Describes where the policy applies
- Refers to Appendix B for detailed mapping of where the policy will apply to allow for easy updating.
- Introduces PennEnviroScreen as the tool for researching these areas.



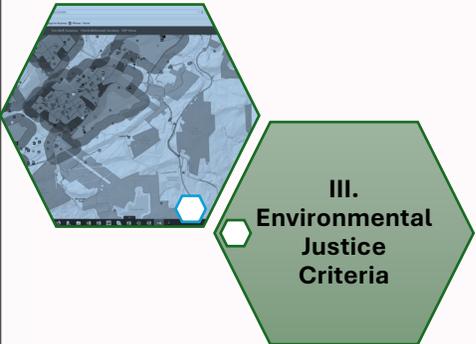
III. Environmental Justice  
Criteria



# Policy Section & Updates to Final

## III. Environmental Justice Areas

- Added census block groups with no/low population, but in top 5% of Pollution Burden.
- Previous EJ Areas from last update are included as Opt-In consideration.
- Update to 2020 Census Block Group Geography.
- Removed data exclusion rule from American Communities Survey data.
- Added more detail on regular updates.
- Clarified what will change regularly and what will require public comment.
- Ways to submit comments on the methodology.
- Additional criteria suggestions added to future considerations segments.
- Some changes in specific cited studies.
- Updates to some specific indicators.
- Text clarity.





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# EJ Areas and Criteria

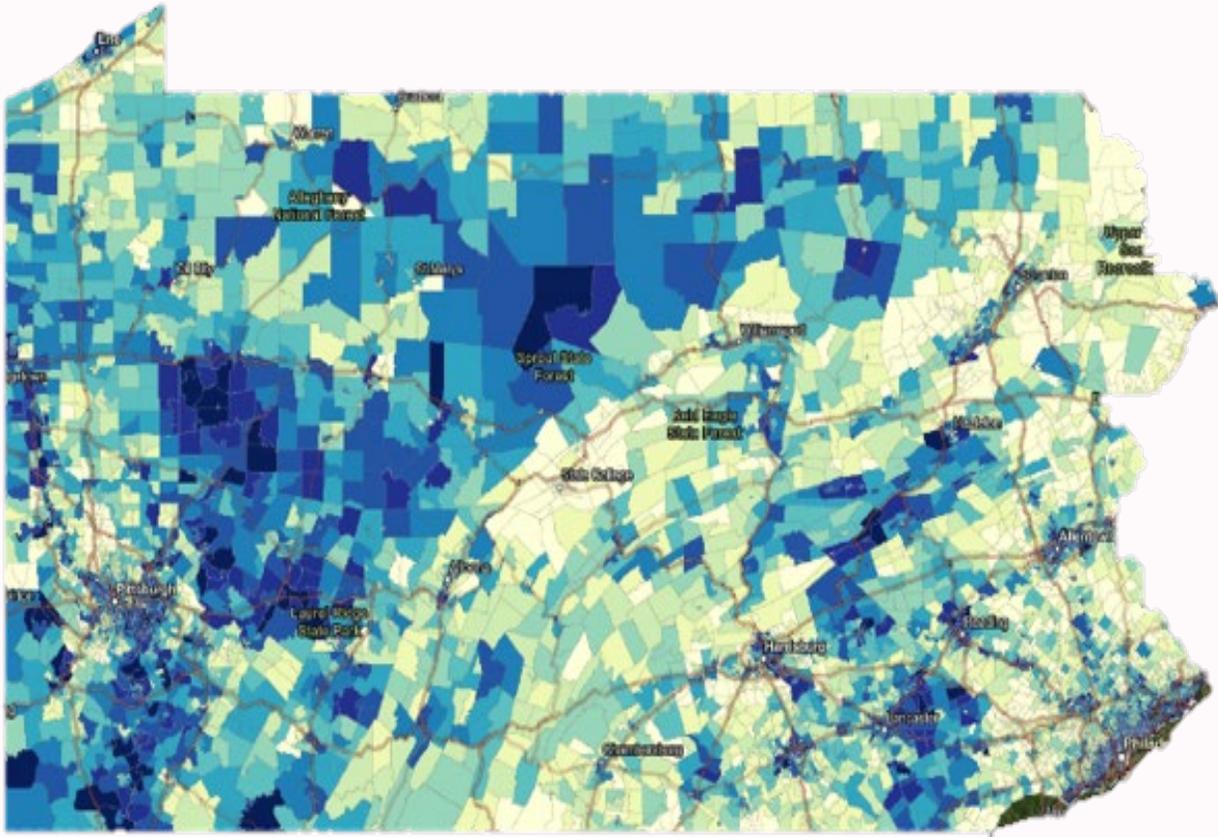
- PennEnviroScreen is DEP's Environmental Justice mapping tool
- Provides a snapshot of undue environmental burden on vulnerable communities
- Combines Pollution Burden and Population Characteristics data to identify EJ Areas
- Indicates where the EJ Policy applies





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# PennEnviroScreen



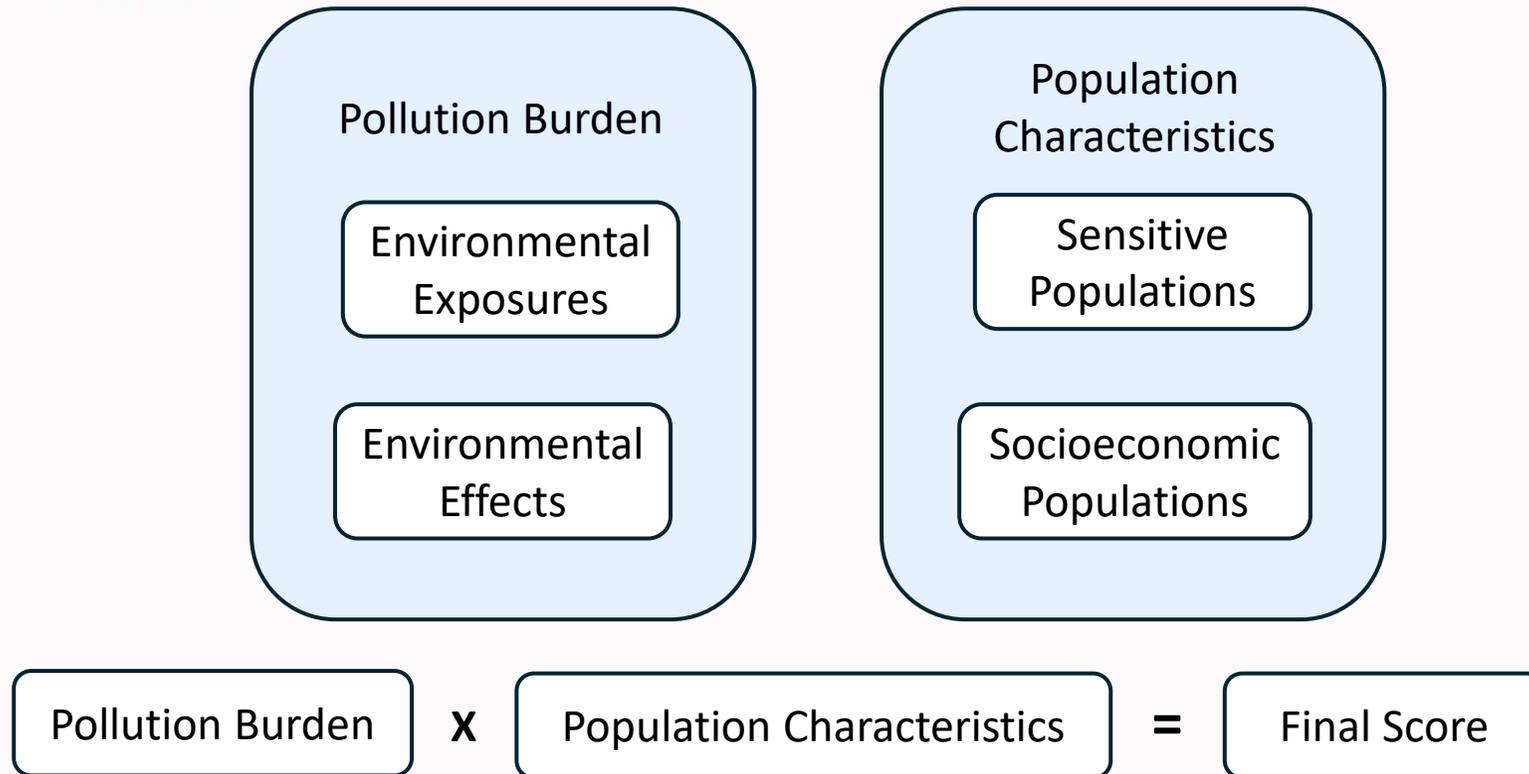
This model combines

Pollution Burden  
+  
Population Characteristics

To identify Environmental Justice (EJ) Areas in accordance with the EJ Policy, which will increase public participation in the permitting process of proposed facilities



# EJ Areas and Criteria



An environmental justice area is a place that has disproportionate impacts of pollution burden on certain vulnerable populations, as defined by the Policy.



# EJ Areas and Criteria

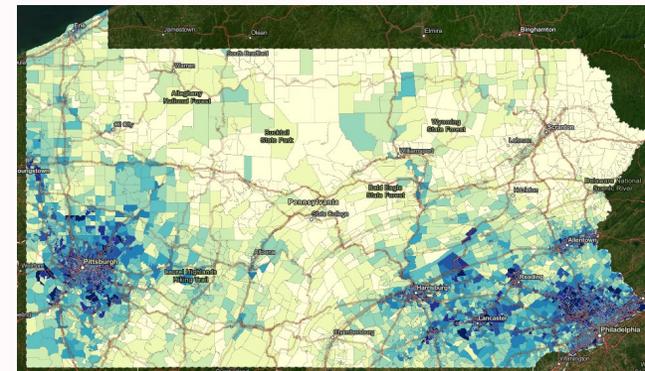
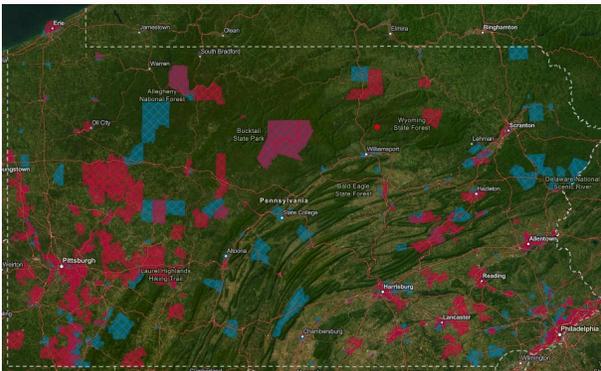
Pollution Burden: Environmental Exposures	Pollution Burden: Environmental Effects	Population Characteristics: Sensitive Populations	Population Characteristics: Socioeconomic Population
Ozone	Oil Gas Locations (Conventional Wells)	Asthma	Low Educational Attainment
PM2.5	Oil Gas Locations (Hydraulic Fracturing/ Unconventional Wells)	No Health Insurance	Linguistic Isolation
Diesel Particulate Matter	Proximity to Railroads	Cancer	Housing-Burdened Low-Income Households
Toxic Air Emissions	Land Remediation	Disability	Poverty
Toxic Water Emissions	Hazardous Waste and Storage Sites	Heart Disease	Unemployment
Pesticides	Municipal Waste Sites		Race
Traffic Density	Coal Mining		Age Over 64
Compressor Stations	Impaired Lakes and Streams		Age Under 5
Children's Lead Risk	Abandoned Mining Concerns		
	Flood Risk		



# How Might You Use PennEnviroScreen?

## What are potential uses of PennEnviroScreen?

- General research
- Determine Enhanced Public Participation applicability for a permit application
- Assess where your grant application will serve
- Determine EJ status in a particular geography
- Identify local demographics and environmental concerns



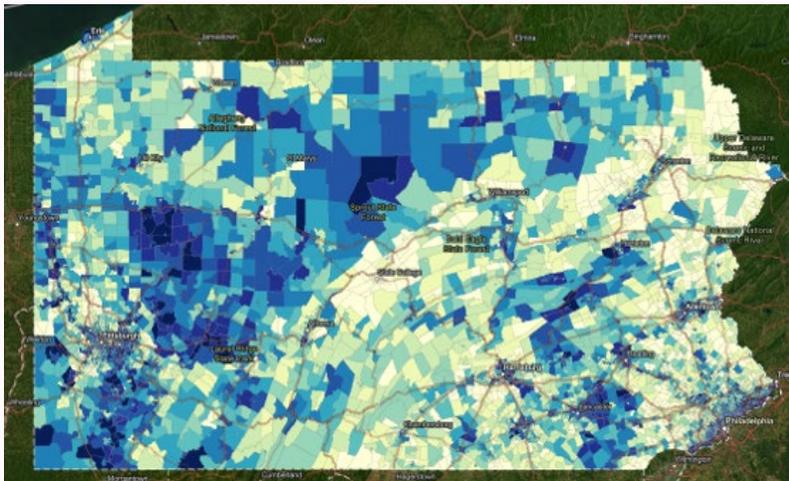


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# Need Assistance Utilizing PennEnviroScreen?

- Contact your EJ Regional Coordinator
- Visit the Office of Environmental Justice webpage to watch a PennEnviroScreen video tutorials:

<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/public-participation/office-of-environmental-justice/pennenviroscreen>



# Policy Section & Focus

- IV. Proactive Community Engagement
- Reaching communities before an environmental project or crisis.
  - Centering on community voices
  - **NO UPDATES IN FINAL POLICY**



IV. Proactive  
Community  
Engagement



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# EJ Policy Overview

Throughout the Policy there is a common theme of Proactive Community Engagement:

DEP seeks to "build long-lasting relationships with people and communities outside of individual projects" and to "increase strategic community education, outreach, engagement and capacity building trust through intentional action. This policy also recommends DEP reach out proactively to communities to help understand their concerns before issuing permits for new facilities, to explain DEP's inspection and compliance strategies, and to provide communities with the tools to help address environmental issues."





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# Proactive Community Engagement by the Numbers

## In 2025 DEP

Met with more than 225 community-based organizations

Met with more than 200 stakeholders and community leaders

Hosted 57 events/office hours

Attended more than 100 events hosted by partners

Give 40 presentations



# Policy Section & Focus

## V. Enhanced Public Participation

Details the Enhanced Public Participation Process

- A. Projects Covered (**To which projects** it can be applied in the permitting context)
  - 1. Trigger Projects (Specified in Appendix C)
  - 2. Opt-in Projects (Suggested permits in Appendix C)
- B. Enhanced Process (**How** it is applied in the permitting process)
  - 1. Pre-Project Community Outreach
  - 2. Language Access
  - 3. Permit Application
    - i. Public Participation Strategy
    - ii. Pre-Application Meeting
    - iii. Notice
    - iv. Public Meetings
    - v. Public Comment
    - vi. Technical Support
  - 4. Communication After the DEP Authorization or Permit Issuance



V. Enhanced  
Public  
Participation



# Policy Section & Updates to Final

## V. Enhanced Public Participation

- Trigger Permit Definition Clarified
- Link to the Policy on Public Participation in the Permit Review Process (Document Number 012-0900-003)
- EJ Area set at the time of application submittal instead of when the project is deemed administratively complete.
- Appendix C updates
  - Language clarification
  - Opt-In clarification – Types of permits listed aren't exclusive to what can be opted-in.
  - CAFOs moved to Opt-In
  - Previous EJ Areas included in Opt-In



V. Enhanced  
Public  
Participation



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# Why DEP Implements Enhanced Public Participation

- **The public and other interested parties can contribute valuable information and ideas.**
- **Public participation is a vital component of the permitting process**
- **Improves the quality of agency decisions**
- **Improves the quality of permit applications**
- **Builds relationships**
- **Addresses concerns**
- **Minimizes impacts on the community and the environment.**



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# Enhanced Public Participation

- Enhanced Public Participation consists of the outreach activities and other support for EJ communities regarding public participation Trigger and Opt-In Projects that is in addition to minimum legal requirements.
- Projects with permits that require Enhanced Public Participation will be analyzed by DEP to consider inclusion of the Enhanced Public Participation process of the associated permits, authorizations, or approvals, whether or not requested by the community.





# Public Hearing v. Public Meeting

## Public Hearing

- Objective is to gather input, comments, or testimony on a specific proposal
- Often mandated by law
- Formal process recorded by a transcriber
- Public hearings are not intended to be spaces for discussion or dialogue about a permit

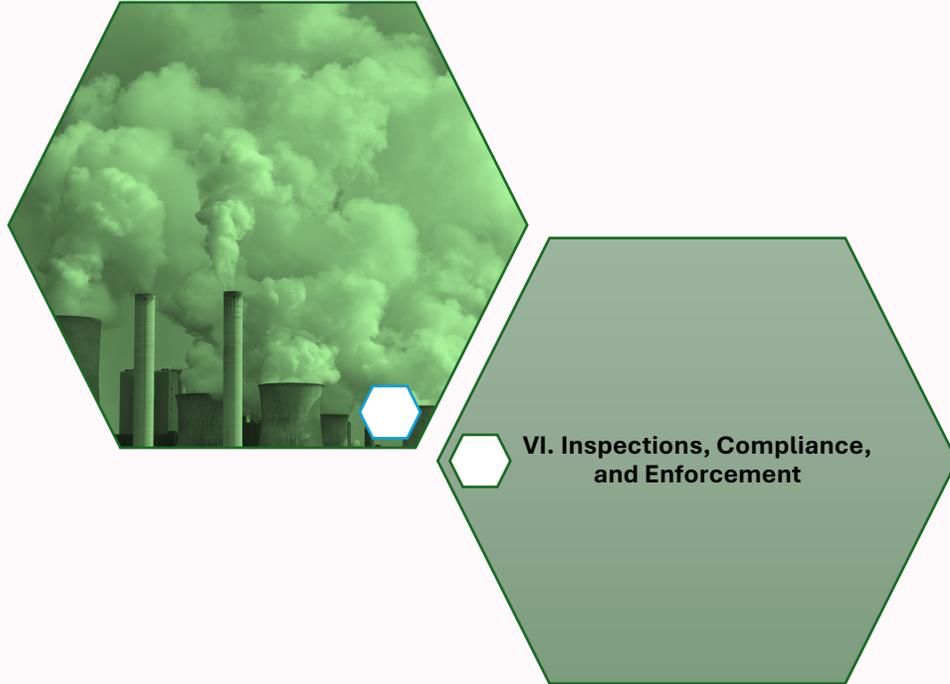
## Public Meeting

- Includes public participation
- Provides a platform for communication & transparency
- Broad gatherings where DEP can interact with the public
- Can take on various formats such as discussions, info-sessions, etc.
- The level of public input may vary



# Policy Section & Focus

- VI. Inspections, Compliance, and Enforcement
- Moving beyond public participation within DEP's existing regulatory authority
  - Prioritizing of Competing Demands
  - Civil Penalty Enhancements
  - Use of Civil Penalties
  - Community Environmental Projects
  - Filing Complaints
  - **NO UPDATES IN FINAL POLICY**





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# Policy Section & Focus

## VII. Community Development and Investments

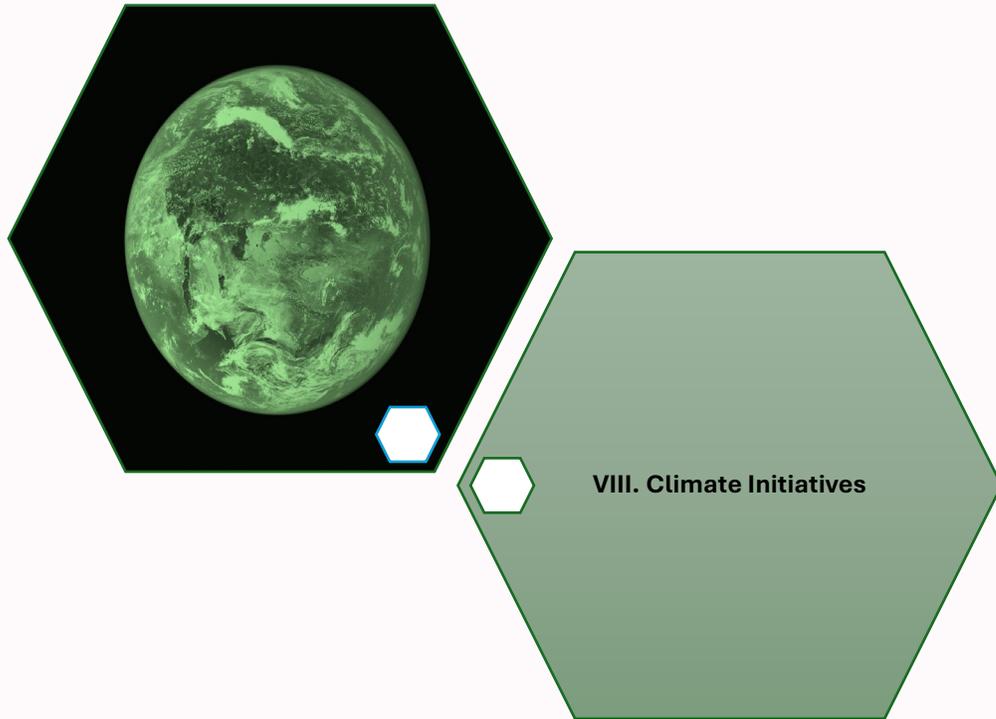
- Targeting grants
- Promoting brownfield redevelopment
- **NO UPDATES IN FINAL POLICY**



VII. Community  
Development and  
Investments



# Policy Section & Focus



## VIII. Climate Initiatives

- Climate Action Plan involvement
- Climate adaptation
- Integrates EJ considerations into climate investments
- Directs DEP to engage in public involvement that integrates the stated needs and concerns of EJ communities
- **NO UPDATES IN FINAL POLICY**



# Climate Change and EJ

## Section VIII of EJ Policy: Climate Initiatives

- Ensures climate-related initiatives consider and prioritize communities disproportionately impacted by climate change.
- Ensures the Climate Action Plan developed under the Pennsylvania Climate Change Act (Act 70 of 2008) addresses climate adaptation planning for EJ Areas.
- Identifies and/or evaluates strategies to address disproportionate impacts of climate change for EJ Area residents.
- Considers preparing for and responding to climate-related impacts and disasters.

Want to learn more about how climate change is impacting PA?  
Visit: [gis.dep.pa.gov/ClimateChange/index.html](https://gis.dep.pa.gov/ClimateChange/index.html)



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# Climate Change and EJ

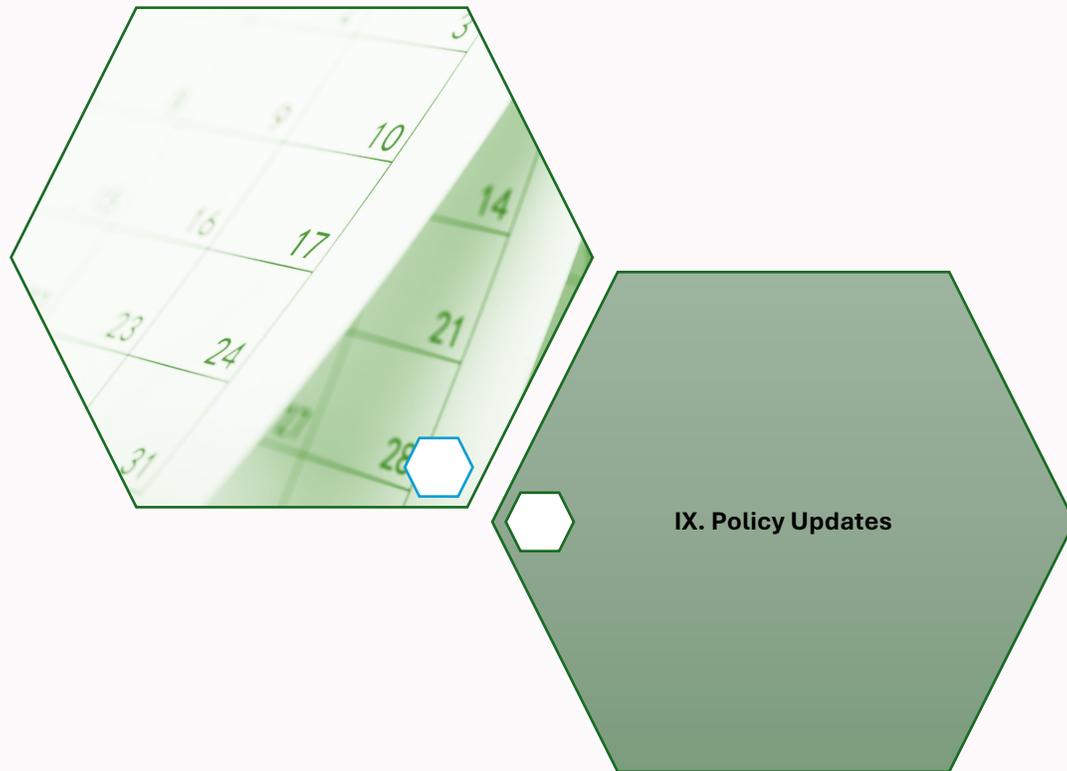
- EJ Areas are disproportionately exposed to climate hazards, such as flooding and heatwaves.
- EJ Areas have limited access to tools to adapt to climate impacts and transition to cleaner energy to slow down climate change.
- DEP will ensure climate-related initiatives consider and prioritize communities disproportionately impacted by climate change. This includes:
  - DEP's Climate Action Plan
  - Funding and investments for climate initiatives
  - Other agency climate priorities



# Policy Section & Focus

## IX. Policy Updates

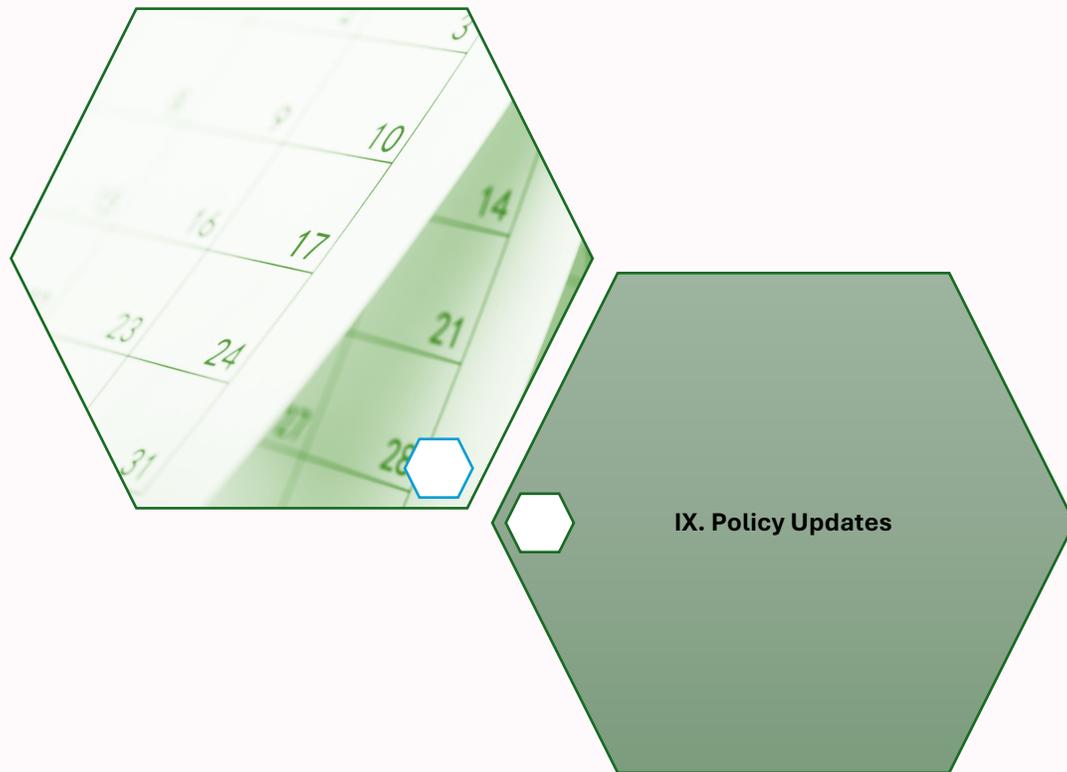
- Requires review of the EJ policy for updates every 5 years
- Update EJ area identification and mapping every 2 years, based on latest data



# Policy Section & Updates to Final

## IX. Policy Updates

- Removed the two-year mandatory update for EJ area identification and mapping and makes it “as necessary”.



# Connect with the Office of Environmental Justice

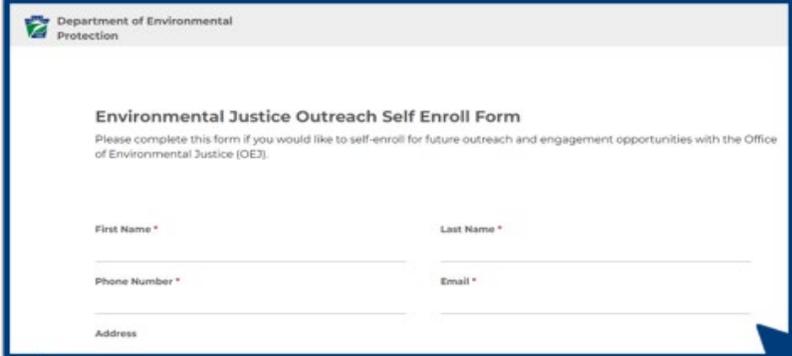
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# Stay Informed

Complete the [Environmental Justice Outreach Self Enroll Form](#) to enroll for future outreach and engagement opportunities with DEP:  
[pacedcitpowerapps.powerappsportals.us/services/Environmental-Justice-Outreach-Self-Enroll/](https://pacedcitpowerapps.powerappsportals.us/services/Environmental-Justice-Outreach-Self-Enroll/)



The screenshot shows a web form titled "Environmental Justice Outreach Self Enroll Form" from the Department of Environmental Protection. The form includes a header with the department logo and name, followed by the title and a brief instruction: "Please complete this form if you would like to self-enroll for future outreach and engagement opportunities with the Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)." Below this are several input fields: "First Name \*", "Last Name \*", "Phone Number \*", "Email \*", and "Address". A blue arrow points to the bottom right corner of the form area.

And sign up for the [EJ Newsletter](#):  
[www.dep.pa.gov/EJ](http://www.dep.pa.gov/EJ) and click the "[Sign Up for Our Newsletter](#)" button







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# Get In Touch

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## General Comments & Questions

[RA-EPOEJ@pa.gov](mailto:RA-EPOEJ@pa.gov)

*Sign up for*



The Department of Environmental Protection's mission is to protect Pennsylvania's air, land and water resources and to provide for the health and safety of its residents and visitors, consistent with the rights and duties established under the Environmental Rights Amendment (Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution).