Environmental Injustice and Racism in Canada: The First Step is Admitting We Have a Problem

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Overview of Presentation

• Social determinants of health: how the effects of environmental exposures are related to race and socio-economic status

• Explanation of the concepts of “Environmental Injustice” and “Environmental Racism”

• The American experience

• Environmental injustice in Canada

• Legal approaches to addressing the Problem
A Model of the Determinants of Health


en·vi·ron·men·tal jus·tice

The fair and consistent distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, without discrimination on the basis of grounds such as socio-economic status, race, ethnic origin, or residence on an Aboriginal reserve.
Overview

- 1982: Afton residents oppose dumping of PCB-laced waste
- 1990: Environmental Equity Workgroup established
- 1992: Office of Environmental Equity created
- 1994: Executive Order 12898 issued by President Bill Clinton
- 2011: Plan EJ 2014 developed by US EPA
Origins

- American civil rights movement
- 1982: Afton, Warren County, North Carolina

Image from <http://www.avoiceonline.org>
American Initiatives

- 1990: Creation of Environmental Equity Workgroup by EPA
- 1992: Establishment of Office of Environmental Equity (later renamed Office of Environmental Justice)
- 1994: Executive Order 12898
- 2011: Plan EJ 2014

Image from <http://drrobertbullard.com>
EPA Definition of EJ

“Environmental Justice is the **fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income** with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. EPA has this goal for all communities and persons across this Nation. **It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process** to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work”

(Emphasis added, retrieved from <http://www.epa.gov.org>)
Results

  • Minority and low-income populations even more concentrated around hazardous waste sites than before
  • 10 recommendations forwarded to Senate Committee

• 2011: Plan EJ 2014
  • 20th anniversary of Executive Order 12898
  • Progress report in 2013
First Nations people’s homes are **90 times** more likely to have **no running water**.
Emmett is two.
He's never had a bath in his own home.
Meet Ada and Ron. They live in Sarnia, Ontario, where the air quality is consistently ranked as among the worst in Canada.
Map 3.1 Nations with Environmental Protection Provisions in Their Constitutions.

Legend
Green—Nations with environmental protection provisions in their constitutions as of 2009
Grey—Nations without environmental protection provisions in their constitutions as of 2009
More than 110 countries now recognize their citizens’ right to a healthy environment.

Now it is Canada’s turn.