

Air and Climate Public Advisory Committee Environmental Justice Proposal

Proposed Project

Provide for sustainable institutional capacity in environmental justice (EJ) to inform the organizing, education, outreach, and policy work of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' (COG) Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) and Climate, Energy and Environment Committee (CEEPC) and their support staff and technical committees.

This work is part of ACPAC's mission, which includes, among other duties, assisting in reviewing the consequences of air quality policies and programs.

Background

The COG Air and Climate Public Advisory Committee (ACPAC) members expressed interest in becoming more actively involved in COG advocacy and outreach efforts. This led to a roundtable and discussion in June during which EJ as it relates to air quality and health was determined to be the top area of interest for committee members. An EJ subcommittee was established to make recommendations to the entire ACPAC about possible actions for members to consider.

As a first step to help ACPAC members learn more about EJ, representatives from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change, and the Natural Resources Defense Council Voces Verdes provided an introduction to EJ and discussed the work they are doing nationally and in communities. Following that meeting, the EJ subcommittee brought specific recommendations back to the entire ACPAC.

ACPAC is now bringing this proposal to MWAQC and CEEPC and their technical committees for consideration.

Issues

Environmental justice is a process to provide for 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. This goal will be achieved when everyone benefits from the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and has access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

If policy makers do not have a full working knowledge of EJ, there can be unintended consequences of policy decisions that can negatively affect vulnerable populations and communities. Policy makers should have a working knowledge of EJ that informs decisions made about environmental policies, programs, and initiatives.

MWAQC conducts interstate air quality attainment and maintenance planning for the metropolitan Washington region on behalf of the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. It is charged with developing regional air quality plans and maintenance plans for criteria pollutant controls suitable for incorporation into State Implementation Plans (SIPs). MWAQC further may perform other functions to improve regional air quality, including the evaluation and consideration of innovative and non-regulatory initiatives designed to expedite or enhance attainment and maintenance of air quality goals.

MWAQC's state and local members have regulatory authority over air quality issues including issuing air discharge permits in accordance with federal and state clean air acts and attendant regulations.

CEEPC develops and maintains policies, plans, agreements, and programs concerning climate change and energy. CEEPC develops actions reports, policy statements, recommendations, and proposals to advance its mission.

EJ issues often address the problem from a multi-media perspective. Therefore, a toolkit and educational effort focused on air, climate and energy issues must recognize the relationship of air, climate and energy issues to other media.

Decisions that have an impact on EJ are made at the local, regional, state and national level. Therefore, educational efforts focused on air, climate and energy issues must recognize the context in which these actions are taken related to broader development related decision making.

MWAQC, CEEPC, and its members have various levels of authority to address EJ in decision making. Therefore, any educational efforts must reflect an understanding of these requirements, and limits. What already is being done at the state and local environmental and transportation agencies and in other air quality, energy, and climate work at COG must be part of ACPAC's examination of EJ.

There are other EJ resources and materials currently in use. ACPAC's work should include a review of the existing resources and materials to identify their strengths and weaknesses and incorporate best practices from these other efforts.

Recommendation

The ACPAC recommends that COG staff, in collaboration with ACPAC, MWAQC and CEEPC, develop an EJ toolkit and undertake educational efforts to build capacity to address EJ in COG's air quality and climate change work.

The toolkit would include a compilation of existing EJ resources and development of any region specific best practices/case studies/etc, as needed. Information in the toolkit would include the following:

- EJ principles and definitions
- EJ authorities and practices of COG, MWAQC and CEEPC members

- EJ measures
- Data sources
- Resources and tools

COG staff would facilitate educational efforts for ACPAC, MWAQC, CEEPC, and their technical committees to help develop and share the toolkit and build institutional capacity to further incorporate EJ into their work. This would include online materials, face-to-face training sessions, and/or Webinars.

Key Stakeholders

- ACPAC members
- MWAQC and MWAQC Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members
- CEEPC and Built Environment and Energy Advisory Committee (BEEAC) members
- COG staff

Next Steps

- Obtain approval from CEEPC and MWAQC to move forward with development of the EJ toolkit.
- Conduct a review of existing EJ resources, materials, toolkits, and best practices.
- Develop an outline for the EJ toolkit and educational plan for CEEPC, MWAQC and their technical committee review and approval. This would be a multi-step process involving review by technical committee members and consideration by the technical committees before presentation to the policy committees.
- Develop the toolkit.
- Work with COG staff to present the toolkit and enhance the EJ knowledge and capacity of MWAQC and CEEPC members and technical committee staff.