

Environmental Justice in Pennsylvania

The state of Pennsylvania has followed and exceeded national trends for development, deforestation, mining, and water pollution for decades. Over the past thirty years, Pennsylvania has been in the top five states for the rate of land development while being 48th in population growth. Over 15% of land in PA is developed and the rate of development is increasing at a steady pace. The issue of overdevelopment is not new in the state, and as infrastructure has aged, many communities are dealing with corrosion and sewer overflow issues that infect waterways. Out of PA's 86,000 miles of rivers and streams, only 3,300 miles are designated high quality.

Along with residential pollution, over 3,000 miles of streams and rivers are saturated with acid drainage from coal mining and fracking. In addition to degrading water quality, air pollution has become an increasing problem in Pennsylvania. Poor air quality in PA has been linked to climate change contribution, and dozens of air quality surveys have linked air pollution to asthma, heart disease, and cancer in Southern Pennsylvania.

The Environmental Protection Agency has promised small grants and support for environmental projects around Pennsylvania. However, many experts are calling on state and local government organizations to increase pressure on polluting corporations who have benefitted from relaxed environmental accountability in PA. Rather than waiting for governmental change, some researchers have established their own accountability systems for individuals and companies.

Under the umbrella of accountability, there are experts responsible for environmental justice work. These areas and projects identify marginalized communities such as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) that are disproportionately affected by pollution and negative environmental changes. Environmental justice projects aim to advocate for otherwise unheard or disregarded communities by producing research and raising funding to help alleviate environmental issues.

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