

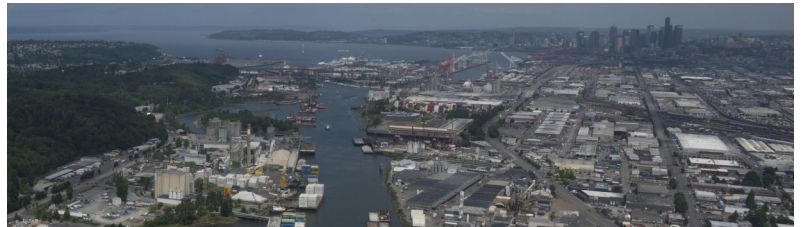
What is Environmental Justice?

And why is it important in Washington?

What impacts your health?

Genetics, diet, stress, and habits like exercise are of course key determinants of your ability to live a healthy life. But did you know that in Washington state, your race, income, language ability and ZIP code are also major factors in life expectancy?

That's because of the interplay between those socioeconomic factors and exposure to environmental health hazards—and it is environmental **injustice** in action. And while there's not much we can do about genetics, we can work to eliminate the environmental health disparities in Washington through smart state policy and investments—taking steps toward *environmental justice*.

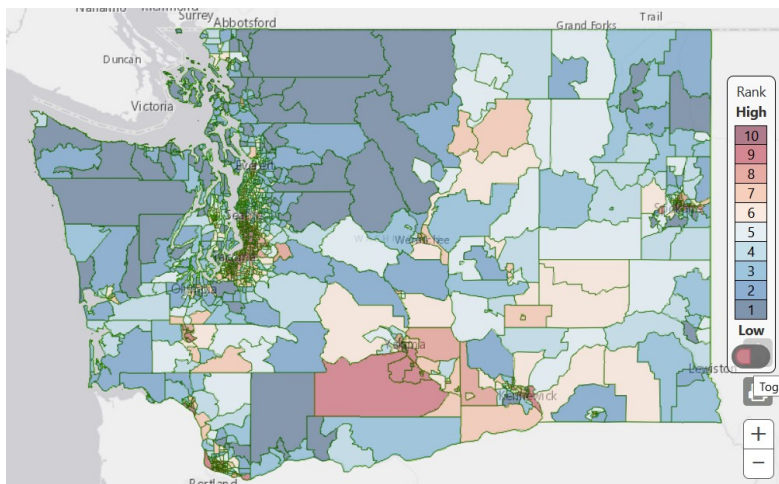


Health Disparities: Residents of the neighborhoods like Laurelhurst in Seattle (top) enjoy an average 5.7-year longer life expectancy than those in census tracts that are closer to sources of industrial pollution, such as along the Duwamish River (bottom).

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Recommended Statewide Definition of Environmental Justice from the Washington Environmental Justice Task Force's Fall 2020 report, Recommendations for Prioritizing EJ in Washington State Government

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. This includes using an intersectional lens to address disproportionate environmental and health impacts by prioritizing highly impacted populations, equitably distributing resources and benefits, and eliminating harm.



How do we know?

Developed by the UW Department of Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences, the Washington state Department of Health, the Department of Ecology and the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, the [Environmental Health Disparities Map](#) provides neighborhood-level data about environmental health risk factors across Washington. The data assigns an impact “score” for each census tract, illustrating where people experience greater risks to their health due to environmental factors such as pollution, and proximity to environmental hazards.

HealthEquity.wa.gov

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Recommendations from the Environmental Justice Task Force

In its [Fall 2020 report](#), the Environmental Justice Task Force provided recommendations for the Legislature to consider adopting to move Washington toward environmental justice. They include:

- **Setting measurable goals**, tracking and communicating progress *in partnership with communities*
- Ten (10) **model policies**, covering:
 - **Incorporating environmental justice into government** by embedding the principle in agency strategic plans; convening a permanent interagency work group; and incorporating EJ into state environmental laws.
 - **Investing equitably**: requiring use of analyses such as the Environmental Health Disparities Map to help guide agency decision-making; distributing environmental investments equitably; prioritizing high labor standards and diversity in state contracting, and studying opportunities for reparations as a mechanism to address health disparities and historical harms affecting overburdened communities.
 - **Improving environmental enforcement** by ensuring accessible processes—eliminating barriers such as technology, literacy, and language; and supporting supplemental environmental projects as appropriate.
- **Guidelines for using the Environmental Health Disparities Map** to identify overburdened communities—starting with building demographic and environmental context, incorporating EJ analysis as routine practice, and centering justice as the priority intended outcome in resource allocation, as well as measuring reductions in disparities through service equity improvements. The Task Force recommends **using the overall Environmental Health Disparity map ranks 9 and 10 as a starting point** to identify overburdened communities.
- Guidelines for **addressing structural barriers to meaningful community engagement**, including increasing understanding of and trust in government actions. The Task Force recommends each agency create a community engagement plan, and recommends changing state laws that restrict agencies from providing goods and services like meals and childcare to support broad community engagement.



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*“We’ve got to decide that we want to live in a world that is sane and happy and healthy, and that everyone deserves that.”
- Majora Carter*

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