



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Phil Murphy, Governor
Sheila Oliver, Lt. Governor
Catherine R. McCabe, Commissioner



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Caryn Shinske (609) 984-1795

Lawrence Hajna (609) 292-2994

PUBLIC COMMENT SESSIONS SET ON MURPHY ADMINISTRATION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN STATE ACTIONS

(19/P05) TRENTON – Following through on Governor Phil Murphy’s pledge that New Jersey take steps to ensure all residents live in a clean and healthy environment, the Department of Environmental Protection today released a plan on how that goal will be achieved across state agencies, Commissioner Catherine R. McCabe announced.

The DEP will hold a 60-day public comment period to receive input on the proposal. Three listening sessions are scheduled in the northern, central and southern regions of the state for the public to comment on the plan.



“Environmental justice is a critical concern for all state agencies when making decisions that will impact communities long overburdened by sources of pollution and the resultant health impacts,” Commissioner McCabe said. “Every New Jersey resident, particularly those in our most vulnerable populations, deserves to live in a clean and healthy environment. Our quality of life depends on it.”

Governor Murphy signed Executive Order No. 23 on April 20, 2018, directing the DEP to take the lead in developing a plan for how all executive branch departments and agencies should consider environmental justice in implementing statutory and regulatory responsibilities.

“New Jersey’s urban communities are disproportionately impacted and overburdened by harmful effects from pollution,” said Zachary Lewis, chairman of the DEP’s Environmental Justice Advisory Council. “A greater emphasis must be made to provide clean and healthy environments and ensure that sound environmental policies are at the forefront in the decision-making process.”

Environmental justice, as defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 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. It also means no one group of people will have a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences stemming from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.



Public listening sessions on the draft plan are scheduled:

- Tuesday, Feb. 5 from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. in Prudence Hall at Thomas Edison State University, 111 W. State Street, Trenton, Mercer County;
- Tuesday, Feb. 12 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Municipal Court Room, 330 Fayette Street, Bridgeton, Cumberland County;
- Tuesday, March 5 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Peterstown Community Center, 408 Palmer Street, Elizabeth, Union County.

Written comments may be submitted until March 22 to eo23@dep.nj.gov.

The draft plan is the culmination of nearly a year's work by an interagency panel to receive input on environmental justice topics from members of impacted communities, conservation and planning organizations, business and industry, municipal and legislative representatives. The panel held multiple meetings during 2018 at the DEP and in various communities to hear ideas and concerns.

Participants identified four areas of concern for environmental justice communities:

- Excessive air pollution, lead contamination and pesticide exposure, as well as high numbers of properties contaminated with hazardous wastes;
- The cumulative health impacts resulting from community exposure to many pollution sources;
- Underlying social conditions that contribute to the cumulative health effects such as lack of affordable housing, lack of access to healthcare, healthy food, safe and clean public transportation, and green areas;
- Vulnerability to the effects of climate change, such as increased flooding.

The draft plan requires 15 state agencies to develop plans on understanding environmental justice issues; working with other agencies and leveraging program and funding opportunities to maximize benefits for impacted communities; getting feedback from residents; and collaborating with the communities to improve conditions.

Since August 2018, the state has filed 14 lawsuits related to environmental justice cases across New Jersey. In December, Attorney General Gubir S. Grewal and Commissioner McCabe announced the filing of eight lawsuits that focus on addressing pollution and environmental hazards in minority and low-income communities. Six other suits filed in August seek to recover damages caused by pollution.

In addition to the lawsuits, the Attorney General's Office announced it is restructuring to add an Environmental Enforcement and Environmental Justice Section.

To view the draft plan, visit www.nj.gov/dep/ej/eo23/docs/eo23-draft-guidance.pdf.

To learn more about the DEP's Office of Environmental Justice and to read summaries of stakeholder meetings held by the interagency panel, visit www.nj.gov/dep/ej/eo23/index.html.

To read Gov. Murphy's Executive Order No. 23, visit <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-23.pdf>.

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