

# Energy and Environmental Justice

## **Nuclear power**

- Nuclear power disproportionately affects communities of color, from the mining of uranium on Native American lands, to the targeting of black and Hispanic communities for new uranium processing facilities to the targeting of black and Hispanic and Native American communities for so-called “low-level” nuclear waste disposal sites. All of the sites proposed for “temporary” and permanent storage of high level nuclear waste (nuclear reactor fuel rods) have been Native American lands.
- Nuclear reactors pollute, releasing radioactive pollution to the air and water, in addition to the solid wastes they produce. Much of the radiation lasts for generations, some for millions of years.
- Radioactive waste from uranium production has been used as “depleted uranium” (DU) ammunition in wars and test sites around the world, contaminating Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia and Vieques, Puerto Rico. DU has largely been used against people of color in war, and low-income people and people of color are overrepresented in the U.S. military (and therefore are more affected by Gulf War Syndrome caused by DU).
- Nuclear power isn’t a solution to global warming. In 2001, 93% of the nation’s reported emissions of CFC-114, a potent greenhouse gas, were released from the U.S. Enrichment Corporation, where nuclear reactor fuel is produced. These facilities are so energy intensive that some of the nation’s dirty, old coal plants exist just to power the nuclear fuel facilities.
- Many new nuclear power reactors are now being proposed in the U.S. Most of the new reactor proposals are in the southeastern U.S., where nuclear reactors disproportionately affect low-income communities and where the region’s first new reactor proposal targeted Claiborne County, Mississippi, a county which is 82% African-American.

## **Coal**

- Over 150 new coal plants have been proposed in the U.S. in recent years, including plans for a wave of new coal-to-oil refineries, to produce coal-based liquid fuels for vehicles. Most have been defeated by activists in our “No New Coal Plants” network so far.
- Coal plants disproportionately affect African-American communities. 68% of African-Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant – the distance within which the maximum effects of the smokestack plume are expected to occur. By comparison, 56% of the white population lives within 30 miles of these plants.
- Coal mining destroys low-income rural communities in Appalachia, where mountains are dismantled and valleys are being filled with coal waste. Native American communities in the southwest are also being exploited for their coal by genocidal government policies and corporate abuses.

## **Oil & Gas**

- Wars have been fought against people of color in Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia and many other countries in order to control their oil and gas resources.
- The U.S. military’s “Africom” program exerts military control over Africa, in large part to control the flow of oil. Since 2005, U.S. oil imports from Africa have been greater than those from the Middle East.
- Canadian tar sands are causing massive ecological devastation, particularly to Indigenous communities. Many U.S. communities are threatened by tar sands pipelines and refining, with Native American and black communities facing some of the worst impacts.
- “Fracking” for natural gas throughout the U.S. is destroying groundwater and polluting the air, mainly in low-income rural communities. Liquefied natural gas import/export terminals, pipelines and other gas infrastructure have been proposed around the nation. From Native American communities in Northern Alaska to the black, Native and Vietnamese communities on the Gulf of Mexico, oil and gas extraction, refining, transportation and spills are disproportionately harming people of color.
- Since the late 1990s, hundreds of gas-fired power plants were proposed. Many were defeated but those built were largely in poor or minority communities.

## **"Biomass" / Incineration**

- Incinerators to burn trash, tires, sewage sludge, animal wastes, construction/demolition wood wastes, paper and lumber mill wastes, trees, crops and toxic landfill gases have been described as “biomass” – masquerading as “renewable” energy, even though the pollution is worse than coal by most measures.
- Trash and sewage sludge Incinerators are disproportionately located in low-income and minority communities. Wood-burning “biomass” incinerators are disproportionately in low-income communities.
- Incinerator pollution accumulates where minority populations are more affected. Mercury pollution contaminates fish, which low-income and minority people consume more than others. Dioxins in the U.S. migrate to the Canadian Arctic, where the highest levels have been found in breast milk of Native Americans who subsist on dioxin-contaminated food.

## **Hydroelectric**

- Dams proposed in Canada would flood large areas, displacing Native Americans from their lands.
- Dams can cause methane, a greenhouse gas, to be released when vegetation is flooded. They can also help liberate naturally-occurring mercury in the ground, enabling it to contaminate fish.

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To learn more about energy and environmental justice, visit [www.energyjustice.net](http://www.energyjustice.net)

**WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR**, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

## **The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)**

1) **Environmental Justice** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.

2) **Environmental Justice** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.

3) **Environmental Justice** mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.

4) **Environmental Justice** calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.

5) **Environmental Justice** affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.

6) **Environmental Justice** demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.

7) **Environmental Justice** demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.

8) **Environmental Justice** affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.

9) **Environmental Justice** protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.

10) **Environmental Justice** considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

11) **Environmental Justice** must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

12) **Environmental Justice** affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13) **Environmental Justice** calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14) **Environmental Justice** opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15) **Environmental Justice** opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16) **Environmental Justice** calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17) **Environmental Justice** requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

**More info on environmental justice and environmental racism can be found online at [www.ejnet.org/ej](http://www.ejnet.org/ej)**

*Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted these 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, the Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.*