



Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition: Statement On Flint Water Crisis

The Flint water crisis was a preventable tragedy that has decimated an entire community. This crisis is particularly appalling because Flint is an Environmental Justice community –a community in which the majority of its residents are racial minorities, many of whom live below the poverty level, and bear the disproportionate burdens of environmental risks. As this vulnerable community continues to suffer, we at the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition are reminded of the Michigan Environmental Justice Plan, and how its implementation may have helped to prevent this catastrophe from happening.

On November 21, 2007, then-Governor Jennifer Granholm issued Michigan Executive Directive No. 2007-23 aimed at “Promoting Environmental Justice.” The Directive defined environmental justice as “the fair, non-discriminatory treatment and meaningful involvement of Michigan residents regarding the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies by this state.” Among other things, the Directive mandated that the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality establish an Environmental Justice Working Group which was tasked with creating a state Environmental Justice Plan. The Directive and subsequent Plan were both the result of years of collaboration and compromise between state government, the environmental nonprofit sector, and private industry. While the adopted Plan heavily favored industry, the environmental community was looking forward to working with the state towards environmental justice. However, the Plan has not been implemented by the Snyder Administration.

The Plan would mandate the creation of an Interdepartmental Working Group, the use of environmental justice metrics, and increased public participation. The Working Group would have required MDEQ to cooperate with state departmental leaders from the Department to Civil Rights, the Department of Community Health, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and others, to come up with collaborative efforts to respond to the concerning reports from Flint. With environmental justice metrics in place, MDEQ could have measured the severity of the threats to public health, triggering an appropriate response. Increased public participation would have served as a vehicle for transparent communication between MDEQ and the people of Flint, helping to ensure that Flint voices would not be ignored or criticized, as unfortunately happened in this case.

The state has continually ignored the concerns of Environmental Justice communities for many years. While Flint’s residents continue to deal with contaminated water, the people of Detroit continue to suffer from the most polluted air in the state. In a heavily industrialized area, which is currently out of attainment with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Sulfur Dioxide, MDEQ is considering a permit that would allow Marathon Petroleum Corp. to increase its emissions of Sulfur Dioxide. Such a decision would yet again place an undue and unacceptable burden on the surrounding vulnerable communities who are already adversely impacted from living in the shadows of Michigan’s most polluting facilities.

We call on Governor Snyder and the Michigan Legislature to implement the Environmental Justice Plan. There are Environmental Justice communities throughout the state that face varying environmental and public health concerns every single day. Failure to take preventative measures places these vulnerable communities at severe risk of becoming the next *Flint*. And this is a risk that the people of Michigan simply can no longer afford to take.

To view the Michigan Environmental Justice Plan [click here](#). To connect with the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition, please [visit us online](#) or contact MEJC Coordinator Jeremy Orr at jeremy.orr@wayne.edu or (313) 577-1687.