

Improving Water Quality and the Urban Environment

Environmental Justice Perspectives

-by Mark A. Mitchell M.D., MPH
President

Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice

What is Environmental Justice?

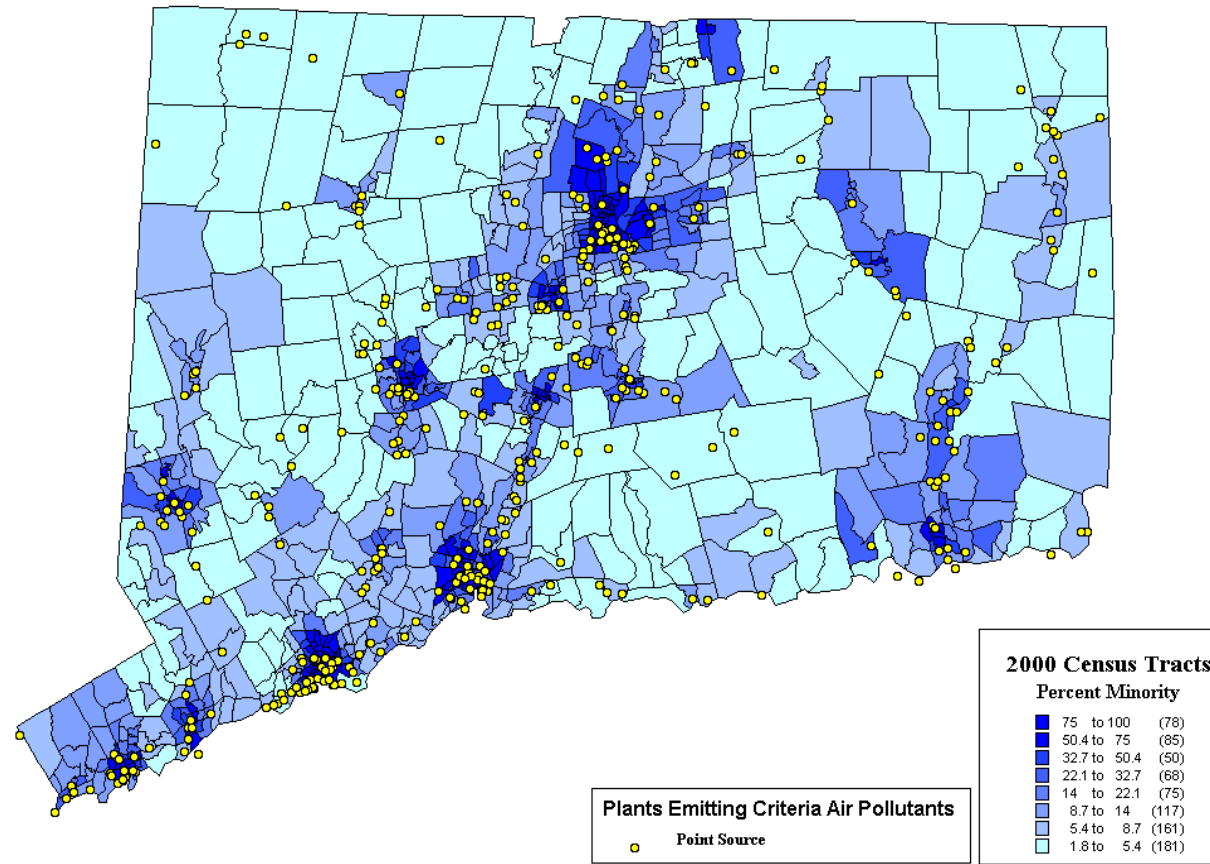
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines Environmental Justice as:
- "The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."

What is Environmental Justice (cont'd)?

- "Fair Treatment" means that no group should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences
- "Meaningful Involvement" means that those affected by an environmental decision should be able to influence the outcome of that decision.

Point Source Air Pollution Emissions in Connecticut 2000

2000 Census Tracts Percent Minority & Plants Emitting Criteria Air Pollutants



Health Disparities and Environment

- Asthma is 50% higher in urban schools in CT when compared to rural schools
- Nationally Asthma deaths are 6 times higher in Black males between the ages of 15 and 24
- 84% of lead poisoned children in CT are Black or Latino
- Cancer, Diabetes, Lupus, Depression, ADHD, Low Birthweight, Sudden Death, etc.

Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice

- Started in 1998
- Hartford, New Haven and Fairfield County (Bridgeport) Chapters
- CCEJ helps low-income communities and communities of color become informed about and involved in the decision-making processes that may impact their environment
- Educates communities and promotes reduction of pollution that affects health and climate change
- helps communities advocate for the elimination of discriminatory environmental policies
- helps people respond to environmental concerns

Urban Flooding Issues

- Combined Sewage System
- When it rains in Hartford, it floods
- It does not flood water, it floods sewage
- Flooding occurs an average of 50 times per year or more
- Sewage backups into people's basements, homes, streets and into rivers and streams
- Potential for infectious diseases, fish kills
- Example: Condo and surgical center flooding

Urban Stormwater Issues

- Very few pervious surfaces
- Lead and petroleum hydrocarbons in runoff
- Patterns of development lead to infilling of floodplains (less dense housing, larger schools, driveways, surface parking lots, contaminated properties, fixed, antiquated infrastructure, etc.)
- School in floodplain at UHART threatens Albany Ave. bridge; increase Park River flooding into sewage system through broken CSO outflow

Suburban Contribution to Urban Flooding

- Adding onto overtaxed sewage system rather than building new suburban sewage plants
- Increases sewage backups and overflows
- Illegal downspout and sump pump connections to sewers
- System designed not to overflow until it reaches Hartford

Other Environmental Justice Issues

- Sewage sludge and septage is brought in from other sewage plants serving about 35 towns and other states to be burned in Hartford
- Hartford bears the brunt of odors, accidental spills, potential explosions of deadly chlorine gas, planned releases, air pollution and air toxins from handling sewage from other communities so that they don't have to bear the risks for their own wastes
- MDC is tax exempt and pays no PILOT payments or host community benefits to Hartford (although their billing structure does benefit Hartford residents)

Environmental Justice and Natural Disasters

- Hurricanes are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change
- The Hartford regional emergency response plan list hurricanes as the most likely disaster
- Environmental hazards are already being concentrated in low-income communities
- When a disaster occurs, it is made worse because low-income people are more likely to be exposed to pre-existing environmental hazards and are least able to respond to protect themselves





MDC's Long Term Control Plan

- Will address some of the environmental justice concerns
- Will separate the CSS into separate storm and sanitary sewer systems
- May increase or decrease the amount of flooding in the City (but without sewage)
- May leave the City with antiquated pipes to maintain
- Will probably increase the runoff of petroleum products into streams and rivers

For More Information

- CCEJ (860) 548-1133
- www.environmental-justice.org
- Our Backyard: A Quest for Environmental Justice.
Visgilio, G. and Whitelaw, D. (editors). Rowman and Littlefield, publishers. 2003
- Toxic Waste and Race at Twenty - United Church of Christ 2007