

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Health Equity Policy Statement

Background

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's mission is to conserve, improve and protect the air, water and other natural resources and the environment in order to enhance the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state. The Department's mission also includes promoting cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy while developing the state's energy related economy.

As trustee of the environment for the present and future generations, the Department achieves its mission through regulation, enforcement and licensing procedures; managing the state's parks, forests and other recreational amenities; developing and coordinating the state's environmental and energy plans; and through collaborative public education efforts with other public and private agencies. Strategic partners include but are not limited to, the Department of Public Health, Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Transportation, Department of Consumer Protection, Attorney General's Office, Office of the Chief State's Attorney, Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, the Department of Agriculture, and the state university system, as well as federal and municipal agencies.

The Department fulfills its mission in a manner that encourages the social and economic development of the state while preserving the natural environment and the life forms it supports. Fundamental to fair administration of its programs and services is the Department's effort to reach all segments of the population.

Health Disparities and Environmental Justice Communities

Federal and state environmental laws have accomplished a great deal in the control, reduction and elimination of pollution. However, these same laws have restricted certain activities and have deemed some areas unsuitable for development. These areas tend to be found in the rural towns of the state. Conversely, the evolutionary development of cities in terms of infrastructure, transportation and population makeup has concentrated manufacturing and industrial facilities in the urban areas where the highest concentration of racial and ethnic minorities reside. The disproportionate percentages of potential pollution sources in these urban areas may cause disproportionate health impacts on their residents. These health impacts may include but are not limited to differences in disease risk, and higher incidences of obesity, diabetes, low birth weight, infant mortality, cardiovascular disease, asthma and behavioral health among racial and ethnic

minority populations. The Department recognizes that childhood obesity, diabetes, depression and attention deficit disorders may be improved by reversing the current trends that disconnect children from nature and exercise.

The Policy of Non-Harm

The Department's policy is that no segment of the population should bear a disproportionate share of the risks and consequences of environmental pollution or be denied equal access to environmental benefits because of race, color, ethnicity, economic status, disability or linguistic abilities. The Department has identified communities that are disproportionately located in areas with a higher number of potential pollution sources. These communities are also characterized by the greatest concentration of racial and ethnic minority groups and lower income persons. In 2009, Public Act 08-94, An Act Concerning Environmental Justice Communities, was signed into law. This Public Act, now found in Connecticut General Statute Section 22a-20a, addresses health issues in environmentally overburdened areas by requiring community education and participation in siting and environmental permitting decisions. The Act defines environmental justice communities and affords certain rights that fulfill the Department's mandate to reduce pollution in environmental justice communities.

Planning

The Department is committed to incorporating health equity into its strategic planning process, and is now poised to demonstrate that a sound integrated approach to environmental, public health, natural resources and energy policy can lead to sustainable economic growth and job creation. The Department has launched an agency wide transformation agenda that will include health equity.

The Department proposes the following course of action to identify and address policies and procedures that relate to diabetes, low birth weight/infant mortality, cardiovascular disease, asthma and behavioral health:

- The Department will review and assess the impacts and opportunities provided by its activities with regard to racial and ethnic minority populations and low income residents.
- The Department will move to protect the state's most at risk populations by promoting energy efficiency, lowering energy costs and encouraging the development and use of cleaner and affordable energy technologies.
- The Department will use best practices to reduce the risks of power outages.
- The Department will work with the Community Action Agency network to improve the health and safety of households through programs such as the Weatherization Assistance Program.

- The Department will enhance communication with persons who are limited English proficient, minorities and persons who live in lower income communities with the goal of reducing health risks.
- The Department will encourage community participation in its ongoing operations and program development, including but not limited to the inclusion of members of these groups on agency advisory boards, workgroups, regulatory review panels and planning and permitting activities.
- The Department will improve its existing outreach and communication systems by providing for the translation of crucial public documents into the appropriate language for the affected community; preparing documents using linguistically appropriate language that is non-technical; ensuring that document repositories are accessible to the public; and making available language translation services at public meetings and hearings when needed.
- The Department will continue to expand its existing communication of environmental notifications by sharing news of its programs and activities to multicultural media such as African American and Latino newspapers and radio stations, etc.
- The Department will foster a heightened awareness of health disparities among its staff and will provide training on the environmental exposures affecting low-income and racial and ethnic minority communities. The Department will implement programs to address the environmental contributors to health disparities.
- The Department will work with federal, state and local partners to identify the impacts of climate change on populations most at risk for health disparities.
- The Department will use best practices to reduce the risk of toxic exposures from industry and Brownfield sites, and will explore strategies to minimize environmental damage that could result from climate change induced events.
- The Department will facilitate a community-based process for vulnerable children and their families living in urban areas to ensure access to a clean and safe outdoor environment in which to play, fish, exercise and enjoy the natural environment.
- The Department will ensure that all segments of the population have equal access and benefits of its programs and services. The Department will take affirmative steps to reach members of all groups and in particular communities who because of their race, color, ethnicity, economic status, disability and linguistic abilities may have not had the opportunity to fully participate in its programs and services.

- The Department will administer its programs in accordance with state and federal nondiscrimination laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, which prohibits discrimination in program participation, services and benefits on the basis on race, color, or national origin.
- The Department will work with other federal, state and municipal governments and local community organizations and neighborhood leaders to address health disparities at the local level.
- The Department will evaluate opportunities to make state parks and forests more universally accessible to people with disabilities.
- The Department will continue to diversify the racial and ethnic makeup of its staff to better reflect and represent the state's diverse constituency.

The implementation of the Health Equity Policy will further the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's integrated approach to environmental, natural resources, and energy policy for all people of Connecticut.



Daniel C. Esty
Commissioner

May 15, 2012
Date