



Environmental Justice

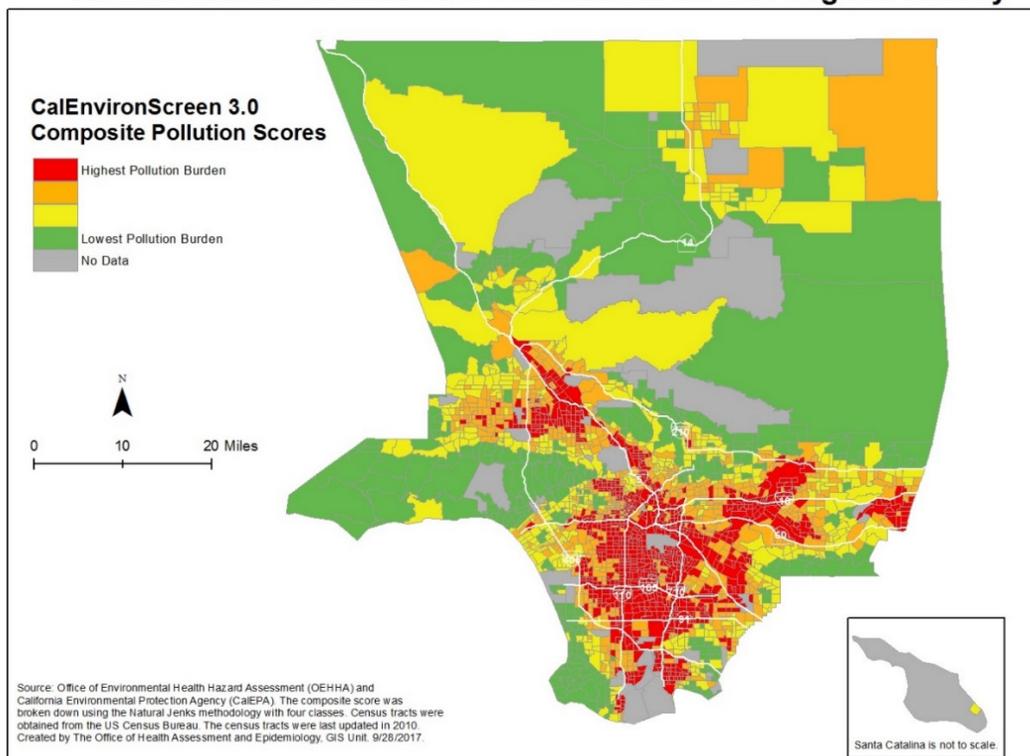
Environmental Justice is defined as “The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” ¹. It recognizes that the health of a community largely depends on the conditions in which people live, work and play, and promotes the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

Who is most affected?

In LA County, some communities are more exposed to environmental risks than others. The California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment developed CalEnviroScreen as a tool to identify communities disproportionately burdened by pollution and other environmental hazards. These include places with a higher density of industrial facilities that contribute to the contamination of air, water and soil. When these facilities are near homes, schools, and daycares, the emissions can worsen existing medical conditions and threaten public health.

This map shows that the aggregation of the highest level of pollution coincides with communities already burdened by poverty and lack of sufficient infrastructure to support health, such as parks. It demonstrates the disparity across the county where the communities burdened by a disproportionate share of environmental pollution also face socioeconomic and health challenges.

CalEnviroScreen 3.0 Census Tract Scores for Los Angeles County



What is the impact on health?

Low-income communities of color are more likely to experience poor health and health inequities as a result of environmental exposures. One example is asthma-related health disparities. As shown in the table below, disparities among children who have asthma exist by race/ethnicity and place. While other factors can contribute to these disparities, air pollution plays a significant role in LA County.

Percent of Children (0-17 years) With Current Asthma† or Children with Asthma† Who Went to the ER or Urgent Care (in the Past Year) Due to Asthma				
Race /Ethnicity	Currently Has Asthma		Went to ER or Urgent Care	
	Percent (%)	Estimated #	Percent (%)	Estimated #
Latino	6.6	96,000	37.7	36,000
White	6.1	27,000	35.8	10,000
African American	17.3	33,000	51.1	17,000
Asian	6.1	15,000	20.0*	3,000
Service Planning Area				
Antelope Valley	14.2	15,000	34.2	5,000
San Fernando	6.6	32,000	33.1	11,000
San Gabriel	6.2	24,000	35.5*	9,000
Metro	5.9	13,000	49.0*	7,000
West	6.7	7,000	23.4*	2,000
South	7.8	24,000	48.5	11,000
East	9.8	33,000	34.2*	11,000
South Bay	6.3	23,000	47.8	11,000

Source: 2015 Los Angeles County Health Survey; Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

* The estimate is statistically unstable (relative standard error >30%); † Asthma prevalence consists of those ever diagnosed with asthma by a health care provider and reported still having asthma and/or having had an asthma attack in the past 12 months;

What causes the health inequities?

Existing inequities related to environmental hazards are the result of multiple complex factors both historical and contemporary. These include land use decisions that predominately place low-income communities of color in close proximity to polluting industries, and patterns of commerce and transportation corridors. These multiple sources of pollution then trigger cumulative and synergistic exposures, which exacerbate asthma and disproportionately impact health. Communities face additional risks when regulatory agencies fail to put the health of the population at the center of their decision-making and fail to provide sufficient regulatory oversight.

Environmental justice seeks equal access to the decision-making process for all community members. This includes the availability of accessible, transparent, and understandable information related to local environmental burdens and benefits. Addressing these issues requires extensive collaboration across County departments and programs, as well as ongoing community engagement to mitigate community identified threats and support implementation of community identified solutions.

Reference:

1. United States of America Environmental Protection Agency. (2016). EJ 2020 Action Agenda. Online at: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-05/documents/052216_ej_2020_strategic_plan_final_0.pdf. Last accessed October 3, 2017.