

What is Environmental Justice?

Reverend Betsy Sowers, March 17, 2021

Legal Frameworks affecting defined communities

- **Federal:** Environmental justice is 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. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.
- **Massachusetts:** Article 97 of Mass. Constitution, Exec. Order 552 (Deval Patrick) and 2017 EJ Policy. Also, see <https://watershedaction.org/learn-along> -- Month 4 for details on Mass. EJ legislation and Month 8 for how legal issues affected the fight against the Weymouth Natural Gas Compressor.
- **Rhode Island:** Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, English language proficiency, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Why Environmental Justice?

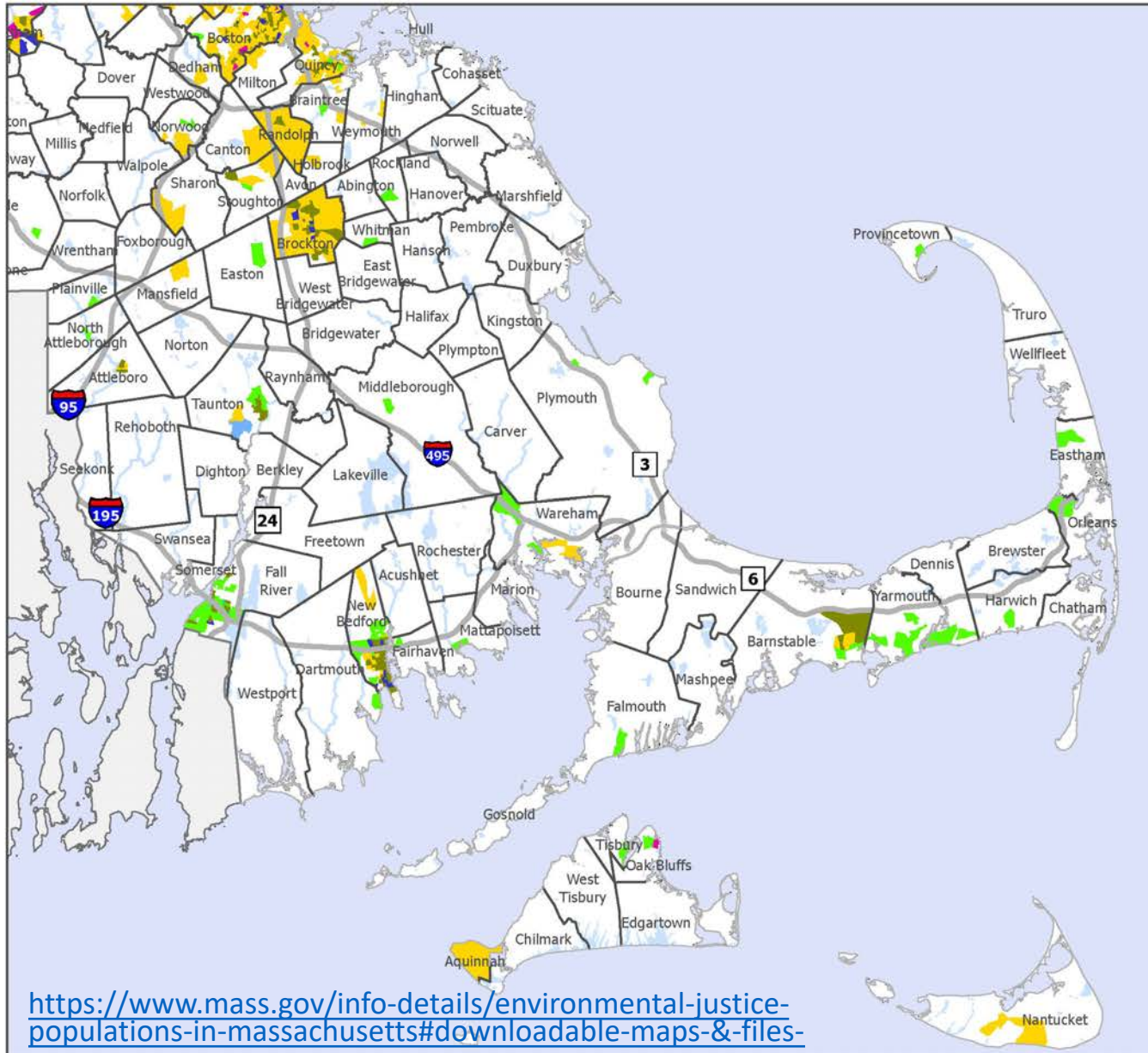
- For more than 50 years, the #1 way to locate pollution in the U.S. is the zip codes that are predominantly people of color. The #2 indicator is the zip codes of low income people.
- Environmental Racism: “Environmental injustice that occurs within a racialized context both in practice and policy.” For more, read “How Systemic Racism Determines Health Outcomes for Black Americans” <http://bit.ly/3ezFd4d>
- Sacrifice Zones: The result of clustering of polluters/pollution.
- Connection to climate justice: *“You can’t have climate change without sacrifice zones, and you can’t have sacrifice zones without disposable people, and you can’t have disposable people without racism.”* Hop Hopkins, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Sierra Club

What is an EJ Population?

- 25 percent or more of the residents are minority; or
- 25 percent or more of the residents have English isolation; or
- The median household income is at or below 65% of the state-wide median income.
- Other map colors = combinations of the above factors.
- Other impacted groups may fall outside the definitions.

2010 Environmental Justice Populations

Southeast Region



<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/environmental-justice-populations-in-massachusetts#downloadable-maps-&-files>

Massachusetts

Environmental Justice Criteria:

Environmental Justice (EJ) populations are determined by identifying all Census 2010 block groups that meet any of the following criteria:

- Income** Households earn 65% or less of statewide median household income
- Minority population** 25% or more of residents identify as a race other than white
- English language isolation** 25% or more of households have no one over the age of 14 who speaks English only or very well

Populations meeting one EJ criterion

- income
- minority population
- English isolation

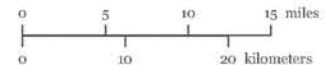
Populations meeting two EJ criteria

- income and minority population
- income and English isolation
- minority population and English isolation

Populations meeting three EJ criteria

- income, minority population and English isolation

For more information contact:
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Concerns in EJ Communities

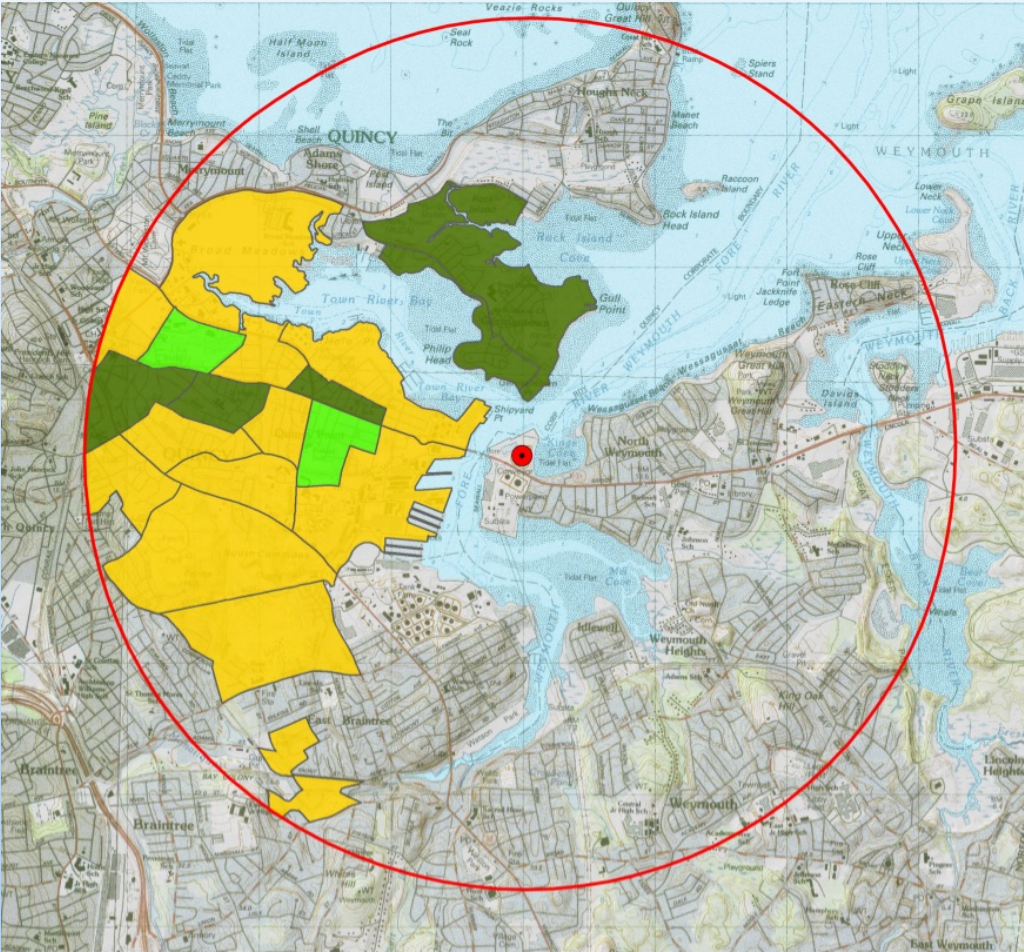
- Water and air pollution.
- Lack of access to green spaces, gardens, fresh food.
- Heat islands from lack of tree canopies.
- Poor quality housing that emits more carbon from old heating systems and poor insulation, creating indoor and outdoor air pollution.
- Tribal concerns about development and water rights access on their historic lands.
- Lack of access to engagement in decisions that impact them.
- Physical, mental, spiritual health problems – asthma, cancer, neurological diseases, and COVID are far higher in EJ communities. Chronic stress compounds health problems.

What's not working?

EJ policy tends not to be implemented because of:

- Failure to require cumulative impacts to be considered when siting new polluters
- Considering “intent” to discriminate vs. “disparate impacts” on EJ communities
- “Regulatory Capture”

Fore River Basin EJ Communities Map



Environmental Justice Geographies - 2 Mile Proximity

● Proposed Weymouth Compressor

□ 2 Mile Proximity

EJ Criteria, by Block Group

■ Minority

■ Income

■ Minority and Income

Fore River Basin Polluting Facilities





Solutions

- Reform under way at Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to center EJ and climate change.
- Centering EJ at the EPA <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>, join-epa-ej@lists.epa.gov
- New Federal EJ policy. See “A Guide to the Biden Administration’s All-of-Government Approach to Environmental Justice” <http://bit.ly/38BpRZr>
- Public participation in movements like Renew New England Alliance <https://www.renewnewenglandalliance.org/>, Just Recovery <https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-recovery/> and others.

Mass Power Forward 2021 Priorities

<https://www.mapowerforward.com/>

Find your Mass. Legislators at <http://bit.ly/2GJXzxk>

- **S.9 – Next Generation Climate Bill** - Contains last year's EJ bill provisions, including adding cumulative impacts and climate change when evaluating projects. Passed by Senate on Monday! Ask House members to pass Senate version and override a veto if necessary.
- **New EJ and 100% clean energy bills with links to fact sheets:** <http://bit.ly/3eNwqMr>
 - **Environmental Justice Table** briefing: bit.ly/3cyQlf
 - **Mass Renews Alliance** briefing: **March 22**. Sign up to attend OR to get a link to the recording at bit.ly/3lletWM
 - **100% Clean Act** briefing: https://youtu.be/eTwBMKt_jsE