



Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)



Environmental Justice Fact Sheet

Interagency Working Group Health Disparities Task Force

BACKGROUND

Executive Order 12898, entitled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," issued February 11, 1994, focuses federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions of minority populations, low-income populations, and tribal populations with the goal of achieving environmental protection for all communities. One provision of Executive Order 12898 established an Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Environmental Justice.

<http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/interagency/index.html>.

HEALTH DISPARITIES TASK FORCE

In October 2002, the IWG created the Health Disparities Task Force to identify and work to address many of the issues which pertain to concerns over both health disparities and environmental justice. The Task Force is working to develop partnerships, through the leadership of federal entities, between agencies, and organizations working to eliminate health disparities and/or address environmental justice. It is clear that many of the populations which suffer health disparities are also facing other environmental justice issues.

On May 28-29, 2003, the Task Force sponsored the "Building Healthy Environments to Eliminate Health Disparities" symposium in Washington, D.C. This Symposium brought together for the first time, senior-level Federal

government employees from various agencies to explore the intersection between health disparities and environmental justice and the ways in which Federal agencies could develop proactive, comprehensive and integrated strategies to build healthy environments in communities suffering from health disparities. The symposium built on the momentum created by the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) "National Leadership Summit on Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health" held in July 2002. This symposium is the first step in a series of meetings to be organized to mobilize strong partnerships within HHS and with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other Federal agencies. Over 100 individuals from over 12 different agencies participated. The Symposium report will be issued in early 2004 and will be posted on both the HHS Office of Minority Health and the EPA Office of Environmental Justice web pages.

In the continuing series of these IWG Health Disparities Task Force symposiums, a November 2004 symposium is planned in collaboration with the American Public Health Association (APHA). At the APHA 2004 annual conference in Washington, DC, with the theme of "Public Health and the Environment," the Task Force will hold a 1 ½ day meeting on environmental justice and health disparities. The 2004 symposium grows out of the commitment by the Task Force to hold a symposium for impacted communities and public health practitioners.

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