

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland's Introductory Message to the U.S. Department of Justice's Environmental Justice Strategic Plan

The Department of Justice's mission to uphold the rule of law, keep our country safe, and protect civil rights compels us to pursue justice for historically marginalized and underserved communities, including those that have been overburdened by environmental harms. To carry out the Department's commitment to that critical work, I am pleased to announce the publication of our revised Environmental Justice Strategic Plan.

Everyone across America deserves clean air, water, and land in the places where they live, work, play, and learn. Violations of our environmental, consumer protection, and other laws unfairly deprive communities of those basic necessities. And while environmental injustice can happen anywhere, communities of color, low-income communities, and indigenous communities often suffer disproportionately from exposure to environmental contamination, the worsening effects of climate change, and environmental crime. A person's race, Tribal affiliation, disability, or income should not determine their level of exposure to climate risks or the cumulative health impacts of environmental burdens.

Since the Department issued its first Environmental Justice Strategy in 1995, we have considered how the nation's environmental, civil rights, civil, and criminal laws can be enforced to reduce these burdens. In 2022, the Department issued a new Comprehensive Environmental Justice Enforcement Strategy (CEJES) and established the Office of Environmental Justice to oversee the Department's wide-ranging environmental justice efforts. We have achieved significant progress under the CEJES, delivering real benefits to overburdened communities and prioritizing health and safety in everything we do. I am grateful to OEJ and so many others throughout the Department for their dedication to implementing that strategy. And I am grateful for the essential work they will do to build on that progress and carry out this Plan.

Fulfilling the Department's mission requires us to protect all Americans from environmental harms and pursue justice for the communities that have experienced those harms. This Strategic Plan will help ensure we carry out our charge in service of those who need us most.