



FACT SHEET

If You Really Care About Environmental Justice, You Should Care About Reproductive Justice!

Environmental Justice (EJ) and Reproductive Justice (RJ) share a common concern about the health of families and communities. Both EJ and RJ seek to improve the lives of disadvantaged women through education, empowerment and activism. EJ seeks to reduce the inequitable environmental burdens borne by communities composed of people of color, indigenous groups, and those living in economically disadvantaged areas. RJ tries to ensure that all people—regardless of race, wealth and political or social power—can decide to have the children they want, raise the children they have and plan their families.

Environmental Pollution and Toxins Affect Reproductive Health

People of all income-brackets, job categories, races and locations are exposed to toxins. Individuals may come into contact with toxins through the clothes they wear, food they consume, furniture they have, transportation they take, detergent they use or housing they inhabit. Toxic chemicals are a dangerous, but increasingly common, part of everyday life.

Because they are more likely to be low-wage workers, women and people of color are disproportionately exposed to many hazardous chemicals, including agricultural pesticides, home cleaning products, industrial cleaning products, and chemicals used in hair and nail salons.¹ Studies suggest that exposure to certain chemicals can cause a host of reproductive health problems such as infertility and reproductive cancers in both men and women.² Greater exposure to chemicals may contribute higher rates of birth defects, low-birth weight, still-birth and miscarriage for women of color.³ Evidence suggests that exposure to certain toxic chemicals in both fetuses and young children can also cause developmental delays.⁴

Since chemicals affecting individuals' health can be passed along genetically, there is no blank slate. Our present generation suffers from the effects of chemicals to which our parents and grandparents were exposed.⁵ Recent research shows the chemicals may permanently alter the genetic code, potentially affecting those generations far into the future.

EJ and RJ Share Common Goals

By endorsing the principles of Reproductive Justice—including the right to bear and raise children in healthy environments—you are advancing Environmental Justice.

Both RJ and EJ are concerned with the health and well-being of all people. They seek to improve socioeconomic conditions for those living in poverty and to provide a forum for traditionally marginalized communities to advocate on their own behalf.

Both EJ and RJ recognize the right of all people to reproductive health including the right of all women to have

healthy pregnancies. By seeking to eliminate the use of toxins that affect male and female fertility, increase risks during pregnancy and lead to birth defects, EJ protects reproductive health and safeguards healthy pregnancies. Both EJ and RJ recognize the right of families to raise their children in a healthy environment and seek to protect individuals and families from dangerous chemicals in their homes, workplaces, schools and stores.⁶

How You Can Support Environmental Justice and Reproductive Justice

To protect yourself and future generations you can:

1. Support the right of women to decide to have the children they want, raise the children they have and plan their families in a healthy environment.
2. Recognize that women and children suffer unique effects of environmental hazards and advocate for policies that improve reproductive health and pregnancy outcomes.
3. Push for stricter regulation through legislation such as the Toxic Substances Control Act⁷ that
 - a. Establishes health and safety testing
 - b. Bans the worst chemicals
 - c. And protects the most vulnerable.
4. Support the right of all parents to raise their children in healthy environments by advocating for the equitable distribution of green space, walking and biking trails, and playgrounds in low-income communities.⁸
5. Urge regulatory protections and safer labor practices for those exposed to toxic chemicals in industries dominated by low-income workers and women of color. Protections ought to increase awareness of potential harms and inform workers of their rights without promoting employment discrimination against pregnant, potentially pregnant, or nursing women.⁹

- 1 MARTHA MATSUOKA, BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES FROM THE GROUND UP: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN CALIFORNIA 29 (2003), available at http://www.environmentalhealth.org/PDFs/PDFs_Archive/EJReport.pdf.
- 2 REECE RUSHING, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS, REPRODUCTIVE ROULETTE: DECLINING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, DANGEROUS CHEMICALS, AND A NEW WAY FORWARD (July 2009), available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/07/pdf/reproductive_roulette.pdf.
- 3 Id.
- 4 Id.
- 5 Michael Skinner et al, Epigenetic Transgenerational Inheritance of Altered Stress Responses, Proceedings of the Natl' Acad. of Sciences of the U.S., (May 12, 2012) available at <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2012/05/15/1118514109.full.pdf+html>; Eric Sorenson, Today's Environment Influences Behavior Generations Later, WSU News, (May 21, 2012), <http://news.wsu.edu/pages/publications.asp?Action=Detail&PublicationID=31763>; TIME also discusses the question "Could parents' experiences early in their lives somehow change the traits they passed to their offspring?" They found that it could. As they note, "[Stockholm preventative-health specialist] Bygren and other scientists have now amassed historical evidence suggesting that powerful environmental conditions (near death from starvation, for instance) can somehow leave an imprint on the genetic material in eggs and sperm. These genetic imprints can short-circuit evolution and pass along new traits in a single generation." John Cloud, Your DNA Isn't Your Destiny" (Jan. 6, 2010), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1952313,00.html#ixzz28AUvX7B>.
- 6 Denny Larson, Reforming Chemical Policy Starts at the Fenceline in the Environmental Justice Community, Physicians for Social Responsibility, (last visited on Oct. 2, 2012), <http://www.psr.org/environment-and-health/environmental-health-policy-institute/responses/reforming-chemical-policy-starts-at-the-fenceline.html>.
- 7 ("The objective of the Toxics Substances Control Act (TSCA) is to allow EPA to regulate new commercial chemicals before they enter the market, to regulate existing chemicals (1976) when they pose an unreasonable risk to health or to the environment, and to regulate their distribution and use.") Environmental Protection Agency, The Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), available at <http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/lasca.html>, (last visited Oct. 2, 2012).
- 8 See the USA Today's report on the effect of toxic air on children and schools. The Smokehouse Stack Effect: Toxic Air and America's Schools, USA Today, (last visited Oct. 2), <http://content.usatoday.com/news/nation/environment/smokestack/index/>.
- 9 Such discrimination is in violation of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e(k) (2008).