

An Environmental Justice Climate Change Policy for New Jersey

Environmental justice (EJ) advocates worry about the detrimental health effects caused by the often documented disproportionate burden of pollution inflicted upon many communities Of Color and low-income neighborhoods across our country. They are similarly concerned about the harm the scientific community warns us global warming can inflict on these same communities. The problems typically cited as the most severe that will be faced by “environmental justice” communities due to climate change are: 1) an increase in temperature that will cause additional deaths in urban areas during “heat emergencies”; 2) increased concentrations of air pollutants that will cause additional deaths and illness in urban areas that are already burdened by the highest levels of particulate matter (PM) air pollution in our country; and 3) the detrimental effects of extreme weather events that cause disproportionate harm in low-income communities because a lack of resources prevents damage mitigation. To prevent these climate change related effects the EJ community has joined in calls to implement measures that will reduce emissions of global warming gases.

However, EJ advocates view the fervor that has developed to fight global warming not only as a tool that can be used to save the planet from a global threat, but also as an opportunity to save lives *now* in our nation, especially in communities Of Color and low-income neighborhoods, by reducing concentrations of fine PM air pollution.¹ Fine PM may cause as many as 50,000 premature deaths in the U.S. annually and for that reason the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA) and the Center for the Urban Environment have formulated an EJ climate change policy that emphasizes reducing concentrations of this deadly pollutant.

The policy also recommends utilizing energy conservation techniques and renewable energy sources extensively in urban areas as a climate change mitigation strategy that will have

¹ Fine PM refers to all airborne particles less than or equal to 2.5 microns in diameter.

the added benefits of reducing concentrations of fine PM and helping to economically revitalize inner city neighborhoods by generating much-needed jobs.

The NJEJA also strongly believes that recently developed carbon trading schemes are deeply flawed policies that should not be implemented. However, at the moment there appears to be a political inevitability regarding the utilization of carbon trading in New Jersey and EJ advocates urge our society to support a climate change strategy that will, in addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, help redevelop inner-city neighborhoods by providing jobs and save lives in urban areas by reducing fine PM concentrations.

The overall EJ climate change policy contains six policy recommendations that are presented below along with a brief comment on each recommendation.

Policy Recommendation: Emphasize and develop strategies that reduce emissions of fine PM, its gaseous precursors and other toxic pollutants, along with emissions of carbon dioxide. This policy would save lives in urban areas now.

Policy Recommendation: Ensure that reductions of emissions are fairly distributed. A potential EJ problem under a carbon trading system is polluting facilities in or near EJ communities can buy pollution allowances or offsets instead of reducing emissions. To prevent this from occurring regulations that are legally connected to the carbon-trading program should be utilized in urban areas to mandate emissions reductions.

Policy Recommendation: Use energy conservation and renewable energy sources extensively in urban areas. This recommendation would not only reduce the carbon footprint in urban areas, it could also provide much needed jobs and reduce fine PM concentrations. The policy could be jump-started by building Abbott Schools that are equipped with solar power and other energy conservation/renewable energy source designs, based on LEED and other “green” design guidelines, and by “retrofitting” urban churches so they can also use renewable energy sources.

Policy recommendation: If a carbon trading scheme is implemented over the objections of the EJ community, 100% of carbon allowances should be auctioned each year and a significant portion of the resulting money used to support global warming initiatives in urban areas. Pollution trading systems have typically given pollution allowances away for free to polluters even though money for pollution reduction is scarce.

Policy recommendation: Formulate climate change mitigation strategies specifically for people Of Color and low-income residents. The Katrina disaster has demonstrated the need for this strategy.

Policy recommendation: Create EJ Committees to oversee the EJ aspects of climate change policy in New Jersey and for the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. These committees could possibly be created for New Jersey by regulations issued pursuant to the recently enacted New Jersey Global Warming Response Act and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

Prepared July 2008.

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