

PA Department of Environmental Protection

Environmental Justice Policy

Adopted January 3, 2026

Definition: The policy seeks fair treatment and meaningful community involvement in DEP decisions. As part of their review of regulations and permits, DEP must determine whether permit changes shift financial and environmental burdens onto vulnerable communities.

What the policy covers

- Community identification: DEP has designated environmental justice areas based on environmental burdens and community conditions.
- Public participation: Certain permit projects trigger additional outreach, information, meetings, and opportunities to comment. DEP can also select other projects for review based on community concerns or anticipated environmental burdens.
- Broader agency work: The policy addresses inspections and enforcement, community investment and financial assistance, and climate initiatives within DEP's existing authority.

What it does not automatically require

- The policy is not a blanket requirement for every industry affecting a low-income community.
- Enhanced participation applies to designated trigger projects and projects DEP selects for additional review.
- It does not automatically prohibit sewer-rate increases or require DEP to prevent them.

How the Policy should be applied to Biosolid Permit changes

- DEP should review the Biosolid Permit changes for impact on environmental justice area residents.
- DEP should solicit public comment from EJA's on the impact of higher sewer rates as low-income households and people on fixed incomes have the least ability to absorb higher sewer bills.
- DEP should involve municipal authorities and their ratepayers to evaluate higher sewer bills, added truck traffic, and impacts near alternative disposal facilities.