

Environmental Justice Relation to Businesses

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Introduction:

The notion of environmental injustice emerged in the late 1980s in the United States, but it was not until 2002 that it was first addressed in Massachusetts. It was only after the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs came up with the Environmental Justice Policy that they began to tackle the problem of environmental injustice in the State (Mass.gov, 2002). Environmental injustice refers to the disproportionate exposure of communities of color and low-income individuals to pollution, and its concomitant effects on health and the environment, as well as the unequal environmental protection and environmental quality, provided through laws, regulations, governmental programs, enforcement, and policies (greenaction.org). In Massachusetts, environmental injustice has been present for decades. Although there are policies and laws in place to restrict private entities from exploiting vulnerable neighborhoods, the conditions have only become worse.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the hard-hitting truths regarding environmental injustices in Massachusetts. There is clear evidence that there are neighborhoods that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. According to a recent report, Massachusetts was ranked third in total deaths nationally due to COVID-19 (Levitz, 2020). The cities and towns which were impacted the hardest were the ones inhabited by people from communities of color. Decades of environmental injustice practices have led to the increase of air pollution in towns such as Chelsea, Springfield, and Brockton that are primarily inhabited by minority communities. It is due to the exploitation of policies and laws that large corporations have been able to carry out activities that have exacerbated air pollution in these areas.

Why Environmental Justice Is Important To Us:

As the nation's first business trade foundation, formed in 1988, the Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts (SBN) has been a driving force behind building an economy that is local, fair, and environmentally conscious. Their Sustainable Business Leader Program (SBLP) offers businesses comprehensive training to transform themselves into an organization that is environmentally friendly and sustainable. SBN aims to not only have a network of local businesses that are governed by the same principles but also to assist and support those businesses which are striving towards attaining an environmentally sustainable route through personalized technical assistance and guidance (sbnmass.org).

Cambridge Local First (CLF) which is a network of over four hundred and fifty local and independent businesses has been at the forefront of creating a thriving local and green community in Cambridge and surrounding towns. CLF believes that by supporting local and independent businesses, an environment can be created which is sustainable and inclusive. CLF's goal is to educate the public as well as the government about the environmental benefits

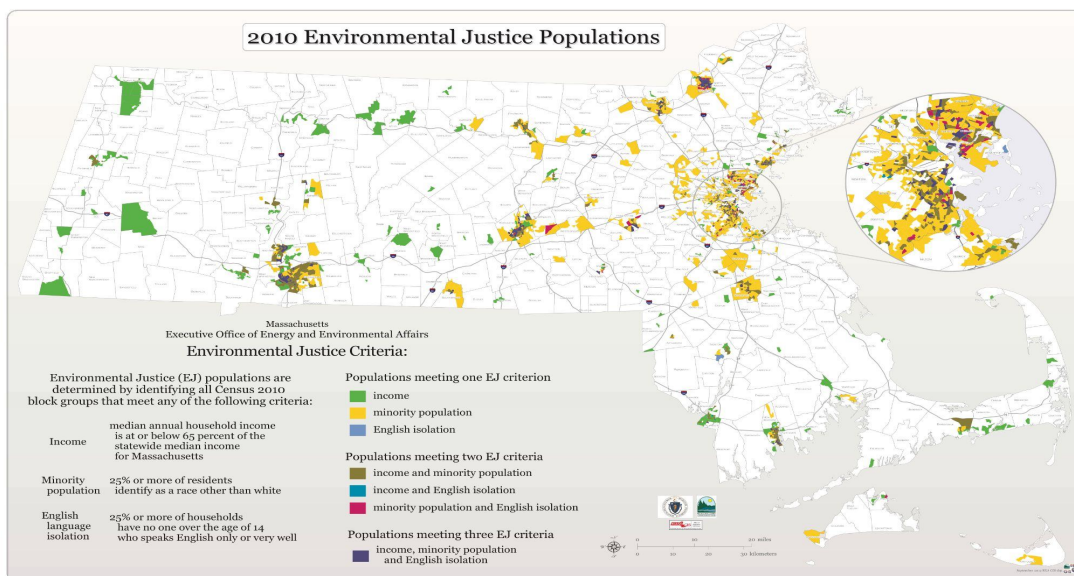
of having such a community (cambridgelocalfirst.org). Through their shared beliefs of having an environmentally friendly and sustainable community in Massachusetts, SBN and CLF aim to highlight issues that have impacted our communities and have damaged our local economy.

Goals of the Report:

The goal of this report is to inform the stakeholders of the malpractices being conducted concerning the environment. Our focus is to highlight cities that are economically backward and predominantly non-White that are being directly affected by the results of the actions carried out by large companies. These cities are not getting enough attention and as a result, are the victims of many life-threatening diseases. The report will accentuate environmental injustice in Massachusetts specifically related to air pollution. Along with Dr. Daniel Faber's views on environmental justice practices in Massachusetts and how to adopt an intersectional view in order to solve the issue. It will also include a success story of a local business that has actively been involved in taking steps to give back to the local community. Their sustainable practices which include supporting independent businesses through a rewards program and providing loans for setting alternative energy equipment is commendable.

Environmental Justice in Massachusetts:

EJ is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of environmental benefits. <https://www.mass.gov/environmental-justice>



(Office of Administration and Finance, 2010)

In Massachusetts, the population that is considered at risk, environmentally, are ones that fall under these categories. The following is the definition from the Massachusetts Government website:

- Block group whose annual median household income is equal to or less than 65 percent of the statewide median (\$62,072 in 2010); or
- 25% or more of the residents identify as a race other than white; or
- 25% or more of households have no one over the age of 14 who speaks English only or very well - English Isolation (Mass.gov)

Air pollution is an environmental issue in Massachusetts that has been reinforced by transportation, factories, and businesses. Air pollution affects everyone, but some communities are affected more than others. Businesses big or small can make an impact on the air quality in the communities they work with. (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2019)

Analysis from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) found that persons of color in the Greater Boston area are more likely to live near a major roadway that exposes them to high levels of vehicular air pollution (Harmon, 2020). Chelsea which is geographically the smallest city of MA is occupied by forty-five thousand residents who reside in one-third of the space (Shemkus, 2020). Its prime location on the waterfront has made it a prime location for industries. It also houses the largest road salt pile in the Northeast which contributes to high levels of air pollution because of the diesel emitting trucks and cargo ships which transport around 800,000 tonnes of rock salt (D'archi, 2017). The air quality in that area has led to the urgent need for local and state policy changes which directly affect the burning of fossil fuels. Chelsea has one of the highest rates of chronic respiratory diseases and asthma. Chelsea was also a national COVID-19 hotspot in the early weeks of the outbreak in 2020 and the primary reason for that was the air quality in the area (DeCosta-Klipa, 2020).

Another city in Massachusetts that has been disproportionately affected because of environmental injustice is Springfield. A city where nearly a fifth of its residents are Black and half are Latino. When compared to the state of Massachusetts the city has a low-income household and nearly thirty percent of its citizens are in poverty (Gregory, 2020). Residents of Springfield are constantly in a battle to get access to clean and fresh air. In one of the rare wins for the environmental justice activists, after almost a decade of protest, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection revoked a permit for the construction of a biomass plant in Springfield (Wasser, 2021). If built, the plant would have produced around twelve hundred tons of waste wood per day. Although this win is a positive step towards environmental justice, it does not however stop the company responsible from submitting the proposal (Abel, 2021). The main area of concern is whether burning waste wood for electricity is good for the environment or not. The city is already facing huge problems related to air pollution due to transportation emission, which is forty-three percent higher than the state average, construction of a biomass plant would only make it worse (Pinto de Moura & Reichmuth, 2019). If adequate measures and policies are not implemented in the city which is already called the Asthma capital of the country, health conditions will only exacerbate.

Policy:

Year	Policy	Key Takeaway
1975	Creating of EEA	The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs was created to protect natural resources and individuals from environmental threats to public health (Mass.gov)
2002	Environmental Justice Policy	The first environmental justice policy was put in place. This included a definition of EJ as well as who it serves and what groups are working for EJ. (Mass.gov, 2002)
2014	Executive Order 552	Requires Secretariats to put in place policies for environmental justice. The order is required for departments to make changes in a certain amount of time. (Exec. Order No. 552, 2014)
2017	Environmental Justice Policy	The current EJ policy report defines EJ as well as what characteristics consist for a place to be labeled as EJ populations. A section describes what the state is going to be focusing on while this policy is in place. (Mass.gov, 2017)
2021	S.9 Bill	The goal of this bill is to reduce emissions. In doing so it takes the whole community especially business to better the environment. (S.9, 2021)

Academic View:

Dr. Daniel Faber, Professor of Sociology and Director of Northeastern Environmental Justice Research Collaborative, has been working on the Global Center for Climate Justice which is devoted to looking at the climate crisis as an intersectional issue. Dr. Faber and many others believe that we need to look through a “justice lens” to be able to work on environmental justice. Although the EJ movement has been making progress Dr.Faber believes that there needs to be more understanding on how race, class, transportation, and living wage all play into it. Dr.Faber mentioned that in Massachusetts class and racial disparities have worsened and that the Northeast has worsened the most environmentally in the U.S.

Gentrification is one way that businesses are contributing to wealth inequality and how that affects the environmental issues in an area. Low-income areas are usually more polluted, but more affordable to many. Businesses enter these areas and spike the prices up of real estate. This drives individuals out of the area and to other low-income areas. We are finding now more than ever during Covid-19 that housing in the Boston area is rising and causing more economical problems.

One way to work on environmental justice is through policy. In order to have stronger policies, there has to be a strong backing. The Massachusetts constitution states that every individual is guaranteed a clean and healthy environment. Policy changes can be a start to a

clean environment. Dr. Faber mentioned toxic chemicals and how businesses have been implementing them into their products and the U.S does not have a direct policy eliminating them. In other countries, they do have rules in place, but in the U.S it has to be brought up by individuals. This makes the point that consumers have power and are in charge of what they buy. The morals of a business are important to consumers and are getting more attention in the past few years. Dr. Faber has been part of a group that is bringing awareness to this subject and hopes a change will come soon.

The Role of Businesses:

The role of businesses when thinking about environmental justice can vary depending on the specialty of the business. The first step is for the business to recognize what aspects of their work can be adapted to better their community. For example, a food business could donate the extra food they have to those who are in need of it in the community. Businesses that do shipping or transportation can focus on how their vehicles could be more eco-friendly or plan more efficient routes to cut down on emissions.

UMassFive College Federal Credit Union has been actively constructing programs for the community that are sustainable and rewarding for their customers. Craig Boivin, Vice President of Marketing explained that their credit union is “person-centric.” Not only are they looking to better individuals’ experiences, but also support the community and environment through their actions. Loans are one way that UMassFive College Federal Credit Union invests in their community. They provide loans for solar energy, farm shares, heating, peddle bikes, and many more initiatives. Providing the opportunity for the community to access these supports they may otherwise not be able to have is a great way the Credit Union makes an impact. UMass Five recognizes the importance of solar energy for our environment and individuals. Creating a resource for citizens to access solar energy is environmental justice at work. UMass Five hopes their work is empowering and they use their power to make a difference, something more businesses should adopt as we shift to more environmentally just business practices.

Conclusion and Looking Forward:

This report is a live working document that aims to highlight one of the EJ issues such as air pollution and how it affects certain neighborhoods that are not predominantly White identifying. It is intended to be a gateway for further research in the field of environmental injustice in Massachusetts and to recognize and promote businesses that are working tirelessly to adopt an environmentally friendly approach. In order to make the report more detailed, the work of local businesses and local organizations needs to be studied along with identifying and researching further into other forms of pollution affecting marginalized communities.

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