

# Minneapolis Community Environmental Advisory Commission

February 26th, 2014

Dear City Council Members and Mayor Hodges:

As we mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898 this month, the Minneapolis Community Environmental Advisory Commission (CEAC) is committed to eliminating the persistent, disproportionate environmental risks experienced by low-income and residents of color in Minneapolis. CEAC makes the recommendations below to the Minneapolis City Council and the Mayor in support of a letter recently submitted by environmental justice organizations and supporters to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The letter asks the MPCA to structurally evaluate its policies, practices, rule-making and regulations in order to eliminate ongoing environmental pollution and related health disparities in our communities.<sup>1</sup>

Minneapolis, as a state population center, is home to 46% people of color (including the Latino population), and 15% immigrant or New Americans. About 22% of the Minneapolis community is below the poverty level. American Indian and African American youth are experiencing elevated incidences of asthma and other related respiratory diseases (28% of American Indian and 23% African American youth in 12 grade reported having had an asthma related incidence)<sup>2</sup>; and the asthma rate for African American and American Indian adults in Hennepin County is more than 25% higher than that of whites.<sup>3</sup> These neighborhoods also have above average poverty rates and high numbers of environmentally sensitive residents (children and the elderly) and are also home to a disproportionate number of contaminated properties and continue to be targeted for location of NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) industries.<sup>4</sup> The data shows that in Minnesota, health disparities in respiratory and heart disease, cancer, and infant mortality among communities of color and Native Americans requires targeted public action. For example, asthma hospitalization rates in children in Minneapolis were almost 50 percent higher than the national average, and 17 percent of students in the St. Paul school district are diagnosed with asthma.<sup>5</sup>

Given that the Values, Goals & Strategic Directions currently being considered by the Minneapolis City Council include a focus on addressing disparities between Minneapolis communities and improving the well-being of people and the environment, CEAC recommends the following near term actions:

- (1) Establish a comprehensive Green Zone Initiative, as outlined in the Minneapolis Climate Action Plan (Buildings and Energy Section, Cross-Cutting Strategy 1). The goal of Green Zones is to target public and private investment in neighborhoods with the highest levels of pollution and environmental degradation—where people have been

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental Justice Letter to Commissioner of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Asthma in Minnesota: 2012 Epidemiology Report. MN Department of Health, pg.14; MN Student Survey 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Racial Disparities in Minnesota: A Factsheet Produced by the Minneapolis Foundation, July 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Twin Cities Environmental Justice Mapping Tool: [www.ceed.org/ejmap](http://www.ceed.org/ejmap), 2013. Click Layers Tab.

<sup>5</sup> Asthma in Minnesota: 2005 Epidemiology Report. Minnesota Department of Health. Minneapolis, MN.

exposed to the toxic effects of pollutants from heavy industry, factories, and busy highways. These neighborhoods should be the first in line for much-needed local, state and federal resources for parks, community gardens, energy-efficiency, renewable energy and “green” small business entrepreneurship.

- (2) Commit resources for green infrastructure planning and community preparedness during extreme weather/flooding in the most at risk Minneapolis communities - particularly those located near existing industrial and contaminated sites where toxic migration from flooding will be a critical issue. The need for this has been made clear with the recent flooding of North Minneapolis, and will only be more critical as extreme weather events increase in Minneapolis with the onset of climate change.
- (3) Engage the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County and state agencies/policy makers to ensure environmental justice is imbedded in the goals and strategies of plans, policies and projects impacting Minneapolis residents. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of the Minneapolis Comprehensive Planning process and working to expand the cumulative impacts policy — currently only in the Phillips neighborhood — to cover all of Minneapolis.
- (4) Establish and fund a multi-year environmental justice micro-grants program for community projects related to community data gathering, grassroots sustainability projects, emergency preparedness, and community engagement.
- (5) Ensure environmental justice is imbedded in the City’s sustainability indicators, and provide ongoing city data and monitoring support to measure racial equity as applied to the sustainability indicators.

CEAC looks forward to working with you on these issues, and will be following up this year with more specific action items from the five recommendations above.

Sincerely,  
Minneapolis Community Environmental Advisory Commission

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