

DAY 10: Environmental Racism. Environmental Justice.

The people most responsible for climate change historically — globally, as well as domestically — are not the same people who are feeling the pain first, worst and longest. If you're just talking about greenhouse gases and parts per million, you're not seeing the issues around vulnerability and justice.”-- Robert Bullard, distinguished professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University in Houston

Environmental racism describes how people of color are more exposed than white people to harmful and deadly environmental factors — including climate change — while often not having a voice in the policy creation and decision-making about their own communities. These factors can range from high rates of air pollution and toxic emissions due to nearby factories and freeways to toxic waste dumping and city infrastructure. Exposure to these pollutants has led to higher levels of asthma, nausea, headaches, cancer and heart disease in residents with low incomes and most often, people of color.

Despite wanting the best for their families, people with limited means are often less geographically mobile and have fewer affordable choices when deciding where to live. What is affordable is often situated near land that is comparatively cheap due to its proximity to industrial areas, highways, landfills, and chemical facilities and/or areas at risk of ecological disaster. This has led to residents with low incomes, and often also people of color, living in areas with high rates of air and water pollution, which have a direct, negative impact on their health.

Washtenaw County is no exception-- [PFAS contamination in groundwater at Ypsilanti Township's Willow Run Airport is more than five times the acceptable level](#). Studies have shown that [Black people are exposed to more pollutants than white people](#). [Air pollution and particulate matter exposure](#) have been linked to asthma, low birth weights, high blood pressure, and other adverse health outcomes. This is environmental racism.

In 2017 in [Ypsilanti, a group of mothers in the Sycamore Meadows began mobilizing fellow residents to advocate for better living conditions of the apartments in which they lived](#). They garnered the support of the local health department and County government, and were able to obtain inspections for all the housing units (95% of which failed) and ensure these conditions were remedied. [These mothers were part of the Trusted Parent Advisors of Washtenaw County Success by Six](#). They continue to convene and mobilize via a tenants association they helped to form. This is environmental justice.

Share your reflections on today's topic on social media using the hashtag **#unitedforequity** or **#uwwcequitychallenge** and tag **@uwwashtenaw**.

[The modern environmental justice movement started in 1982](#) when the majority Black residents of a small town in North Carolina battled to prevent the construction of a hazardous waste landfill near their community. At its core, this movement is built around the principal belief that environmental justice is racial justice. Since then, this movement has been championed and led by the people it most affects.

Today's Challenge:

Listen:

- Listen to [Washtenaw County Commissioner Justin Hodge share progress on how environmental justice is being made a policy priority in Washtenaw County](#).
- [Listen to this podcast interviewing Queer Nature cofounders So and Pinar, who speak about ideas of queer ecology and belonging with and in the land](#). The two talk about how the acknowledgment of our relationship to where we live can inform a sense of responsibility, connection, and belonging.

Read:

- Check out the [Principles of Environmental Justice](#) developed at the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit with help from [Dr. Dorceta E. Taylor](#), a University of Michigan professor.
- Check out this article to [learn how and why climate change disproportionately affects marginalized people](#) based on race and socioeconomic status.
- Read about and then watch an episode of [Planeta G, which is amplifying Latinx voices in the environmental movement](#).

Watch:

- Watch this 10-minute [MLive documentary on environmental injustice and racism in Michigan](#)
- Have you heard of environmental racism? Watch this 3-minute video on [how numerous systemic issues contribute to differences in exposure to potentially harmful environmental conditions](#).
- [Watch this interview of Robert Bullard, a founder of the environmental justice movement](#), who explains how and why pollution is segregated.

Share your reflections on today's topic on social media using the hashtag **#unitedforequity** or **#uwwcequitychallenge** and tag **@uwwashtenaw**.

Act:

- [Sign up for action alerts](#) so that you can join United Way of Washtenaw County and advocate for policies that create more equitable conditions in our community.
- Familiarize yourself with [Resilient Washtenaw](#), our County's plan for carbon neutrality by 2035.
- Journal, reflect and share:
 - What examples can you think of on how the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect communities of color and those who suffer from social inequalities?
 - In what ways is your built environment/neighborhood promoting health and sustainability? For example, do you live in an area with a clean water source and working storm drains? Do you have areas where you can walk or bike?



**Discrimination?
Injustice?
Racial Inequities?**

YES.

**Click here to learn more
and join the
21-Day Equity
Challenge: 2023 Edition**

Share your reflections on today's topic on social media using the hashtag [#unitedforequity](#) or [#uwwcequitychallenge](#) and tag [@uwwashtenaw](#).