

Department of Justice
FACT SHEET

Year One of the Justice Department’s Comprehensive Environmental Justice Enforcement Strategy and Office of Environmental Justice

Advancing Justice Now While Building for the Future

On May 5, 2022, the Attorney General created the Department’s first-ever Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ). Since then, OEJ has directed community engagement in support of the Department’s lawsuit to improve safe drinking water access in Jackson, Mississippi, trained Department attorneys on environmental justice issues and practices, and developed community outreach best practices for case teams across the country. Also on May 5, 2022, the Associate Attorney General issued the Department’s Comprehensive Environmental Justice Enforcement Strategy. One year later, the Department is proud to share our progress in our work advancing environmental justice.

This year saw the Civil Rights Division enter into a resolution agreement in a Title VI investigation in Lowndes County, Alabama—its first ever environmental justice Title VI action. The Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD) worked with the Environmental Protection Agency to address the drinking water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi, and brought suit to curb harmful air pollution from a petrochemical manufacturer, Denka Performance Elastomer, LLC, in Louisiana’s infamous “Cancer Alley.” Meanwhile, to ensure that every community has a Department attorney attuned to their concerns, all 94 United States Attorneys’ Offices have designated at least one civil or criminal prosecutor as an Environmental Justice Coordinator. Read on for these and other highlights of the year.

Enforcement:

- The Civil Rights Division advanced Title VI civil rights investigations focused on allegations of discriminatory treatment related to environmental, public health, and quality of life issues:
 - On May 4, 2023, the Civil Rights Division announced an interim resolution agreement in an environmental justice investigation into the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Lowndes County Health Department (collectively ADPH) in Lowndes County, Alabama. The interim resolution agreement puts ADPH on a path towards ensuring the development of equitable and safe wastewater disposal and management systems in Lowndes County.
 - The Division is continuing its investigation into the City of Houston’s operations, policies, and practices concerning [illegal dumping](#), and the impacts on communities of color in Houston.
- ENRD filed a Clean Air Act [lawsuit](#) on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and sought immediate action by Denka Performance Elastomer, LLC to curb hazardous emissions from its plant in LaPlace, Louisiana. An elementary school lies 450 feet from the facility.

- ENRD attorneys filed a Safe Drinking Water Act [lawsuit](#) on behalf of EPA and negotiated an interim order with city and state officials to name a court-appointed manager and begin to stabilize the Jackson, Mississippi drinking water system.
- Each of the 94 United States Attorneys' Offices has designated at least one civil or criminal prosecutor to serve as an Environmental Justice Coordinator. These attorneys and their teams have secured, for instance:
 - Felony convictions for mismanagement of an industrial waste landfill in [Alloy, West Virginia](#) (S.D. W. Va.);
 - Indictments for selling contaminated grape juice to the National School Lunch Program in [Yakima, Washington](#) (E.D. Wash.), (E.D. Wash.); and
 - A sixteen-month sentence for a contractor who violated federal lead paint safety laws when renovating low- and median-income housing in [Indianapolis, Indiana](#) (S.D. Ind.).

Capacity-Building and Training:

- The FBI has joined or formed six environmental task forces with EPA across the United States.
- 89 United States Attorneys' Offices have stood up environmental justice community reporting systems.
- DOJ's National Advocacy Center in Columbia, South Carolina now includes environmental justice training in its seminars for United States Attorneys' Offices.
- OEJ and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys host monthly environmental justice trainings for the Department's Environmental Justice Coordinators.
- ENRD and the Civil Rights Division conduct witness interview trainings for professional staff to encourage the use of community impact statements in our enforcement actions.
- ENRD offers a mandatory environmental justice training for all new attorneys each fall and incorporated environmental justice in a training for State Attorneys General staff.
- Department of Justice personnel held listening sessions with community leaders in Warren and Sansome Counties, North Carolina; the Detroit/River Rouge area; Houston, Texas; and throughout the Northern District of West Virginia (Wheeling/Martinsburg).

Tribal Justice:

- In November 2022, ENRD and the Office of Tribal Justice (OTJ) co-hosted a listening session for Tribes, alongside the White House Tribal Leaders Summit.
- In February 2023, ENRD and OTJ co-hosted a Defending and Strengthening Tribal Homelands Summit at DOJ's National Advocacy Center. Over three days, Tribal and federal participants discussed enforcing Tribal treaty rights, securing Tribal water rights, and partnering with Tribes to implement climate adaptation plans.

We welcome feedback on our efforts to implement the Comprehensive Environmental Justice Enforcement Strategy. Please send comments, suggestions, or concerns for your community to OEJ.ENRD@usdoj.gov.