

Environmental Justice Stakeholder Meeting

March 12, 1998

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington, DC

Background

On February 11, 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. The Executive Order increased Agency responsibilities such that, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, each Federal Agency must make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States and its territories. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is striving to incorporate environmental justice principles in its rule-making process as the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996 are implemented. The Agency's focus is to identify, address, and remedy disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of drinking water regulations, policies, and activities on minority and low income populations.

Since 1995, EPA's Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW) has held stakeholder meetings to help refocus priorities in the drinking water program and improve relationships between EPA, States, Tribes, local governments, and the public. On March 12, OGWDW convened a public meeting in Washington, DC to discuss ways to involve minority, low-income, and other sensitive subgroups in the stakeholder process. The major meeting objectives were to:

1. Solicit input from EJ stakeholders on known issues concerning current OGWDW's regulatory efforts;
2. Identify key issues of concern to EJ stakeholders; and
3. Receive suggestions from EJ stakeholders concerning ways to increase representation of EJ communities in OGWDW regulatory efforts.

Due to the financial and logistical limitations often faced by EJ representatives, EPA elected to make use of televideo technology to facilitate nationwide stakeholder involvement in the meeting. Televideo links were established with EPA Regions 1 through 9 so stakeholders could merely travel to the EPA Regional Office nearest them in order to provide input at the meeting. Participants in the Regions were able to observe the presentations given in Washington and comment following designated break-out sessions.

Summary

The meeting format consisted of a morning session during which OGWDW staff presented stakeholders with an outline of EPA's responsibilities in implementing SDWA, including: identifying drinking water problems, establishing priorities, ensuring the use of rigorous science and accurate data, issuing standards and guidance, and providing training and technical assistance. The afternoon session included a series of educational presentations covering current Agency research and analysis of issues related to efforts to update the contaminant candidate list (CCL) and activities undertaken in support of regulations for arsenic, radon, and microbial contaminants in water systems served by both ground and surface water sources. Presenters also provided background information to stakeholders on the status of efforts to control risks associated with disinfectants used to control microbial contamination and their by-products.

After each presentation, stakeholders were presented with questions for discussion at their various locations. Following each of these break-out sessions, stakeholders were given the opportunity to report their comments to all meeting participants via the use of the televideo links described above. This mechanism produced many important insights and suggestions for OGWDW to consider in its efforts to involve EJ communities and their representatives in the regulatory process. These suggestions are listed below by general category:

Assessment of Costs, Benefits, and Affordability. Stakeholders recommended that EPA continue to assess the costs, benefits, and affordability of drinking water regulations in addition to the social and healthcare costs of not regulating certain contaminants. Several groups also asked that EPA compare short-term treatment costs to the long-term cost of illness in deciding which contaminants to regulate and at what levels to set standards. Some groups also asked EPA to identify the origins of drinking water source pollution and recover the costs associated with treatment from the responsible parties. Finally, with respect to affordability, the stakeholders suggested EPA establish focus groups to discuss affordability and ensure that the costs borne by small communities that purchase water from large utilities are taken into account.

Financial/Technical Assistance. The stakeholders urged EPA to continue to strengthen source water protection programs and provide education to EJ representatives and consumers concerning regulatory activities and contaminant risks through established EJ communication networks. They also stressed the importance of using formats and language residents of EJ communities and their representatives can understand. A number of break-out groups also reiterated the need for increased funding for drinking water remediation in rural and needy populations with poor drinking water quality.

Level of Protection/Health Concerns. Stakeholders urged EPA to offer equal health protection to customers of small systems by avoiding the promulgation of less-stringent standards and regulations for small water systems. Several groups asked EPA to further address the negative health effects experienced in communities not served by PWSs by identifying and considering ways to protect and communicate with such individuals. Stakeholders strongly supported standards that were protective of the most vulnerable populations.

Setting Standards. Stakeholders viewed the radon AMCL as posing significant EJ concerns. Stakeholders recommended EPA issue regulations addressing sensitive subgroups and multiple sensitivities by ensuring they are broadly-based and sensitive to the differences between communities. Several break-out groups stressed the need for EPA to further involve EJ communities in discussions of standard-setting and expressed a need for ensuring that decisions to consider differential standards across communities are effectively communicated to the public for consideration and debate. The stakeholders also asked the Agency to address co-occurrence of and cumulative exposures to drinking water contaminants.

Next Steps. If you have questions concerning OGWDW efforts to involve EJ stakeholders in the drinking water regulatory development process, please contact Corry Westbrook (202) 260-3228; or westbrook.corry@epamail.epa.gov. A [more detailed meeting summary](#) has also been published.