

**MEMORANDUM TO:** John Hickey, Chief  
Low-Level Waste and Decommissioning  
Projects Branch

**THROUGH:** Robert Nelson, Section Leader  
Low-Level Waste and Decommissioning  
Projects Branch

**FROM:** Phyllis Sobel, Project Manager  
Low-Level Waste and Decommissioning  
Projects Branch

**SUBJECT:** REVIEW OF NRR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PROCEDURE

I have reviewed the NRR environmental justice procedure and have the following comments based on my experiences in using the LandView software developed by EPA and the Census Bureau for environmental justice evaluations.

Area for Assessment

Items 3 and 4 of the NRR procedure discuss the area for analysis and appears to suggest the area is typically up to 50 miles from the site. The NMSS environmental justice procedure specifies the area to be assessed in terms of a radius centered on the site. The NMSS procedure suggests considering an area for assessment within 4 miles of the site for rural areas and within 0.56 miles for urban areas. The reviewer may need to increase or decrease the radius based on the characteristics of the population near the site or the potential impact area. Since the radius of the area to be assessed can vary with the distribution of population, the area should include at least several block groups. The NRR procedure needs these additional details to assist the NRR reviewer in determining the appropriate geographic area for assessment.

Census geographic area

Item 6 in the NRR environmental justice procedure notes the selection of the appropriate census geographic areas could be a neighborhood, census tract or similar unit. Based on my experiences, the census block group is the appropriate census geographic area to consider. My observation was confirmed by discussions with staff at the Census Bureau.

E-8

Blocks, the smallest census geographic area, are not appropriate for environmental justice studies because there is no income information available at this geographic level. Although every census questionnaire included questions about race and Hispanic origin, only the sample questionnaire (census long form) contained questions about income. Since so little information is available at the block level, the smallest area for which the Census Bureau has tabulated income data is at the block group level.

Census block groups are composed of several census blocks. Block groups are usually small areas bounded on all sides by visible features such as streets, roads, streams, and railroad tracks, and by invisible boundaries such as city, town, township, and county limits.

Larger census geographic areas (such as census tracts, counties or places (generally cities or towns)) have populations that are too large to be of value in environmental justice studies because communities of minorities or low income populations could not be identified.

#### Defining low-income

Low-income is defined in item 7 of the NRR procedure as percentage of households below the poverty line. However, the income data available in LandView are median household income. Since LandView does not contain information on population below the poverty level for the block group level, this information can be obtained on the compact disks "1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census," which can be purchased from the Census Bureau. However, unless environmental justice is an issue at a site, the LandView information on median household income is sufficient for environmental justice evaluations.

#### Defining a significantly greater minority or low-income population

Item 7 of the NRR procedure does not define what is a "significantly greater" percentage. In the NMSS environmental justice procedure, an environmental justice potential would occur if the percent of any minority or the percent of low-income households were at least 20% higher than the county or state level. For example, if the county black population were 10% of the total population and the block group black population were at least 30% of the population, there would be an environmental justice potential. Some quantitative guidance, such as that found in the NMSS procedure, will help the NRR reviewer determine what is a "significantly greater" percentage.

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Distribution: ABryce PDR (YES\_) (NO\_✓)

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5

From: Phyllis A. Sobel (PAS), *NMNS*  
To: mfw  
Date: Friday, August 18, 1995 8:17 am  
Subject: EJ briefing - August 16

On August 16, John Hickey, Merri Horn and I met with Mal Knapp to discuss the status of environmental justice issues. John Hickey presented the attached material. There is still no draft guidance from CEQ.

Although I am still questioning IMNS, it appears I am the only person in the agency attempting to implement an environmental justice procedure. Mal <sup>Knapp</sup> said that until someone tells me to do otherwise, the notes I have been preparing for the project managers discussing the use of census data for environmental justice studies at their sites will remain the standard.

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