

**As of:** November 01, 2021  
**Received:** October 29, 2021  
**Status:** Pending\_Post  
**Tracking No.** kvc-wjfy-ke4j  
**Comments Due:** October 29, 2021  
**Submission Type:** API

# PUBLIC SUBMISSION

**Docket:** NRC-2021-0137

Systematic Assessment for how the NRC Addresses Environmental Justice in its Programs, Policies, and Activities

**Comment On:** NRC-2021-0137-0001

Systematic Assessment for How the NRC Addresses Environmental Justice in Its Programs, Policies, and Activities

**Document:** NRC-2021-0137-DRAFT-2242

Comment on FR Doc # 2021-14673

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## General Comment

Dear Sirs,

I thank you for your attention and consideration, and for the opportunity to comment.

Below is the standard letter being sent by various citizen groups. I hope that you have read the letter.

Additionally I would like to call your attention to your purpose , as stated on the front page of the NRC website. "The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) was created as an independent agency by Congress in 1974 to ensure the safe use of radioactive materials for beneficial civilian purposes while protecting people and the environment."

Since the purpose of the NRC is to protect people, and to ensure beneficial use of radioactive materials, it is unfortunate that these comments are even relevant. Clearly, the NRC has fallen short of it's purpose in the past. It is now time to correct the wrongs, however inconvenient or expensive, and move forward in a way that completely complies with your agency's purpose.

The NRC cannot operate in an environmentally just way without acknowledging its past violations of Environmental Justice (EJ) all along the nuclear chain. Most nuclear reactors, uranium mining-milling-"enrichment" facilities, fuel factories, reprocessing, and both high and "low-level" waste sites and transport routes are targeted for or located in/upstream/upwind of Indigenous, Black, People of Color, poor, and/or rural communities.

A next step is to compensate, cleanup, and repair damage done by previous NRC and AEC licensee actions, including over 15,000 abandoned uranium mines and the 1979 Church Rock disaster directly impacting indigenous people. The White House EJ Advisory Committee's list of "PROJECTS THAT WILL NOT BENEFIT A COMMUNITY" includes "procurement of nuclear power."

To prevent repeating the past, NRC should set up structures to assist EJ communities including

(1) a permanent EJ Advisory Board to assess all NRC processes, with authority to prevent EJ violations and  
(2) an independent division of NRC, with a firewall from existing staff, to assist intervenors (similar to current staff support for applicants).

The costs could be part of license application/amendment fees. Fees should also cover costs of

(3) intervenor funding for legal and technical expertise. Canada has intervenor funding.

NRC's 10CFR2 rules for intervention are clearly skewed in favor of nuclear proposals—they must be amended to enable EJ communities to participate, get standing (presume intervenor status), and for their contentions to be accepted. Local Hispanic intervenors and their contentions were dismissed in the Holtec CIS licensing case.

Diversity in NRC-ASLB judges might help.

NRC could improve its EJ policy by going beyond the National Environmental Policy Act requirements. Under NEPA, EJ should be automatically considered in Generic EISs and Environmental Assessments.

EJ “consideration” should include the full revelation of cumulative and synergistic impacts from multiple sources of pollution and health stressors.

Make all information available in the primary languages of the communities and provide longer public comment periods to enable more meaningful participation.

Until the COVID-19 crisis with variants passes, extra measures are needed to enable already-over stressed and disproportionately impacted EJ communities to engage.

Finally but importantly, NRC must seek to determine EJ impacts of many decades of nuclear waste transport along rails, roads, waterways largely through EJ communities from reactors to waste sites. The containers hold more plutonium than the Nagasaki bomb and more cesium than Chernobyl releases and routinely emit radiation even without accidents. There will be accidents and front-line communities will bear the deadly burden without free, prior, informed consent or knowledge.