

Environmental Justice

Communities of color and low-income communities are on the frontlines of unprecedented environmental injustices, including the climate crisis and local disasters that range from high asthma rates to lead paint to toxic drinking water. These environmental threats put the health and safety of communities across Ohio at risk, with political leaders often failing to address them.

Decades of research tell us that children who grow up in low-income families are more likely to have health problems related to the environment they live in, such as asthma and complications from lead poisoning.

Families in Sebring are all too familiar with the failure of our government to address these inequities. Recent reports indicate that the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency knew that the water in Sebring was contaminated with lead as early as five months before the community was notified. In Cuyahoga County, neighborhoods with majority black populations have the highest rates of lead poisoning. Anyone who lives in a home built before 1978 (when lead paint was banned) is at risk for lead poisoning. Low-income families who rent these deteriorating homes often don't have any recourse. They are stuck in a double bind because they fear eviction if they complain and don't have the money to move.

How to Talk About Environmental Justice

Lead with Values

We all have a basic responsibility to leave our kids and grandkids a healthy future. We recycle, we check our car's emissions – shouldn't major industries also show the same level of responsibility that we do by cutting pollution and protecting communities from toxic elements?

Emphasize the Ends

By increasing the use and production of the safe sources of sustainable energy we have now, we can create healthy communities for generations to come and have a happy surprise when we open our energy bills.

Focus on Lived Experience

When the American Lung Association tells us that toxic pollution in the air we breathe is affecting the health of nearly half of all Americans, we need new solutions. Kids now carry inhalers as often as lunch boxes. Seniors are stuck inside when weather shifts dramatically to extreme heat or freezing cold. And, low- and middle- income families are more likely than others to face these health threats.

Name the Causes

Big, out-of-state oil companies are desperate to protect the rigged system that keeps Ohio dependent on dirty energy and creates environmental and health disasters in local communities. We can hold them accountable and take control of our future.

Link the Problem to the Solution

We can dramatically reduce the pollution that comes from burning dirty fuels by creating rules to curb pollution. By producing and using clean energy, we can correct years of racial and economic disparities created by environmental injustices. Clean energy can power our lives at home and work, create high wage work in Ohio and free us from the outdated fuels that pollute our air and water and change our climate.

Darrick Wade, 58, of Cleveland, is an activist fighting to save children from lead poisoning, after his son, Demetrius, died from what Darrick says were health effects from toxic exposure.

Demetrius (pictured) was poisoned by lead as a child living in public housing in Cleveland. He died in 2007 at age 24 after suffering from heart and kidney disease, which have been linked to lead exposure.

"At 15 his skin color started to change. At 16 he had problems with his kidneys. We know the lead caused many problems. We watched his mood change. He had problems learning. When he couldn't get an answer, he got upset. He had liver damage, his heart enlarged. He was in and out of hospitals."

Darrick says lead poisoning ruins the lives of countless children in low-income housing, causing learning and behavioral problems that lead many to criminal activity.

"We know it causes illnesses, aggression, unruliness, children fighting. This is across the board, children three and four years old," he said. "Generations of people are undiagnosed, and nothing's being done about it. I think about the children and how the politicians and people in power cover it up."

