

County of Contra Costa  
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** June 19, 2008  
**TO:** Hazardous Materials Commission  
**FROM:** Jason Crapo   
Senior Deputy County Administrator  
**SUBJECT:** Update on Environmental Justice

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## Introduction

On September 23, 2003, the Board of Supervisors adopted a countywide environmental justice (EJ) policy and directed that an EJ Committee comprising of department representatives be established. Additionally, the County Administrator's Office (CAO) designated a county EJ Coordinator to chair the EJ Committee and provide countywide coordination and oversight to ensure the integration of EJ principles into County programs. It was also at this time that the Board approved the implementation of a pilot project on illegal dumping. Illegal dumping is an EJ issue of concern in the County, particularly because it tends to occur disproportionately in the lower income, minority communities of the County.

Among the departments identified to spearhead the illegal dumping project were: Health Services (through its Hazardous Materials Program), Public Works, Community Development, Building Inspection, and County Administrator.

Beginning in 2004 and continuing until late 2005, the EJ Committee met regularly to formulate EJ policies and practices, coordinate work on EJ issues, and to report on the progress made related to the illegal dumping project. Although the Committee has not formally convened after 2005, departments have continued to coordinate with each other on EJ issues. In addition, departments have independently and collectively moved forward in implementing EJ-related initiatives. Community outreach, improved access to services, coordination among departments, and increased staff training are some of the efforts gained since the adoption of countywide EJ policy. Included in this memorandum are some departmental highlights.

The CAO remains committed in supporting County departments in their efforts to address various EJ issues. We welcome suggestions on how the County can do better in this area.

## **Department Highlights**

### **Department of Conservation and Development (DCD)/Building Inspection Division (BID)**

- BID switched to Hybrid and Natural Gas vehicles as a conscious effort to be an environmentally-friendly department.
- BID adheres to the principle of enforcement equity in implementing Building and Zoning Codes equally in all neighborhoods.
- BID established the Residential Rental Inspection Program to proactively identify blighted and deteriorated housing stock. This program promotes the safety and preservation of all single and multiple-family residential rental units and enhances the quality of life for all residents of the County.
- BID provides one Code Enforcement Inspector to the City of Richmond who is assigned to act as a Health, Zoning and Building Inspector. This is a pilot program funded by the Richmond Sanitation District, with emphasis on weed abatement and illegal dumping.
- BID provides one Code Enforcement Inspector for the Bay Point community to work on health and zoning concerns.
- The Neighborhood Preservation Program provides loans to low and moderate-income persons to improve their homes by correcting health and safety problems and improving livability.
- BID expanded access to information by hiring more bilingual staff to assist non-English speaking customers and printing program flyers and pamphlets in Spanish.

### **Department of Conservation and Development (DCD)/Community Development Division (CDD)**

- Participated in EJ pilot project on illegal dumping:
  - Instrumental in the development of the County's multi-departmental Illegal Dumping web page that helps the public navigate the system easier.
  - Develop and implement North Richmond Waste & Recovery Mitigation Fee Expenditure Plan involving strategies to help combat illegal dumping and blight in North Richmond.
  - Participated and supported the *Keep North Richmond Beautiful* program and related efforts to curb illegal dumping and graffiti.

- Ensure just and equal access to CDD information and procedures by jointly initiating with BID & Public Works the following initiatives as components of the on-going “Municipal Services” coordination effort:
  - Complement the services currently provided at the Application and Permit Center (APC) in Martinez with appointment-based services offered at regional locations throughout the County. This allowed residents in different areas of the County to receive plan check and planning assistance closer to their residence.
  - Provide the public with a lead contact for their geographic area to ensure better access to services.
  - Develop a joint community outreach system where representatives from Public Works, BID, and CDD are available to attend community meetings and other media forums to inform the public on County services.
  - Improved the CDD website and phone directory listing to ensure information is easily accessible and understandable
  - Hired translators for some community meetings and at least one public hearing due to special circumstances.
  - Publish Park Recycling Posters in English and Spanish to promote proper beverage container recycling.

### **Public Works (PW)**

- PW continues to work on improving its communication and community outreach
  - *Department Strategic Plan* – The department is in the process of developing a new strategic plan, which will have stronger communication, customer service and service delivery, and community outreach components.
  - *Community Liaison/Community Informer* –PW expanded outreach in the unincorporated communities by designating a liaison who has participated in over 40 community meetings in 2007, and by distributing the *Community Informer Newsletter* which highlights department projects, programs, and provides answers to frequently asked questions and contact information.
  - *Municipal Services Improvements* – A multi-department initiative to improve services within the Land Development program has been developed that resulted in establishment of regional offices for easy access. PW is also partnering with DCD to expand its newsletter to include information on CDD and BID programs.
  - *Improved Website* - PW will be launching a new website by the end of June that will provide easier access to information to better serve communities.
  - *Outreach to Elementary Schools and Colleges*- PW’s Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee has been going out to elementary schools and colleges in areas with diverse populations to talk about the role of public

works in the community, the importance of education, and the job opportunities available in the department. A video of Public Works, starring high school students, was developed for high school audience and is being circulated to all high schools in the county as an outreach/ career development tool.

- Education Programs and Job Training Outreach
  - *Facilitative Leadership Training* – All management staff at PW have been trained in Facilitative Leadership. This training has improved communication, interpersonal and leadership skills of department management, increasing effectiveness at communicating with communities.
  - *Watershed Program Outreach* – This program conducts several education and outreach initiatives, including the 2008 Watershed Calendar. This calendar is mailed to every residence in the unincorporated county and provides education tips to reduce pollution in all neighborhoods.
  - *Project Outreach* – Community Outreach for PW projects continues to be improved. For example, for the Pacifica Avenue improvement project in Bay Point, a presentation was made to the neighboring schools with participation by 120 fourth and fifth grade students.
- *Illegal Dumping Pilot Project* – PW continues to participate in a multi-department task force to reduce illegal dumping in the county.
- Pollution Prevention/Quality of Life
  - *Built Environment* – This is a multi-department effort to establish recommendations to improve quality of life and reduce pollution in urban areas.
  - *Pollution Reduction Programs* – The Watershed Program has several initiatives to reduce pollution in older urbanized areas through street sweeping, household hazardous materials pick-up programs, illicit discharge, enforcement and other programs targeted at specific pollutants of concern.
  - *Integrated Pest Management (IPM)* – PW participates on a multi-department task force to reduce pesticide use throughout the county.
  - *Street Standards* – PW takes the lead in a multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional effort to revise and update Street Standards to reduce pollution from impervious surfaces, increase infiltration of stormwater and improve quality of life through better access.
  - *Greenhouse Gas Emissions* – PW participates on a multi-department task force to identify actions for the County to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution throughout the County.
  - *Neighborhood Health* – PW participated in the North Richmond Truck Access Study looking at ways to reduce truck traffic through communities and recommend transportation improvements to achieve study goals. PW

September 19, 2008

Dear Supervisor :

I am writing you on behalf of the Contra Costa County Hazardous Materials Commission to urge you to re-energize the implementation of the County's Environmental Justice policy. The Commission was intimately involved with the conceptualization, development, and passage of the Environmental Justice policy the Board of Supervisors adopted in 2003. We were very pleased that initially after adoption County Departments, working in cooperation with the County Administrator's Office, successfully engaged in a number of activities directed by the Board of Supervisors to implement the policy. Unfortunately, since then several of these key activities have fallen by the wayside. The Hazardous Materials Commission believes that for the County Environmental Justice policy to be truly successful, these key activities need to be restored as they were envisioned when the policy was originally adopted in 2003.

The Environmental Justice policy adopted in 2003 by the Board of Supervisors directed the CAO's office to appoint a coordinator who would be responsible for County-wide oversight of Environmental Justice in the long term, and to chair periodic meetings with departmental Environmental Justice representatives to ensure integration of the Environmental Justice policy into the workings of the County Departments on an on-going basis. County Departments were also directed to report annually to the Board of Supervisors through the Environmental Justice coordinator on their performance in the area of Environmental Justice.

Initially, an Environmental Justice Coordinator was appointed from the CAO's office who brought representatives from County departments together periodically in open public meetings. The group successfully developed a multi-departmental approach to dealing with the issue of illegal dumping. In 2006 the person appointed as Coordinator retired and the position was not reassigned to another staff person. As a result, representatives from the departments haven't met since 2005. Annual reports to the Board of Supervisors on the implementation of the County's Environmental Justice policy have never been provided.

In June of this year the Commission received a presentation on the status of the County's Environmental Justice policy from Jason Crapo, Deputy County Administrator. He provided the Commission with a very detailed presentation on County Department activities related to the implementation of the County's Environmental Justice policy (memo attached). He felt that the topic of Environmental Justice is at the forefront of the thoughts of many County staff, due in large part to the awareness that was brought to them by the Hazardous Materials Commission. He said all staff talked to him about the efforts of their departments to increase public participation in their programs, and to address the impacts to low-income and minority communities. He felt there has been a big change in the level of awareness of Environmental Justice concerns in the last 10 years. He saw the work continuing in the departments and that it is very much an on-going effort. He saw it as a sign of success that these concepts are now being incorporated into the way departments do business without the need for a coordinating group.

The Commission appreciates all the hard work done by County staff and departments over the last three years to address Environmental Justice issues. However, these efforts alone, conducted in isolation without the opportunity for public participation, are not enough to ensure that the County's Environmental Justice policy is being fully carried out. For instance, Commissioners could not determine which departmental priorities the

activities described in the memo provided to them by Jason Crapo were addressing, or even identify what were the departmental Environmental Justice priorities.

The Commission feels it is important that the Environmental Justice representatives meet periodically in open public meetings because there needs to be an easy way for the public to participate in the process. These meetings afford the public the opportunity to learn what departmental priorities are, understand how the departments are addressing these priorities, see how departments are coordinating with each other on priorities they have in common, and provide input into selecting and addressing those priorities. Annual reports to the Board of Supervisors will provide necessary transparency and accountability to show how the actions of the Departments are meeting their Environmental Justice priorities. Coordination by the CAO's office is necessary because of the multi-departmental nature of this effort.

Therefore, on July 24, 2008 the Hazardous Materials Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the Board of Supervisors take the following actions:

- 1) Direct the CAO to re-appoint an Environmental Justice coordinator in the CAO's office to coordinate implementation of the County's Environmental Justice policy.
- 2) Direct the Environmental Justice coordinator to reconvene periodic meetings of Environmental Justice representatives from County Departments to address Environmental Justice issues.
- 3) Direct the Environmental Justice coordinator and County Departments to prepare annual reports to the Board of Supervisors that describe Departmental Environmental Justice priorities and the activities they are undertaking to address these priorities.
- 4) Direct the Environmental Justice coordinator and the County Departments to report back to the Board of Supervisors in three months with a progress report.

Thank you for considering our recommendations to fully implement the County's Environmental Justice policy. The Commission looks forward to working with you and County staff on its implementation.

Sincerely,

Sabiha Gokcen, PhD  
Hazardous Materials Commission Chairperson

cc. David Twa, County Administrator  
Jason Crapo, Deputy County Administrator