

Environmental Racism Toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide the reader with a better understanding of environmental racism, its history, how it plays out in so called Canada, and what you can do to take action. We have provided links and resources throughout this toolkit that can be of use to help the reader better identify environmental racism today and current roots of advocacy.

What is Environmental Racism?

Environmental racism describes the ways decision-makers perpetuate inequity and uphold systemic racism when deciding about laws, policies, funding, city plans, and developments. These decisions disproportionately impact the lives and health of Indigenous and racialized people in their community and the lands they occupy¹.

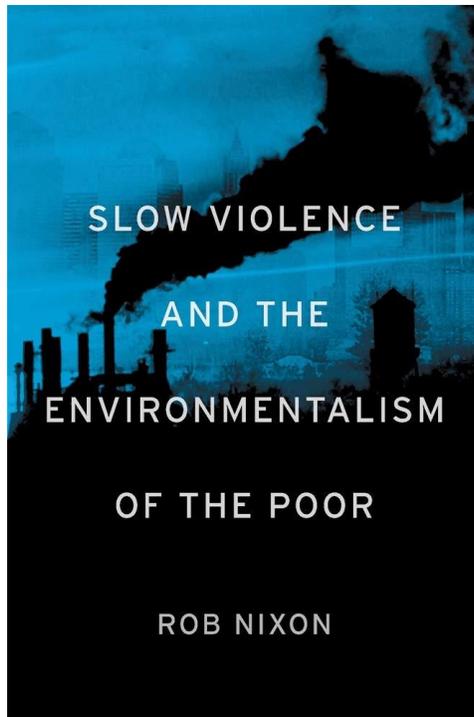
Video: [Environmental justice, explained](#)

Environmental racism goes unnoticed because effected communities often lack the political and organizational power to call out industrial polluters and decision makers. Negative environmental impacts experienced by racialized communities are often not believed and inequities are rarely monitored, requiring communities to provide evidence that there is a problem in the first place or worse yet, having to wait until the impacts start affecting more communities. This contributes to slow and inadequate access to relief.

Environmental racism can be defined as "the deliberate or intentional siting of hazardous waste sites, landfills, incinerators, and polluting industries in communities inhabited by minorities and/or the poor"². These designated sites called "Sacrifice zones" are considered spaces of Land that are "locally unwanted" and deemed appropriate for unwanted toxins.

¹MacDonald, E. (2020, September 20). *Environmental racism in canada: What is it? what are the impacts, and what can we do about it?*. Ecojustice. <https://ecojustice.ca/environmental-racism-in-canada/>

² *It matters where you live: Examples of environmental injustice in Canada.* (n.d.). Environmental Justice. <https://enviroinjustice.weebly.com/index.html>



The violence wrought by climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, oil spills, and the environmental aftermath of war takes place gradually and often invisibly. Using the innovative concept of “slow violence” to describe these threats, Rob Nixon focuses on the inattention we have paid to the attritional lethality of many environmental crises, in contrast with the sensational, spectacle-driven messaging that impels public activism today. Slow violence, because it is so readily ignored by a hard-charging capitalism, exacerbates the vulnerability of ecosystems and of people who are poor, disempowered, and often involuntarily displaced, while fueling social conflicts that arise from desperation as life-sustaining conditions erode.

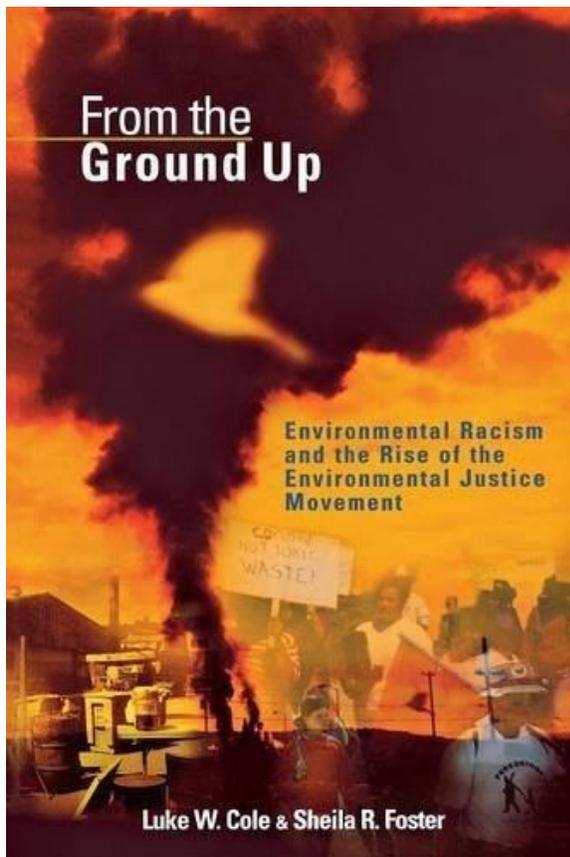
A History Lesson on Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement:

The term environmental racism, originally coined by Dr. Benjamin Chavis, first emerged in the 1980s in North Carolina on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s and Environmental Movement of the 70s³. It originally came in response to the placement of a toxic chemical landfill in Warren County North Carolina, a predominantly Black community. This event led to a month-long protest of community members which gained widespread notoriety sparking similar protests across the US and eventually growing into the movement we know today.

Video: [A Brief History of Environmental Justice](#)

You can read more about the history of the Environmental Justice movement in Luke W. Cole & Sheila R. Foster's book [From The Ground Up by Luke W. Cole & Sheila R. Foster](#)

³ African American Voices in Congress. (n.d.). *Environmental justice: History*. <http://www.avoiceline.org/environmental/history.html#:~:text=The%20term%20%E2%80%9Cenvironmental%20racism%E2%80%9D%20grew,in%20Warren%20County%2C%20North%20Carolina.>



When Bill Clinton signed an Executive Order on Environmental Justice in 1994, the phenomenon of environmental racism—the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards, particularly toxic waste dumps and polluting factories, on people of color and low-income communities—gained unprecedented recognition. Behind that momentous signature, however, lies a remarkable tale of grassroots activism and political mobilization. Today, thousands of activists in hundreds of locales are fighting for their children, their communities, their quality of life, and their health.

From the Ground Up critically examines one of the fastest growing social movements in the United States—the movement for environmental justice. Tracing the movement's roots, Luke Cole and Sheila Foster combine long-time activism with powerful storytelling to provide gripping case studies of communities across the US—towns like Kettleman City, California; Chester, Pennsylvania; and Dilkon, Arizona—and their struggles against corporate polluters. The authors use social, economic and legal analysis to reveal the historical and contemporary causes for environmental racism. Environmental justice struggles, they demonstrate, transform individuals, communities, institutions and the nation as a whole.

Environmental racism in so called Canada:

Racism has been a part of Canada's history since the early interactions of Europeans and Indigenous peoples. Land was seized from these communities and there was a clear lack of respect and lack of recognition of their rights to the land.

As we've discussed in the previous section, environmental racism is the development and implementation of environmental policy on issues such as toxic waste disposal sites, pollution, and urban decay in areas with a significant ethnic or racial population. Believe it or not, Canada is not immune to these policies. Black and Indigenous communities in Canada are exposed to environmental racism that includes exposure of toxic waste facilities, garbage dumps, and other sources of environmental pollution that negatively impacts quality of life and health⁴

⁴ Canadian Labour Congress. (2019, February 6). *Ending discrimination: Why Canada's unions are highlighting environmental racism during Black History Month*. <https://canadianlabour.ca/why-canadas-unions-are-highlighting-environmental-racism-during-black-history-month/>

Video: [Environmental Racism in Canada, Part 1](#)

Video: [Environmental Racism in Canada, Part 3](#)

In the next few sections, we'll dive a little deeper into specific case studies of environmental racism playing out across Turtle Island.

Shoal Lake 40

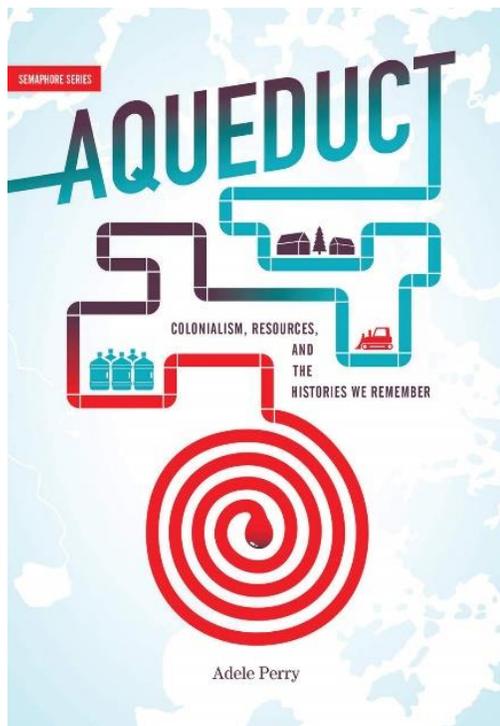
Shoal Lake 40 First Nation is a clear example of how environmental racism has played out in the making of Winnipeg. During the rapid expansion of the City of Winnipeg in 1890, it became clear that there was an urgent need to obtain clean drinking water to support the influx of settlers and industrial development in the city⁵. In order to obtain permission to divert water from Shoal Lake into Winnipeg, the City required approval of the International Joint Commission (IJC), the Government of Canada, and the Province of Ontario. Nowhere did the city obtain permission or consideration of the residents of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation who would be severely impacted for the next hundred years. What ensued during this period was the displacement of residents of Shoal Lake 40 onto the lake's peninsula that would later be severed with the construction of the aqueduct channel, landlocking the residents onto an artificial island⁶. For the next century, Shoal Lake 40 residents were isolated without an access road or clean drinking water while Winnipeg reaped the benefits of the water they were taking.

Video: [Vice News Shoal Lake 40](#)

You can learn more about the history of the aqueduct and Shoal Lake 40 in Adele Perry's book *Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources, and the Resources we Remember*.

⁵ Ennis, D. A. (2013). *Manitoba History: The pressure to act: The shoal lake aqueduct and the greater winnipeg water district*. Manitoba Historical Society. http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/72/aqueduct.shtml

⁶ Shoal Lake #40. (n.d.). *About Shoal Lake 40: History*. <https://www.sl40.ca/about.htm>



1919 is often recalled as the year of the Winnipeg General Strike, but it was also the year that water from Shoal Lake first flowed in Winnipeg taps. For the Anishinaabe community of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, construction of the Winnipeg Aqueduct led to a chain of difficult circumstances that culminated in their isolation on an artificial island where, for almost two decades, they have lacked access to clean drinking water.

In *Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources, and the Histories We Remember*, Adele Perry analyses the development of Winnipeg's municipal water supply as an example of the history of settler colonialism. Drawing from a rich archive of historical sources, this timely book exposes the cultural, social, political, and legal mechanisms that allowed the rapidly growing city of Winnipeg to obtain its water supply by dispossessing an Indigenous people of their land, and ultimately depriving them of the very commodity--clean drinking water--that the city secured for itself.

Africville, Nova Scotia

Following the American Revolution, there was a significant migration of Black settlers entering Canada with many settling in Nova Scotia where they were promised freedom and land. Upon arrival, they were met with racism and prejudice from white settlers and were subsequently pushed to the outskirts of Halifax⁷. Over time, the community grew into a tightknit, cultural hub that would formally be known as "Africville". Although the residents found refuge from the anti-Black racism in the city's center, they were not free from the daily injustices they faced from systemic anti-Black racism that ran the city's operations. Residents of Africville paid taxes to the City of Halifax and yet they were cut off from any Municipal services such as sewage systems, clean drinking water, paved roads, garbage collection, public transportation and recreational spaces⁸. Despite these barriers to an equitable livelihood, residents nurtured and supported each other and remained in Africville until 1965 when the City of Halifax began its "Urban Renewal Project" and

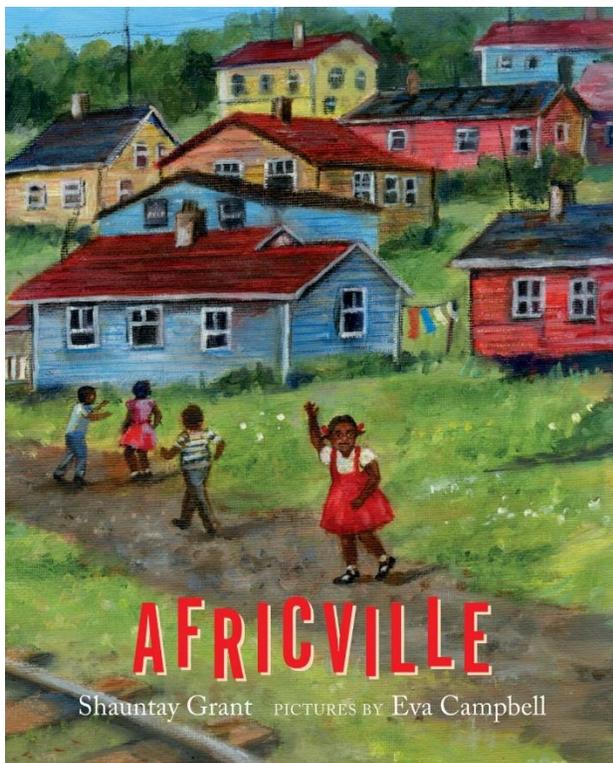
⁷ McRae, M. (n.d.). *The story of africville*. Canadian Human Rights Museum. <https://humanrights.ca/story/the-story-of-africville>

⁸ Tattrie, J. (2014, January 27). *Africville*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/africville>

Africville was ultimately destroyed⁹. Leading up to this project, the city envisioned Africville as a site for Industrial development and in 1947 rezoned it as such¹⁰. This led to the forced displacement and relocation of residents, which was strongly opposed. The “superior housing” that they were promised in exchange for the demolition of their homes did not follow through and many residents were unable to afford short term rentals and were forced to leave the city all together.

Video: [Africville: The Black community bulldozed by the city of Halifax](#)

You can read more about the story of Africville in Shauntay Grant’s book *Africville*



When a young girl visits the site of Africville, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the stories she’s heard from her family come to mind. She imagines what the community was once like —the brightly painted houses nestled into the hillside, the field where boys played football, the pond where all the kids went rafting, the bountiful fishing, the huge bonfires. Coming out of her reverie, she visits the present-day park and the sundial where her great- grandmother’s name is carved in stone, and celebrates a summer day at the annual Africville Reunion/Festival.

Africville was a vibrant Black community for more than 150 years. But even though its residents paid municipal taxes, they lived without running water, sewers, paved roads and police, fire-truck and ambulance services. Over time, the city located a slaughterhouse, a hospital for infectious disease, and even the city garbage dump nearby. In the 1960s, city officials decided to demolish the community, moving people out in city dump trucks and relocating them in public housing.

Today, Africville has been replaced by a park, where former residents and their families gather each summer to remember their community.

⁹ Waldron, I. (2020, December 14). *Environmental racism in canada*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/environmental-racism-in-canada>

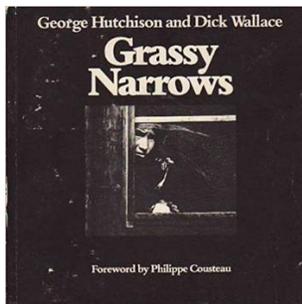
¹⁰ Tattrie, J. (2014, January 27). *Africville*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/africville>

Grassy Narrows

With permission from the government of Ontario, the Dryden Chemicals Ltd dumped mercury into the English-Wabigoon River from 1962 to 1970. People from Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek (Grassy Narrows First Nation) who lived just upstream began to suffer the effects of severe mercury poisoning in fish¹¹, including damaged nervous systems, death, and multigenerational birth defects. The Province of Ontario issued the termination of the commercial fishery due to the imposed health risk of the contaminated fish. This led to mass unemployment of community members of Grassy Narrows who not only relied on the fish as their primary food source but also their main source of income. Dryden Chemicals Ltd officially shut down in 1976 but the harmful health effects of their actions have persisted to this day. Community members were forced to advocate for decades before the federal and provincial governments would begin to provide any form of aid or clean-up efforts. It was only in 2017 that the federal government began their clean-up of the English-Wabigoon River¹², and now 2023 with the expected opening of a care facility dedicated to victims of mercury poisoning¹³, 50+ years after community members were poisoned.

Video: [The Story of Grassy Narrows](#)

You can read more about Grassy Narrows and its harmful lingering impacts in George Hutchison & Dick Wallace's book *Grassy Narrows*.



George Hutchison and Dick Wallace covered the Grassy Narrows (Ontario) story for the London Free Press, documenting with sensitivity the tragedy of mercury poisoning of the English-Wabigoon river system, in the traditional territory of Ojibway communities in Northern Ontario. "Grassy Narrows is a book that causes a quiet explosion of outrage in the heart."

Chemical Valley

¹¹ Waldron, I. (2020, December 14). *Environmental racism in Canada*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/environmental-racism-in-canada>

¹² Prokopchuk, M. (2017, November 17). *Grassy narrows leadership pleased with cleanup funding but says help needed for survivors*. CBC: Thunder Bay. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/grassy-narrows-mercury-home-calls-1.4404889>

¹³ CBC News. (2021, July 26). *Grassy narrows to get \$68.9M from Ottawa for centre to care for people with mercury poisoning*. CBC: Thunder Bay. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/grassy-narrows-mercury-care-facility-ottawa-funding-1.6117975>

"Chemical Valley" is a 25km² area of land between Ontario and Michigan that holds 40 percent of Canada's polluting chemical companies¹⁴. Chemical valley is located next to Aamjiwaang First Nation and the city of Sarnia, and was deemed the worst air in all of Canada by the World Health Organization in 2011¹⁵. The varied range of pollutants entering and mixing in the air of Chemical Valley creates a lethal concoction and has been linked to higher rates of cancers, respiratory illnesses, and reproductive health issues of the residents and victims of Chemical Valley¹⁶. You can read more about the perceptions and coping strategies of the Aamjiwaang First Nation in Smith and Lockridge's study "Surrounded by Chemical Valley and "Living in a Bubble": the case of the Aamjiwaang First Nation, Ontario" (2010), which provides in-depth interviews from community members¹⁷.

Video: [Canada's Toxic Chemical Valley \(Full Length\)](#)

Windsor

Indigenous two-spirit describes living in Canada's 'chemical valley' in Greenpeace report on recycling



Beze Gray talks about the disconnect they experienced growing up beside petrochemical plants

CBC News · Posted: Jan 20, 2021 6:47 PM ET | Last Updated: January 21, 2021

You can access this article to read more [Here](#).

¹⁴ MacDonald, E., Rang, S. (2007). Exposing Canada's chemical valley: An investigation of cumulative air pollution emissions in the Sarnia, Ontario area. *Ecojustice*. 5-25. <https://ecojustice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2007-Exposing-Canadas-Chemical-Valley.pdf>

¹⁵ Kramer, D. et al. (2015). From awareness to action: The community of Sarnia mobilizes to protect its workers from occupational disease. *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*. 25(3), 377-410. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1048291115604427>

¹⁶ Waldron, I. (2020, December 14). *Environmental racism in Canada*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/environmental-racism-in-canada>

¹⁷ Luginaah, I., Smith, K., & Lockridge, A. (2010). "Surrounded by Chemical Valley and "Living in a Bubble": the case of the Aamjiwaang First Nation, Ontario". In *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 53(3), 353-370. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09640561003613104>

Wet'suwet'en First Nation

In British Columbia, TC Energy has been pushing to construct the infamous Coastal Gaslink Pipeline that would cross under Wedzin Kwa (Moris River) despite opposition from Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs¹⁸. Wedzin Kwa is a sacred site and drilling under this river is not permitted in the territory. Undeterred by the hereditary chiefs' sovereignty over the unceded lands, TC Energy has continued its assault on the lands and its defenders. This has led to numerous demonstrations, blockades and protests across Turtle Island in support of the land defenders and hereditary chiefs of Wet'suwet'en¹⁹.

This protest is ongoing. You can stay up to date with the land defenders by following their social media pages listed below.

Facebook: [Gidimt'en Checkpoint](#)

Instagram: [@yintah access](#)

Twitter: [@gidimten](#)

Video: [INVASION](#)

Hollow Water First Nation

On May 16th 2019, the Provincial government of Manitoba approved the environmental license for Canadian Premium Sand's (CPS) proposed silica sand extraction project "Wanipigow Sand"²⁰. The project site is located on the territory of Hollow Water First Nation, 160 kilometers northeast of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The project was widely opposed by residents of Hollow Water who set up Camp Morning Star to halt construction²¹. The primary concerns over this project are the adverse impacts to air quality, ground water, noise pollution and its impacts on wildlife, hunting rights, and overall degradation to the land²².

¹⁸ Simmons, M. (2021, October 14). *Why Tensions are escalating on wet'suwet'en territory over the coastal gaslink pipeline*. The Narwhal. <https://thenarwhal.ca/wetsuweten-coastal-gaslink-explainer/>

¹⁹ Unist'ot'en Camp (2020). *Wet'suwet'en supporter toolkit 2020*. Unist'ot'en: Heal the People, Heal the Land. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/grassy-narrows-mercury-care-facility-ottawa-funding-1.6117975>

²⁰ Mining Technology. (2019, December 19). *Wanipigow sand project, manitoba*. <https://www.mining-technology.com/projects/wanipigow-sand-project-manitoba/>

²¹ Mangeli, B. (2019, June 13). *Camp morning star*. Waniskatan. <https://hydroimpacted.ca/camp-morning-star/>

²² Wilt, J. (2019, September 16). *'This is sacred': The fight against a massive frac sand mine in manitoba*. The Narwhal. <https://thenarwhal.ca/this-is-sacred-the-fight-against-a-massive-frac-sand-mine-in-manitoba/>

You can keep up to date with the land defenders on the ground at Camp Morning Star through their social media pages:

Facebook: [Camp Morning Star](#)

Instagram: [@campmorningstar](#)

Video: [Hollow Water First Nation Frack Sand Mine](#)

Manitoba Hydro in Northern Manitoba

Manitoba Hydro is the leading provider of electricity in the province with six mega dams constructed over the Nelson River²³. Although hydroelectricity has been marketed as a green energy, there are detrimental impacts to the environment, local economies, human health, and social well-being of the Indigenous peoples obstructing the path to resource extraction. Mega dams operate through the development of artificial reservoirs which have flooded thousands of square kilometers of land in northern Manitoba²⁴. The observed effects from this flooding and development include spikes in mercury levels in the surrounding bodies of water, increased methane emissions from decomposing vegetation submerged during flooding, increased erosion of shorelines due to artificial fluctuations of water levels, terrestrial and aquatic habitat loss, and the gradual change of community structure due to these changes of the land.

Take a deeper look into the impacts of Manitoba Hydro in the North through the work available at [Wa Ni Ska Tan](#)

Video: [Manitoba Hydro is Water Drunk](#)

²³ Elkaim, A. V. (2020, November, 7). *State of erosion: The legacy of manitoba hydro*. The Narwhal. <https://thenarwhal.ca/state-of-erosion-the-legacy-of-manitoba-hydro/>

²⁴ Wa Ni Ska Tan. (n.d.). *Impacts: Impacts of hydropower in manitoba*. <https://hydroimpacted.ca/impacts/>

How to Take Action:

Environmental racism, its past and ongoing impacts will not be resolved overnight. This will take ongoing work to dismantle and repair past wrongdoings.

You can take action by:

- Further educate yourself on the topic and share this toolkit widely.
- Stay up to date on our website: <https://www.lwic.org/calls-to-action>, where we will provide updates and actionable steps to take regarding addressing environmental racism at the micro and macro levels.
- You can also read more about similar campaigns to address Environmental Racism here: <https://www.enrichproject.org/resources/>

Support the laws to address environmental racism in Canada.

Three private member's bills have been introduced since 2015, all with the intention of creating a federal strategy to address environmental racism. While the first two expired due to slow progress in house of commons, the third bill is now in the process. Along with partners in the Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice, we are urging the federal government to expedite the passage of Bill C-226²⁵, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy to assess, prevent and address environmental racism and to advance environmental justice,

The strategy must include measures to:

- Examine the link between race, socio-economic status, and environmental risk.
- Collect information and statistics relating to the location of environmental hazards.
- Collect information and statistics relating to negative health outcomes in communities that have been affected by environmental racism.
- Assess the administration and enforcement of environmental laws in each province and
- Address environmental racism including in relation to:
 - possible amendments to federal laws, policies, and programs.
 - the involvement of community groups in environmental policymaking.
 - compensation for individuals or communities.
 - ongoing funding for affected communities and
 - access of affected communities to clean air and water.

There is one simple way that you can encourage cross-party support for Bill C-226 and encourage all political parties to consent to the fast tracking of this bill through Parliament: Send an email or letter (template below) to MPs across the country to indicate why you support Bill C-226 and why Canada needs environmental racism legislation. It is especially important to reach out to Conservative MPs across the country since the Conservative Party was

²⁵ Bill C-226 <https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en/bill/44-1/c-226>

the only party that declined to support Bill C-230 at second reading and at amendments in 2021. Finally, share your thoughts with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Steven Guilbeault about why Canada needs environmental justice legislation now.

Letter Template:

Dear friends, colleagues, family members, and all those who stand for Environmental Justice in Canada,

As you may be aware, on February 2, 2022, Green Party MP Elizabeth May introduced **An Act Respecting the Development of a National Strategy to Assess, Prevent and Address Environmental Racism and To Advance Environmental Justice (Bill C-226)** in the House of Commons:

<https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-226/first-reading>. It was first introduced by former MP Lenore Zann as Bill C-230 on February 26, 2020. Bill C-230 was eventually approved by the Liberals, NDP, and Bloc Quebecois at second reading and at amendments in 2021:

<https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-230/second-reading>. Only the Conservatives chose not to support it. When the snap election was called in 2021, Bill C-230 died on the order paper. Fortunately, Elizabeth May resurrected the bill as Bill C-226, which is now before the House.

Bill C-226, if it becomes legislation, will be an effective tool for addressing environmental racism in Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities across Canada. Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate location and greater exposure of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities to polluting industries and other environmental hazards. These toxic burdens have been linked to high rates of cancer, reproductive diseases, respiratory illnesses, and other health problems in these communities. From the decision approximately 60 years ago to offload pulp mill effluent into Pictou Landing First Nation's once pristine Boat Harbour, and toxic landfills placed in the African Nova Scotian communities of Shelburne and Lincolnville, to mercury contamination in Grassy Narrows First Nation, petrochemical facilities in Chemical Valley in Ontario and in British Columbia, the legacy of environmental racism can no longer be ignored.

Now that Bill C-226 has been introduced and is before the House, and given that Bill C-226 is the exact same bill as Bill C-230 after the amendments at committee, we are urging MPs from all political parties to fast track it and give it unanimous consent in the House.