

## I. Issue Statement

Environmental justice issues transcend departmental boundaries. A mechanism is needed to identify the environmental justice related impacts of projects from the perspective of various state agencies and departments and to assure that these impacts are addressed in a coordinated manner.

## II. Context and Assumptions

In our discussion it has become clear that the issue of interdepartmental integration was related to several other subgroup topics, including public participation, petition process, and role of local government.

It is assumed that some sort of formal mechanism for assuring interdepartmental integration of environmental justice issues is needed. The mechanisms examined in other states are typically associated with an advisory council that includes representation from the general public and the private sector.

## III. Relevant Models and Experience

There have been several examples of interdepartmental working groups. Success has been mixed. An interdepartmental working group is an integral part of California's environmental justice program and is utilized as a meeting space rather than an intensive work space. The California working group meets rarely, but the state's emphasis on individual leadership, meaningful public participation, and sponsorship of pilot projects has been modestly successful. New Jersey also had an interdepartmental working group, but it was recently abolished due to noncooperation. While in existence, the working group differed from the California model in that it was used as an intensive work space. The working group handled the petition review process, a well developed and successful model. A petition could be accepted, deferred, or rejected. If accepted, a very detailed action plan would be prepared for that community addressing exactly how the situation would be remedied, including specific timetables and deliverables. One other thing that can be learned from New Jersey's experience is that clear direction and leadership from the Governor's Office is imperative for such a task force to succeed. There have been more recent initiatives in New York and Massachusetts.

Michigan also has past experience in this area. The Michigan Environmental Review Board was created by executive order in 1974. MERB consisted of 17 members appointed by the Governor, 10 from the general public and 7 from state agencies. The board had significant authority, including advising the Governor and state agencies on environmental issues and reviewing environmental impact statements. An associated advisory body called

Intercom consisting of state agency representatives was also part of the executive order. The board was fairly successful due to strong Executive Office support and a highly motivated Chair. The board was abolished in the 1990's.

From the experience in other states and in Michigan, several things can be learned. First, strong leadership from the Executive Branch is required to assure that work group members treat environmental justice as a high priority. Second, senior staff should be actively engaged in the group's work. Finally, highly committed individual leadership is essential.

#### IV. Recommendation

It is recommended that an interdepartmental work group (IWG) be created consisting of senior staff [e.g. deputy directors] from all departments and the Governor's Office. The task force [but not the members] would be placed for organizational purposes in the Department of Management and Budget. The Departments of Environmental Quality and Civil Rights would be co-chairs. The functions of the IWG would include petition review and approval, denial, or recommendation for adjustment, data review, policy recommendations, pilot projects and grants or assistance in obtaining grants. Each department would be directed by the Governor to appoint an EJ Specialist or Coordinator.

An executive committee would be created to oversee the critical administrative needs of the interdepartmental task force, which could include calling meetings, forming technical advisory committees for specific tasks (evaluation of petition merit, advise on grants/projects, etc.), coordination of activities of departmental members, and maintaining accountability among task force members. The executive committee should be composed of no more than five members including the two co-chairs, Governor's Office, Community Health, and Energy, Labor & Economic Growth.

IWG review would be initiated in one of two primary ways. It could be triggered under the mechanism currently being discussed by the Disparate Impacts Subgroup. In this instance, the process would begin with review by the department's EJ Specialist and/or a technical advisory committee. Alternatively, the process could be initiated by a petition. This would be coordinated by the Governor's Office, which would refer to the IWG executive committee.

Finally, because of the connections and crossovers to other subgroup reports, we recommend that a flow chart showing critical paths of action and triggers be developed for the final report.

V. Alternatives

None.

VI. Comment Information

Comments should be provided to Tom Martin at [martint2@michigan.gov](mailto:martint2@michigan.gov).