P O L I C Y

Section: **Administration**

Subject: **Environmental Equity Initiative**

Approved By: **DENR Secretary**

Eff. Date: Oct 19, 2000
Revised:

Environmental Equity Policy

The Environmental Equity Initiative supports the NC DENR's mission of protecting our state's precious human and natural resources. We do this by ensuring clean air, clean water, and proper and safe disposal of pollutants in a manner consistent with sustainable development. Our key focus is to address issues as they arise, establish lines of communication with industries and affected communities, and bridge the gap of misunderstanding that often becomes a significant barrier in problem resolution. By fostering meaningful participation and greater understanding, we reduce risk, share responsibility and enjoy mutual benefits. By building consensus with our two primary customers (community and industry) and assuring that we protect our silent customer (nature), we allow all parties to become true stakeholders in the environmental regulatory process.

Low income and minority communities often believe that they are burdened with a disproportionate share of our state's environmental risks. This belief in some instances, may be well founded. However, these beliefs can also create a hostile environment in which good-faith efforts to resolve disputes, address concerns, and seek consensus solutions are nearly certain to fail. The NC DENR's Environmental Equity Initiative attempts to create opportunities for successful and productive communication between the agency, local community, and neighboring industries. Providing all citizens the opportunity for meaningful input into decision-making processes is critical to effective government.

DENR Goals for Environmental Equity:

- To ensure that agency programs substantially affecting human health or the environment operate without discrimination,

- To provide information for citizens and neighborhood groups to allow meaningful participation in regulatory processes,

- To respond in a meaningful manner to allegations of environmental injustice,

- To provide a link for communication and information between the community, industries and the government,

- To increase awareness of environmental conditions in minority and low-income communities.

To Meet The Goals, DENR Will:

- Inform potentially affected and protected communities about the Environmental Equity Initiative which seeks first to fully understand environmental issues as raised by the community, staff, industry, or other interested parties, and then attempts to address them in an environmentally sensitive manner that is consistent with sustainable economic development.

- Address environmental equity issues in permitting decisions for projects potentially having a disparate impact on communities protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,

- Promote greater use and analysis of demographic information to identify communities that may be disproportionately impacted by sources of pollution,

- Use demographic information to determine whether there is: 1) a need for greater outreach to community in order to encourage more meaningful participation, or 2) special health risks based on the nature of the population,

- Develop guidelines for assessing the cumulative effects of permitted facilities.

- Provide opportunities for interested parties to raise concerns on Environmental Equity in DENR's decisions,

- Develop a process for intervention or mediation specific for each instance with a focus on mutually acceptable solutions,

- Resolve environmental equity complaints, consistent with the protection afforded by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,

- Develop a full record of environmental equity issues.