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[Climate Justice Working Group Update](#)

By Jeff Jones

The main work of the March 12th meeting of the Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG) was to hear a presentation by California environmental justice leaders on the efforts in that state to develop a working definition of disadvantaged and climate impacted frontline communities. To fulfill its mandated task to achieve a working definition to guide mandated resources under the Climate Leadership and Community Preservation Act (CLCPA), the working group has focused on a similar definition and process in California to create the Cal Enviro Screen. Three speakers from California representing different climate and EJ organizations discussed and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of that state's process to address historically disadvantaged communities.

The three speakers were:

Yana Garcia, Deputy Secretary for Environmental Justice, Tribal Affairs and Border Relations at the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA):

Martha Dina Arguello, Executive Director, Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles;

Diane Takvorian, Executive Director, Environmental Health Coalition.

Two questions from NY working group member Eddie Bautista kicked off the discussion.

1. How did the government regulators and community members work together to arrive at the California enviro screen? What lessons were learned?
2. How did CA deal with inclusion of indigenous communities? Bautista pointed out that there has been no indigenous involvement in the CLCPA process in New York.

Takvorian - Describing the California process, she noted that in the late 1990's, CA adopted the equivalent federal definition. The committee met for several years during which opposition to the definition from EJ communities began to be identified. Issues concerning toxics, pollution, and land use, among others, emerged. That process led to

the creation, ultimately in 2011, of a cumulative impact screen. Over 100 different criteria have been identified and some are still being debated today. Race is not one of the factors. While there still isn't complete satisfaction as to how communities are represented in the screen, areas with the worst pollution have been identified and combined with other social determinants of health. A green zone map has been developed to identify where investments should be made. That, at least, has set a framework for the conditions that need to be evaluated. These include housing, lead poisoning in homes, and pollution impacts on the CA/Mexico border.

Arguello – Need to understand the “lived experience” in impacted communities. Public health is critical and must be brought into data and decision-making. The Cap & Trade approach wasn't supported by EJ community leaders because it did not solve the immediate health problems. Now the Cal Enviro Screen has also been used to map and verify COVID realities. The same burdened communities are being decimated by COVID.

Garcia - Federal and non-federal tribes are not recognized in the Cal Enviro Screen. There is a lack of consistency in tribal sources of data. Looking for set-aside pots of money for tribes to use, but that doesn't address the lack of data. Set-asides for impacted tribes are developed issue by issue, state agency by agency. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) is still developing their set-asides. Loan opportunities for tribes are also under discussion.

Other issues discussed by the panel included:

- Regarding tribes, no systematic way to capture data on members of out-of-state tribes who have moved to California.
- Trying to avoid green gentrification.
- Working to address large-truck pollution.
- A staff of 200 people are now working to track how investments in frontline communities are invested.
- Serious problem from community point of view: Large corporations like FedEx and Coca Cola are receiving cap-and-trade investment funds, while community involvement in decision-making is inadequate.
- Even after all the investments, California air emissions are not going down.

Garcia – Money should stop going to projects that harm our communities. More democracy is always better. Communities want things that are transformative. As a

result of an initiative by former Gov. Jerry Brown, cap-and-trade funds were supposed to be administered by air pollution districts. But these are not trusted in the community. Air districts are dominating decision-making. Communities are not having the say that they need. The emission reductions have to be real, and they have to be measurable.

The Working Group session ended with a presentation of data visualization on the potential of Tableau to track future goals.