



OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND EXTERNAL CIVIL RIGHTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

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U.S. EPA Marks 60th Anniversary of The Civil Rights Act by Celebrating Strengthened Compliance and Enforcement to Address and Prevent Discrimination

Today, on the 60th Anniversary of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) celebrates our nation's commitment to ending discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin. The EPA's mission recognizes that all people – no matter the color of their skin or the language they speak – deserve to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and have a healthy environment for their communities to thrive.

Through its Office of External Civil Rights Compliance, within the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights, the EPA enforces [Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) and helps recipients of EPA financial assistance implement robust civil rights programs to prevent discrimination. In this Administration, EPA has made significant progress to fulfill the promise of the Civil Rights Act in the environmental sector.

“EPA's dedication to civil rights is rooted in President Biden's commitment to justice for communities across the country that for too long haven't received the full benefits from EPA's progress to protect public health,” said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan. “We actively support states, cities, and communities across the country to prevent discrimination – and we are using the full power and full suite of Agency tools to uphold the promise of the Civil Rights Act.”

Notable steps to strengthen civil rights compliance and enforcement in recent years include:

- **Launched the new [Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights](#)**, advancing the Agency's commitment to deliver on environmental justice and civil rights now and in the future. With this new office, EPA elevated civil rights to the highest levels of the Agency.
- **Embedded the Agency's commitments to civil rights in the EPA's [FY 2022-206 EPA Strategic Plan](#) and [Agency Equity Plans](#)**, which set out actionable strategies and accountability measures to strengthen the compliance program and ensure that civil rights compliance is an Agency-wide responsibility.
- **Partnered on a [Joint Interagency Statement of Shared Commitment to Ensure Compliance with Civil Rights Laws and Advance Environmental Justice](#)**, which affirmed that environmental justice is a core civil rights issue and, also, made clear that civil rights obligations are independent from other obligations, including obligations to comply with Federal, state, and local environmental laws.

- **Increased staff and resources to enforce civil rights.** After the President’s request for a significant investment in civil rights, the EPA’s budget has included crucial increases to build civil rights enforcement capacity, leading to a near doubling of positions in the Office of External Civil Rights Compliance after decades without growth.
- **Reached groundbreaking agreements with recipients of federal funds to address civil rights complaints.** Resolution agreements have included commitments to reform permitting processes, enhance meaningful access to programs and activities, and ensure that members of the public understand their rights, among other things. EPA monitors compliance with these agreements to ensure that commitments are fulfilled.
 - A February 14, 2024 [Informal Resolution Agreement](#) with the **Illinois Environmental Protection Agency** included provisions to address civil rights and environmental justice in its permit review process.
 - An April 19, 2024 [Agreement](#) commits the **Upper Mississippi River Basin Association** to implement various civil rights safeguards, including to develop a process to receive and review public input during public meetings and report back to the public on how the input was considered in decision-making.
 - After issuing [Partial Preliminary Findings](#) of non-compliance on March 30, 2021, EPA entered a [Voluntary Compliance Agreement](#) with the **Missouri Department of Natural Resources**, which included commitments to prominently display a notice of nondiscrimination, ensure grievance policies and procedures are meaningfully accessible to persons with limited English proficiency, and take other key steps to ensure language access.
- **Revamped EPA’s pre-award compliance review process** for applicants and recipients requesting EPA financial assistance to ensure that all recipients of EPA funding are in compliance with procedural requirements in [EPA Form 4700-4](#).
 - Offered training and technical assistance for recipients and applicants of EPA financial assistance, as well as online [Tips](#) for complying with the pre-award review process.
 - In the 18 months since launching the new process, EPA has entered into more than **200 agreements with recipients** to come into compliance with obligations under EPA’s nondiscrimination regulations and the majority of the commitments made in these agreements have already been resolved. Pre-award review will remain an important focus for the EPA.
- **Initiated EPA’s first affirmative compliance review to evaluate potentially discriminatory activities** by EPA financial assistance recipients affecting communities with environmental justice concerns.
 - **Developed and published the [Process and Criteria for Prioritizing and Selecting Affirmative Compliance Reviews](#)** for use by program staff and shared to increase transparency for stakeholders.
- **Advanced transparency in civil rights efforts** so the public has visibility into regulatory practices and procedures and can share ideas directly with the EPA through public engagements.

- **Created and maintained the [External Civil Rights Docket and Case Resolutions](#)**, which include links to complaints, agreements, and other case documents from January 1, 2014 to the present.
- **Held its first public listening session** in 2021 and now engages with the public on a quarterly basis through the [Environmental Justice Community Engagement Call](#).
- **Spearheaded EPA's actions to ensure its programs are accessible** for people with Limited English Proficiency. EPA recently issued a new [Order for Assisting Persons with Limited English Proficiency](#) and has worked to ensure language access throughout its regions and programs.
- **Conducted civil rights compliance technical assistance and training** to EPA staff to build internal capacity and to hundreds of EPA financial assistance recipients and other stakeholders annually, through both one-on-one sessions and workshops, to encourage compliance.

In the years ahead, EPA will continue its robust enforcement of the Civil Rights Act through complaint investigations and compliance reviews, while expanding proactive outreach, education, and technical assistance efforts with recipients and communities. To learn more about EPA's comprehensive efforts to protect and advance civil rights, visit [Office of External Civil Rights Compliance](#).