



Office of Human Resources

The Inclusion Council

Dear Colleague,

Welcome to our November Inclusion Council newsletter. Expanding on last week's MEDIA Club, we are discussing the intersectionality of the environmental crisis and racism. The convergence of these issues is known as environmental and climate justice. We are focusing on these issues because, while many people understand them separately, they are not aware of how deeply these crises are intertwined. Learning more about these connections from the resources below can help us better understand the root causes of both issues and address the reality that communities of color often suffer disproportionate environmental burdens.

Environmental and Climate Justice MEDIA Club Resources



In case you missed our MEDIA Club session held on October 28, it focused on the documentary [Fenceline: A Company Town Divided](#) and book [As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock](#). Our discussion of environmental and climate justice was led by U of M Assistant Professor Dr. Fayola Jacobs. (View a recording of the [MEDIA Club Zoom session here](#).) You are invited to review those media resources and many other articles, videos, and podcasts in our [MEDIA Club](#) invitation.

Watch your email for an invitation to attend a presentation by Karen Diver, the senior advisor to the president on Native American affairs here at the University. Her presentation, "History of Federal Indian Policy and Impact," will be November 30 from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

Environmental Justice in Water Quality



Water is life. Water is essential to our survival. Those who decide issues on water and its use hold the power. Recent events have brought light to the great inequalities associated with water use, which disproportionately affect lower economic groups and BIPOC communities.

- The Flint Michigan water crisis of 2012 prompted many complaints, investigations, and lawsuits. A report by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission [concluded](#) that the poor governmental response was a "result of systemic racism."

- An estimated [1 in 10 Indigenous Americans](#) lacks access to safe tap water or basic sanitation, without which a host of health conditions— including COVID-19, diabetes, and gastrointestinal disease—are more likely. Those most affected by water issues are 30 tribes in the Colorado River Basin in California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado.
- The increase in natural disasters has also caused severe water shortages in communities already struggling with water stress. The damage caused by hurricanes Katrina, Ida, and Maria, among others, have shown that those most often affected by water loss and scarcity are again people of lower economic status and BIPOC communities.

The [US Water Alliance](#) has a three-pillar framework to assess water equity in communities. They should:

- Have access to safe, clean, affordable drinking water and wastewater services
- Share the economic, social, and environmental benefits of water systems
- Be resilient in the face of floods, drought, and other climate risks

As a society, we need to think about how to change the policies that make [some people water-poor while others are water-plentiful](#). To succeed, it will need the involvement of everyone—not just those directly affected. This is another opportunity for allies to do their work.

Environmental Justice in Air Quality



The effects of air pollution are not [equitably distributed](#) among the population. Although lower-income and minority populations tend to [create less air pollution](#), they are disproportionately exposed to traffic and air pollution. In [Minnesota](#), 32% of all communities experience air pollution-related risks above health guidelines, while 46% of low-income communities and 91% of communities of color and indigenous communities experience elevated risks. Air pollution directly contributes to a myriad of [health issues](#), causing additional emergency room visits, hospital stays, chronic health issues, and fatalities. It is not enough just to reduce air pollution for everyone without efforts to address this historical and ongoing unequal burden.

Environmental Justice and Native American Communities



The Native American people have been fighting tirelessly for centuries to protect their identity and culture and preserve the ecosystem. In the last decade, we have witnessed [the Native American resistance](#) against oil explorations and pipeline development within their lands, starting with the protest against the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#). Most recently, we see the Native American people fight against the [Line 3 Oil Pipeline Project](#). It is a fight for their right to the land as outlined in the [1855 Treaty](#), but also to protect northern Minnesota's water, [wetlands](#), and wild rice beds, and to take care of the global climate to ensure that our future generations will live in a healthy and safe environment.

Global Environmental Justice



Our planet's temperature is rising at a dangerous speed. [Global temperatures](#) have increased more than 1 degree Celsius on average and will keep rising toward 1.5 degrees Celsius unless significant change takes place. The U.S. response to this situation will affect not just our country but the world. In 2019 alone there were 24.9 million [climate refugees](#) in 140 countries. Environmental crises triggered internal conflicts in many countries already struggling with disparity and a legacy of past colonialism and modern exploitations, forcing people to leave for survival. The drought in the Americas created mass [emigration from Central America](#) to the United States. Massive efforts are necessary immediately if the world is to slow the climate crisis and preserve the [tropical rainforests](#) that help balance the earth's ecosystem.

The U.S. has made significant progress in the past couple of years, but it is still one of the [top greenhouse gas emitters in the world](#), despite having just 4.25% of the world's population. The U.S. can also do better with our use of plastic and paper: Our nation leads the world in [plastic waste per capita](#) and is [second largest in paper consumption](#).

Links to More Resources:

Article: [To Solve the Climate Crisis, We Must First Repair Our Relationships](#), Grist

Article: [Inside Climate News--President Biden's 30 by 30 Land Conservation Plan and Environmental Justice](#), Inside Climate News

Article: [It's Been a Hot, Dry Summer in the Twin Cities, But Not All Neighborhoods Are Hit Equally](#), Sahan Journal

Article: [Can We Green the Hood Without Gentrifying It?](#), Grist

Video: [Lakota People's Law Project: Trial Archives Environmental Justice](#) (YouTube--7:27)

Book: [All We Can Save](#), edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson

Book: [Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States](#) by Carl A. Zimring

Questions to Consider and Share on the [OHR Inclusion Council Slack Channel](#)

- What feelings or thoughts arose for you when reviewing these materials?
- Is there something new you learned or something that made an impact for you?
- What connections have you seen or experienced between structural or institutional racism and environmental injustice in your own life?
- What actions could OHR or the broader University community take to address environmental injustice?
- What are two actions you can personally take over the next year?

Find Upcoming Events Through These Organizations:

- [Stop Line 3](#)
- [MN350](#)
- [Honor the Earth](#)
- [RISE Coalition](#)
- [Community Members for Environmental Justice \(CMEJ\)](#)
- [100% Campaign](#)
- [Community Power](#)
- [Climate Generation](#)
- [Climate Justice Committee \(CJC\)](#)
- [Friends of the Mississippi River \(FMR\)](#)
- [Sierra Club North Star Chapter](#)
- [Sunrise Movement](#)

Sincerely,

Josh Iniguez and Sondang Cornelia
OHR Inclusion Council Co-Chairs

THE LAND

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities is built within the traditional homelands of the Dakota people. Minnesota comes from the Dakota name for this region, Mni Sota Makoce—the land where the waters reflect the skies. Each day, the students, faculty, staff, and community members who traverse this campus engage with Dakota territory and should reflect on the ongoing relationship that Dakota people have to this area.

—Adapted from a statement by Iyekiyaipiwiŋ Darlene St. Clair, Bdewakaŋtuŋwaŋ Dakota

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This email was sent to OHR staff and University affinity group leaders on behalf of Josh Iniguez and Sondang Cornelia on November 2, 2021, by the Office of Human Resources, 100 Donhowe Building, 319 15th Ave SE, Minneapolis, MN, 55455, USA. The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

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