



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

America's Most Vulnerable Communities Need Stronger Clean Air Protections from EPA

Air pollution is dangerous. Long-term exposure can lead to serious health problems like chronic asthma, reproductive and developmental harm, and even premature death. One of the most dangerous types of air pollution is smog (also called ground-level ozone), which is described by doctors as being so harmful that inhaling it regularly can lead to getting “a sunburn on your lungs.” Exposure can permanently scar respiratory tissue, which can impair lung function even after disease symptoms have disappeared. Disturbingly, children are at the greatest health risk from smog pollution because their lungs are still developing and they tend to be outdoors more often.

Making matters worse, smog pollution is disproportionately prevalent in low-income communities and communities of color, which are more frequently in nonattaining areas (or areas that do not meet the EPA's standard for safe air conditions) than their white counterparts. Because of this, our most vulnerable communities are regularly exposed to smog pollution, putting them at risk for life threatening health conditions.

This is why curtailing smog pollution is an environmental justice imperative and it is incumbent upon the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure air quality protections for all. This year, the EPA can do just

that by strengthening our current clean air protections with strong smog pollution safeguards that limit the amount of pollution in our air to 60 parts per billion (ppb), which is what medical scientists have been recommending for years. It isn't just scientists either, many medical associations, public health groups, and environmental justice groups have all united in support of protecting our air by setting protections at 60 ppb.

Strong and just protections will benefit us all, but will be especially critical for disadvantaged communities that are already overburdened.

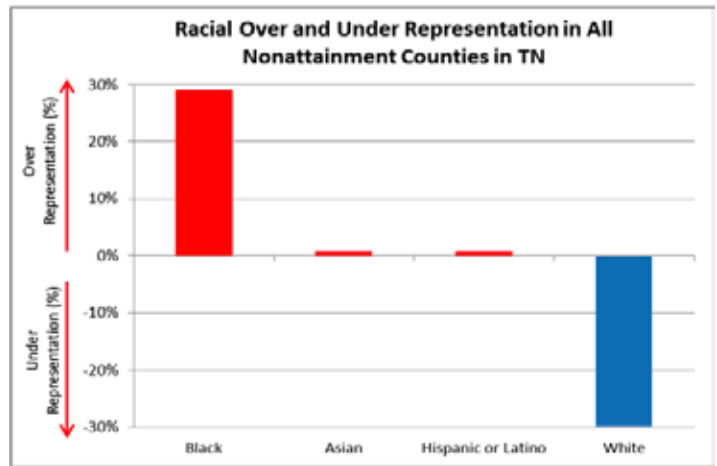
Coal plants are principally located in areas occupied by communities that have historically been underserved and are economically vulnerable:

- 60 percent of African Americans live within 30 miles of a power plant.
- 39 percent of people of color live within three miles of a power plant.
- People who live within three miles of a power plant have an average per capita income of \$18,400, which is lower than the US average of \$21,587.
- A NAACP report gave 75 plants in the US failing environmental justice grades because of their disproportionate impact on people of color and low income communities:
 - Four million people live within three miles of the failing plants
 - The average per capita income of these individuals is \$17,500
 - Almost 53 percent of these individuals are people of color.

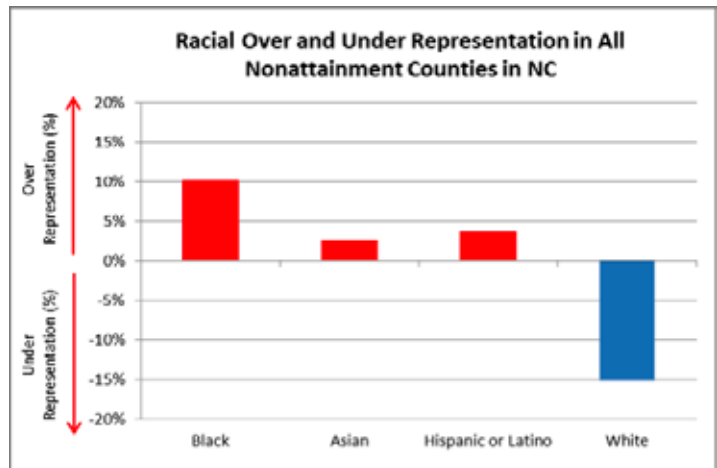
Due to their higher and more frequent exposure, low income communities and communities of color bear the brunt of the negative health impacts of smog pollution - which includes chronic asthma and other respiratory and lung diseases, reproductive and developmental harm, and even premature death. In fact:

- African Americans were 20 percent more likely to have asthma than non-Hispanic whites.
- In 2013, African Americans were three times more likely to die from asthma related causes than the white population.
- Black children are 3 times more likely to be admitted to the hospital for asthma, as compared to non-Hispanic white children.
- Latinos are 60 percent more likely to visit the hospital for asthma, as compared to non-Hispanic whites.
- Latino children are 40 percent more likely to die from asthma, as compared to non-Hispanic whites.

This isn't a problem in just one state or region. Smog pollution is wreaking havoc on these communities nationwide. Throughout the country, communities of color are significantly over-represented in areas with unsafe air, with the southeast leading the way in the disparity between communities of color and whites.



GRAPH 1¹¹



GRAPH 2¹⁰

REGIONAL SNAPSHOT – THE SOUTH

In states like Tennessee and North Carolina, for example, air pollution is already above healthy limits in many areas. Of the 16 counties in Tennessee that were graded for air quality by the American Lung Association's (ALA) 2015 State of the Air report, 15 received a grade of C or lower. In North Carolina, 19 counties out of a total of 34 that were graded received the same distinction.

In both of these states, there is also a clear trend when comparing the racial demographics of counties whose air quality fails to meet clean air standards (so-called "nonattaining counties" that have air monitors) to average statewide data, as displayed in the following graphs. For example, Tennessee has the starkest discrepancy in the nation with African-Americans 30 percent overrepresented in areas with unsafe air. In other words, as the air quality decreases, the presence of African-Americans increases significantly. In North Carolina, the situation is shockingly similar, where African-Americans are overrepresented by 10 percent in counties with unsafe air. By comparison, whites in those areas are significantly underrepresented.

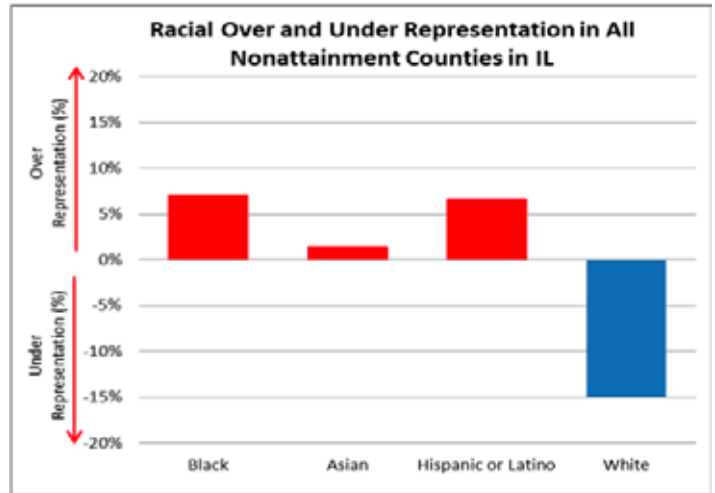


REGIONAL SNAPSHOT – THE MIDWEST

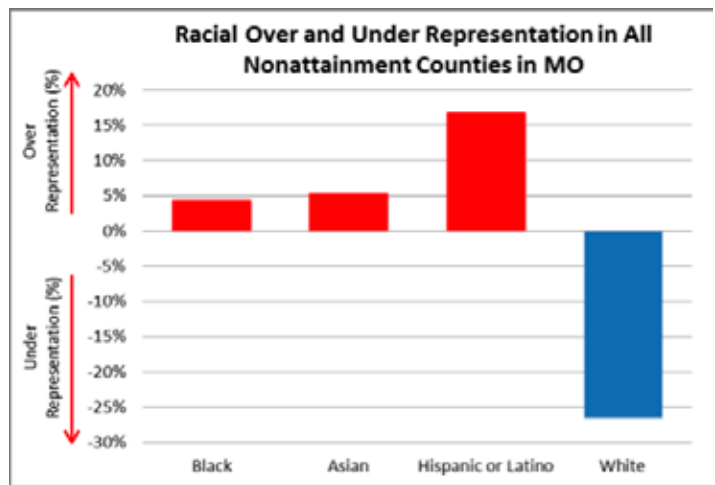
We also see a similar pattern of poor general air quality and the distribution of pollution along racial lines in the Midwest.

ALA’s State of the Air report graded a total of 22 counties in Illinois and 16 received a grade of C or lower for bad air days. In Missouri and Michigan, 18 and 25 counties respectively were graded and all received grades of C or lower. Plus, several cities in these states (including Chicago, St. Louis and Grand Rapids) appear on the report’s Most Polluted Cities list.

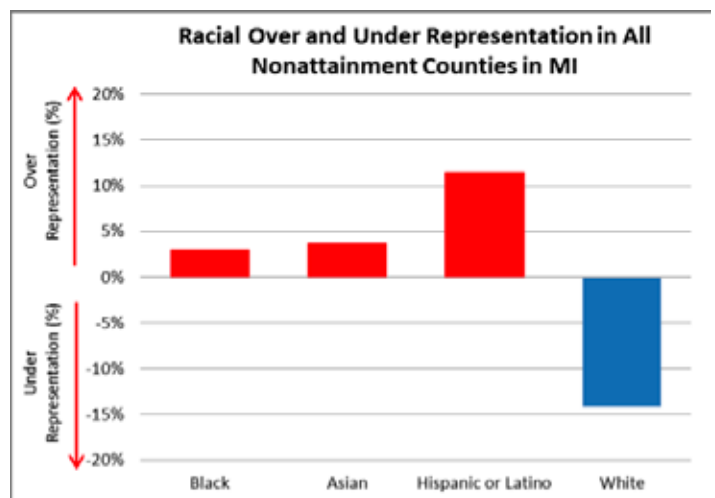
As shown in Graph 3, African Americans and Latinos are overrepresented in nonattaining counties in Illinois by roughly 7 percent, while whites are underrepresented by 15 percent. It’s a similar situation in across the Midwest. In Missouri (Graph 4), African Americans and Latinos are 5 and 17 percent (respectively) overrepresented, while whites are almost 30 percent underrepresented. In Michigan (Graph 5), Latinos are 11 percent overrepresented), while whites are 15 percent underrepresented.



GRAPH 3¹²



GRAPH 4¹³



GRAPH 5¹⁴

REGIONAL SNAPSHOT – THE NORTHEAST

Poor grades from the State of the Air report indicate that the Northeast is another region coping with bad air.

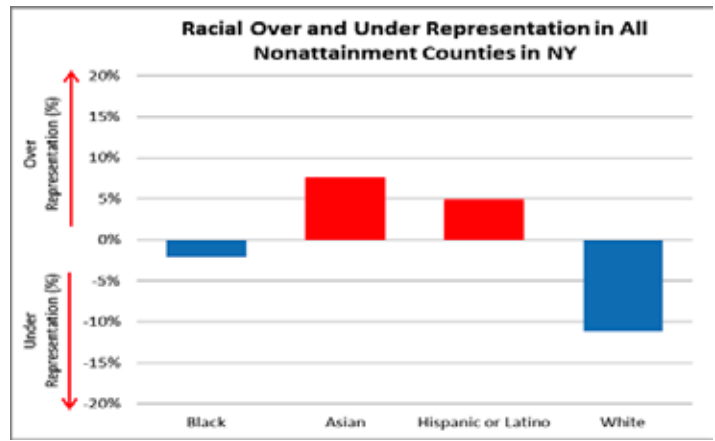
Twenty-seven counties in Pennsylvania (out of a total of 36 that were graded) and 14 in New York (out of 26) received

a C grade or lower. And several of those states' cities appear on the report's Most Polluted Cities list (including the boroughs of Queens and the Bronx in New York and Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Harrisburg in Pennsylvania).

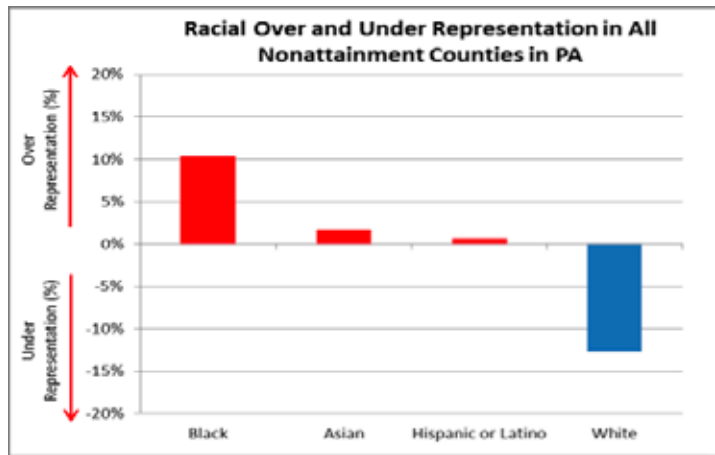
The large air quality disparity between whites and people of color is also prevalent in the Northeast. In New York, for example, Asians are overrepresented by seven percent in areas with unsafe air, with Latinos not far behind at 5 percent (Graph 6). In Pennsylvania, African Americans are overrepresented by 10 percent in these areas. In contrast, whites are under-represented in both states by roughly 15 percent. (Graph 7)

THE NEED FOR ACTION

With low-income communities and communities of color already burdened with a litany of challenges, taking steps to protect their health and well-being is vital. This is an ideal time for the EPA to take the opportunity to significantly cut smog, while setting an example for the nation on how to create a healthier, cleaner environment for all Americans.



GRAPH 6¹⁵



GRAPH 7¹⁶

ENDNOTES

- 1 Green for All et al June 11, 2015 news release, "African American, Hispanic Leaders Respond to Latest Attacks on Clean Power Plan"
- 2 NAACP Report: Coal Blooded (November 2012)
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Ibid
- 5 United States Department of Health and Human Services Website, Office of Minority Affairs, Minority Population Profiles, "African Americans and Asthma"
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Ibid
- 8 United States Department of Health and Human Services Website, Office of Minority Affairs, Minority Population Profiles, "Hispanics Americans and Asthma"

- 9 Ibid
- 10 Data Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's design value website: <http://www.epa.gov/airtrends/values.html> and the U.S Census Bureau's website: <http://www.census.gov/>
- 11 Ibid
- 12 Ibid
- 13 Ibid
- 14 Ibid
- 15 Ibid
- 16 Ibid

