**PART 1: ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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**Introduction**

There can be no doubt that African American and Latinos are far more likely to have hazard waste sites holding or using the toxic, cancerous, and fatal products of our economic system located in or near their communities. Nor can there be any doubt that as a consequence of living very close to toxic pollution centers, among other factors, that African Americans and Latinos also suffer from higher incidences of chronic or fatal diseases. While there are very large and statistically significant racial disparities in terms of the location of hazard waste sites near communities of color, white communities are sometimes less worse off, but not necessarily safe.

While there is a justifiable complaint that the term [environmental justice masks environmental racism](http://www.blackagendareport.com/node/4362) and tends to [substitute class for race](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2015/08/environmental_racism_when_where_you_live_determines_how_fast_you_die.html), the empirical data provided below show that while race is the most important variable in determining where the waste products of our economic system are located and disposed of, and who they most injuriously affect, there is also an element of class. Even the most robust analyses (discussed below) that find that “race matters,” also find that disadvantaged white communities are also as affected.

As we examine environmental issues in Escambia County, looking first at larger issues in the United States, protecting the environment should not be a partisan or ideological issue—even as we recognize that we do not all drink the same water or all breathe the same air.

State Senator Anitere Flores (GOP, District 37) wrote in the *Miami Herald*: “[Protecting our communities from environmental risks should never be a partisan issue](http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article62179672.html). The flooding of coastal neighborhoods during king tides doesn’t distinguish between households that vote Democrat and those that vote Republican. The intrusion of salt water into our drinking-water supplies doesn’t discriminate on partisan lines, nor will the storm surges that the Florida State Department warns will steadily increase.”

**Racial Disparities in Health Outcomes**

Based on 2000 census data, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) observed that “For many health conditions, non-Hispanic blacks bear a disproportionate burden of disease, injury, death, and disability. Although the top three causes and seven of the 10 leading causes of death are the same for non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic whites (the largest racial/ethnic population in the United States), the risk factors and incidence, morbidity, and mortality rates for these diseases and injuries often are greater among blacks than whites.” The CDC went on to note: “[For blacks in the United States, health disparities can mean earlier deaths, decreased quality of life, loss of economic opportunities, and perceptions of injustice](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5401a1.htm). For society, these disparities translate into less than optimal productivity, higher health-care costs, and social inequity.”

The CDC noted that these racial disparities were caused by a mix of socioeconomic factors (education, income, employment), lifestyle behaviors, social environment (including neighborhood and work conditions), and access to preventive health care services.

A 2008 compilation of data by [George Washington University’s Department of Health Policy](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHUmhBeGNoMHJNX0U/view?usp=sharing) found that “Myriad research studies and reports have documented that minorities are in poorer health, experience more significant problems accessing care, are more likely to be uninsured, and often receive lower quality health care than other Americans. These differences may be caused in part by factors such as *income, education, and insurance coverage. But even after adjusting for these determinants, disparities often persist*” [emphasis added].

The GWU data compilation noted that Blacks and Hispanics were twice as likely to live in poverty than whites and Asians; had significantly lower median family income (roughly $54,000 versus $33,000 and $34,000, respectively); and, lower levels of education attainment across high school graduation, some college, or bachelor degree and higher.

And, *even when controlling for socioeconomic variables, racial disparities between Blacks and whites persisted*. Considering just the incidence of chronic illness, the GWU report noted: “Blacks are also most likely to have a chronic illness or disability, with almost half reporting such a condition. The disparity in chronic illness between blacks and whites persists across income levels and after adjusting for age. Blacks with family incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level are 26 percent more likely to suffer from a chronic condition than whites. While both black and white individuals with incomes at or above 200 percent of the poverty level are less likely to be living with chronic illness than their poorer counterparts, the disparity between blacks and whites still exists and, in fact, is greater at this higher income level. Blacks at or above 200 percent of the poverty level are 40 percent more likely to have a chronic illness or disability than whites.”

James Hamblin in *The Atlantic* reported findings from the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which reported data from 2008 indicating that “life expectancy was 5.4 years shorter for black men than white men in the United States, and 3.7 years shorter for black women than for white women. Among men, 38 percent of that racial gap is accounted for by cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Among women, the number is even larger, 54 percent. Poorly controlled blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar are understood to underlie much of that mortality, and much other morbidity.”

Hamblin went on to observe, “[there is very little incentive for healthcare organizations to work on addressing social determinants of health: the social and economic drivers of disparities, starting with creating healthy communities](http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/12/the-race-problem-in-medicine-race/383613/).”

*Forbes* magazine, not known for its progressive views, nevertheless opined, “The country is in a state of health care denial. Politicians, pundits and executives proudly declare America’s medical care is the best in the world. But it isn’t. The U.S. lags behind other industrialized nations in many important health measures—partly because [citizens of certain races, ethnicities and incomes experience poorer versions of U.S. health care than others. The disparities are glaring](http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertpearl/2015/03/05/healthcare-black-latino-poor/#6b354d6c1ca7).”

Robert Pearl (M.D.), writing in *Forbes* and using data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, observed that “African-Americans, Latinos and the economically disadvantaged experience poorer health care access and lower quality of care than white Americans. And in most measures, that gap is growing…. The foundation estimates Latinos and African-Americans experience 30 to 40 percent poorer health outcomes than white Americans. This disparity leads not only to shortened lives and increased illness, but also costs the nation more than $60 billion in lost productivity each year.”

In [Florida as a whole and in Escambia County](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHNjdnR0VsWDZwQWs/view?usp=sharing) Blacks have higher rates of death from heart disease, stroke, diabetes, pneumonia/influenza, and HIV/AIDS than whites. Whites have higher death rates than Blacks for cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease, motor vehicle crashes, and cirrohosis. Most telling of a significant racial disparity in Escambia County is the significantly much higher rate of infant mortality for Black babies aged one year or less. The Florida Department of Health reported that “[non-Hispanic black infant mortality rates have consistently remained more than two times higher than non-Hispanic white and Hispanic infant mortality rates](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHNjdnR0VsWDZwQWs/view?usp=sharing). Disparities in infant mortality are also present and consistent at the national level.” In fact, nationally the infant mortality rate for Black babies is twice as high than for white babies.

**Racial Disparities in Environmental Justice**

The socioeconomic disadvantages correlated with racial disparities in health outcomes discussed above are also correlated with racial disparities in environmental justice. In fact, major empirical studies have documented that these very socioeconomic disadvantages are ruthlessly exploited by corporations as well as local, state, and federal governments to place environmentally dangerous facilities in or near communities of color.

Miguel de la Torre, writing for the Baptist News Global noted, “[We are called by God to be good stewards of the earth. Unfortunately, racism gets in the way](https://baptistnews.com/opinion/commentaries/item/8756-environmental-racism-afflicts-us-minorities). Environmental racism, defined as the link between the degradation of the environment and the racial composition of the areas where degradation takes place, is prevalent among communities of color within the U.S. borders.” He went on to observe that even when corporations are fined for polluting an area, the punishments are significantly much less when the affected area is populated by people of color, and, government is much slower to react when affected areas are populated by people of color.

For example, the 2007 study by the United Church of Christ, [*Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty, 1987-2007*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHV0VZbkdVS1RPcjQ/view?usp=sharing), found that that more than “68 percent of African Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant—the distance within which the maximum effects of the smokestack plume are expected to occur—compared with 56 percent of white Americans” (page 4, 19 on pdf). The 2007 study was an update of the original, seminal 1987 study produced by the United Church of Christ.

In November 2012, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in collaboration with the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, with assistance from the Rain Action Network, issued a report, [*Coal Blooded: Putting Profits Before People*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHdFY2WGtrLWJHUEU/view?usp=sharing).

The NAACP study found that six million Americans live within three miles of one of the nation’s 378 coal burning power plants. Of these six million Americans, 39 percent were people of color, three percent more than the nationwide total of people of color. People living within three miles of coal power plant had around $3,000 less in per capita income, $18,400 versus the national average of $21,587 (page 15, 16 in pdf). Coal burning power plants emit sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, fine particle pollution, as well as mercury, uranium, arsenic, lead, and other heavy metals (pages 16-17 in pdf).

Based on a complex algorithm that combined the amounts of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides emitted, plus the total population living within three miles of the power plant, the percentage of people of color living within three miles of the plant, and median income the study calculated an “environmental justice performance score” for both each power plant and the 59 parent power companies (see page 25 in pdf). This performance score is not an indicator of “dirtiness.” It is an indicator of how it affects communities of color.

Of the 378 coal burning power plants, 75 had an environmental justice performance score of “F.” These F-rated power plants affect four million people, of whom 53 percent are people of color. These communities have 25 percent lower than the state average for per capita income ($17,500) (page 28 in pdf).

The twelve worst coal burning power plants affected almost two million Americans, of whom 76 percent were people of color, and they had an average per capita income of $14,626, much less than the average per capita income of $21,587 (page 31 in pdf).

Of the nearly six million people who live within three miles of a coal burning power plant, 3.6 million people of color are affected by the top twelve worst companies. Number 11 on the list is the Southern Company which also operates Gulf Power (see page 35 on pdf).

The Southern Company earned $17.4 billion in revenue in 2010 and compensated its CEO with just over $16 million dollars. Southern Company ($13 million in 2010) and American Electric Power, two of the country’s largest coal producers, spent a combined $43.7 million on lobbying in 2008-2009. Southern Company lobbies against renewable solar power (see pdf pages 43-45).

The Southern Company operates one of its twenty coal burning power plants in Pensacola. According to data in the NAACP’s Appendix I, the Crist power plant has 19,722 people living within 3 miles of the plant. Of these 19,722 people, 16 percent are people of color. The per capita income of $22,226 is 103 percent of the state average per capita income. The Crist plant is ranked number 94 and has an environmental justice performance rating of D- (see pdf page 70). The Southern Company, rated the eleventh worst in the country, operates 20 coal burning power plants. Its plants have 148,718 people living within three miles of its plants, of which 34 percent are people of color. Overall, these people have per capita income 14 percent greater than the state average per capita income (see Appendix II, pdf page 86).

In other words, while there are racial disparities in the siting of coal burning power plants, the Southern Company in general and its Crist power plant in particular affect middle income white people in addition to people of color.

The NAACP study concluded, “The message arising from this report is simple: these polluting life-compromising coal plants must be closed, and the path to doing so involves engagement from all to ensure policies and systems protect public health and maintain the economic wellbeing of communities, while providing the energy we all require to function” (see pdf page 60).

A FracTracker.org study reported by Think Progress found that California’s state regulatory agencies allow energy companies to locate hydraulic fracturing or fracking wells close to elementary schools. The study also reported that many states lack databases on the location of fracked wells and their distance from schools. In California, there was a strong correlation between the number of non-white students and the presence of oil and gas wells located near elementary schools.

Liberal California, whose state government is dominated by Democrats, has “no specific laws that safeguard the health of children who attend school near industrial activities. The [state has no limits on how close industry may place regular or fracked oil wells next to schools, and companies are not required to give notice to students, parents, teachers or school officials before oil extraction begins](http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2014/11/18/3593172/california-schools-fracking/). California state regulators are not required to consider a well’s proximity to a school before issuing a permit.”

FracTracker’s research found that “out of the 352,784 California students who attend school within one mile of an oil or gas well, 79 percent are non-white, while 60 percent are Hispanic. Out of the 121,903 students who attend school within 0.5 miles of an oil or gas well, 77 percent of students are non-white, while 59 percent are Hispanic.” The study also found that the number of new wells in a school district increased as the number of non-white students increased; similarly, the number of stimulated wells increased as the number of non-white students increased.

FracTracker also found that a “[community’s income level, social vulnerability, and race affect the ability of concerned parents to put enough pressure on companies to make sure they’re operating responsibly, or whether they’re operating at all](http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2014/11/18/3475882/fracking-near-schools/).”

The 2007 United Church of Christ study, [*Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty, 1987-2007*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHV0VZbkdVS1RPcjQ/view?usp=sharing), found that while around 9.2 million Americans (or about 3.3 percent of the total U.S. population) lived within three kilometers (1.8 miles) of the nation’s 413 commercial hazardous waste facilities, just over 5.1 million were persons of color. Thus, about 4.1 million Americans living in a neighborhood with at least one commercial hazardous waste facility were white (page 52, 67 on pdf). However, Hispanics were 2.3 times more likely to live in neighborhoods with a commercial hazardous waste facility than whites, as were 1.7 times African Americans, and 1.8 times Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Host neighborhoods, those with at least one commercial hazardous waste facility were 1.5 times more likely to have higher poverty rates than non-host neighborhoods (18 percent versus 12 percent); there was almost a $9,000 difference in median income; a roughly $24,000 difference in mean owner-occupied housing value; a lower percentage of people with four-year college degrees; a lower percentage of white collar occupations; and a slightly higher percentage of blue collar workers (Table 4.1, page 53, 68 on pdf).

According to the 1990 census, host communities were 46 percent communities of color; according to the 2000 census, just under 56 percent of communities with a commercial hazardous waste facility were communities of color. In other words, the problem has grown worse for communities of color.

The study’s multivariate regression analysis found that race, mean income, and percentage of blue collar workers were statistically significant predictors of a commercial hazardous waste facility being located in their neighborhood. Thus, the higher the percentage of people of color, the lower the mean income, and the higher the percentage of blue collar workers, the more likely at least one commercial hazardous waste facility would be located in their neighborhood (Table 4.7, page 63, 78 on pdf).

In May 2014, the Environmental Justice and Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform, Coming Clean, and the Center for Effective Government, published [*Who’s In Danger? Race, Poverty, and Chemical Disasters*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHX0RnMkNMUHg4NUE/view?usp=sharing). This study found similar racial disparities as the earlier 1987 and 2007 studies.

This study noted that over 134 million Americans live in danger zones near 3,433 facilities that store or use “highly hazardous chemicals.” The study defined a “vulnerability zone” as the distance a facility manager calculated using the EPA’s Risk Management Planning program. A “vulnerability zone” was defined as the “maximum possible area where people could be harmed by a worst-case release of certain toxic or flammable chemicals.” The “fenceline zone” was an area one-tenth of the vulnerability zone and indicated an area “in which those affected are least likely to escape from a toxic or flammable chemical emergency…”

Residents in fenceline zones were much more likely to be African American (75 percent greater than the national average); Latinos (60 percent greater); have less than a high school degree (46 percent greater); college or higher degree (27 percent less likely); a poverty rate 50 percent higher than the national average; average household incomes were 22 percent below the national average; and, home values were 33 percent below the national average (page 3, 9 in pdf).

In other words, those closest to a chemical danger and least able to flee an emergency were more likely to be people of color having lower levels of education and less financial resources than the national averages. But, not everyone in the fenceline zone or the larger vulnerability is a person of color. While there are significant and unmistakable racial disparities that are disproportionately dangerous and injurious to communities of color, what they also have in common is their class status—they are among the most vulnerable communities in the country by virtue of them having less education and less financial resources.

Here is the intersection of race and class, particularly when one considers how many white people are in the “vulnerability” and “fenceline” zones.

While Latinos make up 16 percent of the U.S. population and Blacks are 12 percent of the U.S. population, inside the larger vulnerability zone, Latinos are 21 percent and Blacks are 15 percent; with non-Hispanic whites comprising 56 percent; within the much smaller fenceline zone, Latinos are 25 percent of the population and Blacks are 21 percent. Thus, 46 percent of the population in the fenceline zone is Blacks or Latinos, while non-Hispanic whites (47 percent) and others make up 54 percent (page 28, 34 in pdf, Table 4).

Essentially, less advantaged Blacks, Latinos, and whites are particularly endangered by hazardous chemical facilities, even as Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately affected.

The 2014 study concluded, “It is time to finally and fully address the inequitable distribution of these dangers, and *the need for everyone—regardless of race, income, or education—to be protected by the government from chemical disasters*....These and other findings in this report document a pattern of disproportionate exposure to chemical hazards created over a long period of time, which should be considered discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act” (page 38, 44 in pdf) [emphasis added].

In January 2016, *Focus on Environmental Justice* published the first study linking the “disproportionality in the production of environmental harm” with the “disproportionality in exposure.” The authors found that of all environmental polluters, there was a small subset of “hyper-polluters—the worst-of-the-worst—that disproportionately expose communities of color and low income populations to chemical releases.” The authors found “a highly skewed distribution of polluter-based harm generation with fewer than 10% of the nearly 16 000 study area facilities generating greater than 90% of estimated exposure.” The study found that “[the small group of the most toxic facilities are located in places where residents tend to be lower income and people of color](http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/1/015004).”

**The Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Civil Rights**

Unfortunately, the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Civil Rights is virtually completely dysfunctional in addressing environmental justice issues.

In August 2015, the Center for Public Integrity (CPI) undertook an [exhaustive and comprehensive examination of the EPA’s Office of Civil Rights](http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/08/03/17668/environmental-racism-persists-and-epa-one-reason-why). The CPI found that despite the fact that despite “siting of malodorous dumps and sewage plants near the homes of African-Americans, the spraying of toxic pesticides near schools attended by mostly Latino students, and other environmental problems that disproportionately affect communities of color…. the office has not made a formal finding of discrimination in 22 years, despite having received hundreds of complaints, some exhaustively documented.”

The CPI found that “More than nine of every 10 times communities have turned to it for help, the civil-rights office has either rejected or dismissed their Title VI complaints. In the majority, the office rejected claims without pursuing investigations.”

The CPI found 162 cases rejected without an investigation; 52 cases dismissed after an investigation; 14 cases referred to other agencies; 12 cases resolved with informal agreements; and 13 open cases, including one dating back to 1996—twenty years ago. Some 95 cases had been dismissed because the entity did not receive agency funding, as required by law. The EPA did not dispute the Center for Public Integrity’s findings.

A 2011 analysis of EPA’s OCR responsiveness by Deloitte Consulting found that of the 247 filings reviewed by the consulting firm, only six percent had been reviewed within the legal limit of 20 days. The CPI reported that the consulting report “depicted an office in turmoil” and “appeared more ceremonial than meaningful.”

In July 2015, the environmental law firm [Earthjustice filed a federal lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-w1JwXVKGGHdFFma0haX2RBaGs/view?usp=sharing) in San Francisco. Plaintiffs are Californians for Renewable Energy, Ashurst/Bar Community Organization, Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping, the Maurice and Jane Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice, the Sierra Club, and Michael Boyd. All of the complainants had filed cases between 1994 and 2003, and had their cases accepted for investigation between 1995 and 2005, yet the EPA had not acted within the federally-mandated 180-day period.

The Ashurst/Bar Community Organization was formed to protest the Tallassee Waste Disposal Center, also known as the Stone’s Throw Landfill. Stone’s Throw, located in Tallassee, is 98 percent African American. The EPA accepted the group’s Title VI complaint for civil rights violation in 2005, but had still not acted upon the complaint after ten years.

Earthjustice lawyer Marianne Engelmann Lado noted that Stone’s Throw Landfill, located on Interstate 85 between Auburn and Montgomery, is located “‘[smack in the middle of a historically African American land-owning community…. It is a historic community where families have owned their land for generations](http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2015/07/epa_sued_tallassee_landfill.html).’” According to the complaint, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management “failed to require the Tallapoosa County Commission to use appropriate siting factors before approving the landfill.” Residents complain that they can smell the stench from three miles away, according to the AL.com report.

That sounds like our very own dump named Rolling Hills C&D Recycling Center, which is anything but. The Wedgewood community suffers from having nearby [six other Construction and Demolition disposal facilities and borrow pits](http://bridgethegulfproject.org/blog/2014/american-nightmare-wedgewood-community). All of these dumps are located in or near a predominantly African American middle class community that has essentially been unwantedly invaded by the waste products of economic progress. Dr. Gloria Horning, an environmentalist helping the Wedgewood Homeowners Association to shut down the facility and be [compensated for damages](http://www.pnj.com/story/news/2015/01/23/three-hundred-join-rolling-hills-civil-suit/22254733/), noted that Escambia County’s [commissioners had been slow to react](http://www.pnj.com/story/news/2015/10/31/wedgewood-victim-environmental-racism/74640306/) to [residents’ complaints for years](http://studeri.org/2014/11/living-wedgewoods-legacy/).

The Earthjustice press release announcing its lawsuit against the EPA noted that all of the plaintiffs were harmed by “[facilities in predominantly low-income African-American or Latino neighborhoods](http://earthjustice.org/news/press/2015/epa-must-end-discrimination-stop-states-from-permitting-polluters-in-overburdened-communities-of-color-0). The complaints, filed between 1994 and 2003, argue that state agencies permitted these facilities through discriminatory actions, processes, patterns or practices.”

In June 2014, Earthjustice, the Waterkeeper Alliance, Apalachicola Riverkeeper, and the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy sued Gulf Power, a subsidiary of the Southern Company, to stop toxic chemicals from an unlined 40-year old coal ash pond from leaking into the river and contaminating it with aluminum, barium, beryllium, copper, lead, nickel, zinc, selenium, and the neurotoxin mercury. One year later, Gulf Power settled the lawsuit with the environmental groups and agreed to “[develop plans to dry out and remove coal ash from unlined ponds, transferring it to a new onsite landfill located out of the river’s flood zone](http://floridapolitics.com/archives/185594-gulf-power-settles-federal-lawsuit-agrees-to-move-toxic-coal-ash-from-apalachicola-river). The company will also install an impermeable cover over the landfill.” The Southern Company is second only to Duke Power in the number of coal ash ponds it is responsible for.

The Waterkeeper Alliance is the parent organization of our own local Emerald Coastkeeper headed by Laurie Murphy. Emerald Coastkeeper is [deeply involved in monitoring and protesting the six unlined Crist coal ash ponds](http://www.pnj.com/story/opinion/2016/02/07/viewpoint-state-needs-regulate-dangerous-coal-ash/79896206/) that Gulf Power has located right next to or in the middle of the Escambia River. According to data collected by the [Southeast Coal Ash Waste website](http://www.southeastcoalash.org/?guid=ac00d51a972c12fb1952dc0d0b8ca138), a production of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, the six unlined Crist power plant coal ash ponds range in age from seven years (2) to 36 years (1) and 57 years (3).

**Conclusion**

This brief survey has found that African Americans and Hispanics have disproportionately worse health conditions than whites and that these worse off health conditions are linked to socioeconomic disadvantages, inequitable distributions of health care access, and living in communities closer to toxic or hazardous chemicals and thus more likely to suffer from toxic environmental damage.

Whether one examines hazardous waste facilities (United Church of Christ, 2007), coal burning power plants (NAACP, 2012), or facilities using or storing hazardous chemicals (Environmental Justice and Health Alliance, 2014), “race matters,” as the NAACP concluded. African American and Hispanic communities are far more likely than white neighborhoods, all other things being equal, to be endangered and injuriously affected. That said, disadvantaged white neighborhoods are also affected.

And, when one considers, for example, the contamination of an underground water supply through hydraulic fracking to extract natural gas, everyone is affected. Governmental reactions to a common disaster may exacerbate racial differences, but that is a different matter.

Finally, even with documented cases of environmental racism or environmental injustice going back to 1987, the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Civil Rights (Title VI) has been grossly ineffective. Had there not been such an office, no one would have noticed. State and local governments, who are often the targets of Title VI lawsuits, have been more responsive to the needs of industry than the health and wellbeing of its residents, especially communities of color who bear a particularly heavy burden of inadequate access to health care and greater exposure to hazardous and toxic pollutants.

Part 2 of Environment in Escambia County looks at specific environmental hazards to include the endangerment and economic destruction of the Wedgewood community, the Crist coal burning power plant’s coal ash ponds, the Emerald Coast Utilities Authority’s proposed siting of six million gallons of raw sewage in area affecting North Hill, Long Hollow, and downtown Pensacola, and the dangers of hydraulic fracking in northwest Florida.

But, even this cursory analysis suggests that what we need in Escambia County and northwest Florida is a broad-based coalition demanding a commitment to protect our children, communities, and future; more transparency from industry; greater accountable government; a commitment to the highest environmental and ethical standards; and, the participation of concerned and informed residents.