



Unequal Response, Unequal Protection Operating Principles

Over the last four months, the Center for Health, Environment & Justice has held meetings with community leaders from around the country to jointly develop a more effective response to chemical contamination in community settings. We've divided into four breakout groups (health concerns related to permits, components of a health investigation, cumulative impacts of contamination, and community involvement) to discuss reforms throughout the process. Through multiple discussions, we've brainstormed various operating principles to guide an improved response to evaluate health impacts caused by chemical contamination. These principles are components of an agency and paradigms of a response that transcend across the breakout groups.

1. Community Rights

- Involve community leaders from the beginning of the investigation process
- Communities should control their own data and have access to environmental and health data collected during investigations
- Communities should have representation in meetings or other decision-making processes that impact them
- Communities should dictate testing parameters but should not have to prove chemical exposure

2. The Role of Local Culture

- Experts should familiarize themselves with the geography and culture of the region before intervening
- Expert intervention should be culturally sensitive to the communities they are assisting
- Local and indigenous knowledge should influence data collection and health study design -- consult residents to determine pathways of exposure

3. Chemical Risks

- The value of human life is the basis for environmental protection -- no preventable deaths are acceptable
- Assume chemicals are dangerous until proven safe by environmental agency
- Develop health-based standards for intervention

- Consider seriously environmental threats and health concerns voiced by community members, including individual symptoms or outbreak of a disease potentially associated with chemical contamination
- Measure cumulative impact of pollution in addition to individual contaminants
- Evaluate risk of exposure for both the individual and a population

4. Communication and Transparency

- Experts should inform community members throughout the entire investigation process
- Implement education programs to inform community members about chemically-associated health risks
- Involve a liaison between scientists and community members to communicate data from an investigation
- Companies should inform nearby communities about the chemicals they release (right to know)
- Investigate company background, history of pollution in other community settings, and previous permit applications

5. Agency Structure

- Agency should work on the ground with local communities
- The model we create should not have an underlying political agenda and should focus on answering community-oriented public health questions
- Provide funding to involve independent experts, such as epidemiologists, doctors, and researchers, to collaborate with communities

6. Long-Term Impact of Chemical Contamination

- Consider the latency period of health conditions when determining the impact of chemical contamination
- Monitor environmental testing results and human health data in communities long after exposure and remediation