Environmental Justice & the Recycling Industry

As a member of ISRI and the dynamic recycling industry, you are familiar with change. We wanted to make you aware of a new and powerful political and social movement called Environmental Justice that is likely to cause us in the recycling industry to change. In the following paragraphs, we will define Environmental Justice, discuss how new legislation may impact our industry, articulate ISRI’s position on this important issue and recommend how you can play a key role in influencing change.

What is Environmental Justice?
According to the U.S. EPA, Environmental Justice (EJ) is defined as, “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies”. ISRI believes that several states are poised to pass EJ legislation designed to address the environmental and social wellbeing of communities that have “borne a disproportionate share of adverse environmental and public health consequences”. Furthermore, ISRI is tracking statements on Environmental Justice at the Federal level, where Congressional policymakers and the Administration have made EJ a cornerstone of their approach to climate and environmental issues.

How could Environmental Justice legislation impact recycling?
EJ legislation is expected to target facilities that are located in “overburdened communities”. Specifically, states that pass EJ legislation would apply additional permitting restrictions and/or require businesses to submit an “environmental justice impact statement” to remain in compliance. For example, New Jersey legislation identified scrap metal facilities – in addition to incinerators, landfills, solid waste facilities and others as potential “public health stressors”, and our industry could be a point of focus for EJ enforcement in other states, too.

What is ISRI’s position on Environmental Justice?
While ISRI agrees with many of the universal aims of EJ legislation, there remain many unanswered questions about how new regulation will accomplish these ambitious goals. Some of the broad outcomes sought by EJ legislation in which ISRI whole-heartedly agrees include: equal treatment and opportunity for all people; recyclers’ responsibility to contribute positively to the communities in which they operate; environmental stewardship; and the health and safety of employees, customers and communities. Instead of taking a reactionary approach to EJ legislation, ISRI will seek to shape EJ legislation and highlight many of the goals of EJ already being practiced by our members. The ISRI Executive Committee has established an Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG) to develop a strategy and direct the development of tools to aid in this effort.

A Call to Action:
At ISRI, we believe our members are world-class at adapting to changing environments. So, as an ISRI member, you should be doing the following to proactively prepare for changes resulting from upcoming EJ legislation:

- Staying up to date on the EJ movement. Do your own independent research on the issue. Some helpful links are included in the footnotes below. Also, go onto the ISRI website where you will find ISRI’s State Resource and Tracking website, which monitors all state issues, including the latest on EJ.
• Get a conversation going. Talk with others at your company about how EJ might impact your business. Get employees involved and ask are there changes you can make now that line up with the aspirational goals of EJ?

• Connect with your local ISRI chapter leadership. Exchanging ideas and opinions with your peers is an excellent way to grow in your understanding of how EJ will impact your business and how you can get involved both individually and together.

• Take the first step in your area. Reach out to local community and business leaders and start the discussion about EJ. Propose forming a community EJ task force to collectively bring on positive change.

• Reach out to your local and state representatives. Invite them to your facilities for a tour and have a conversation about the positive environmental and economic impact your business provides (and ISRI can give you the data to support the storytelling). Let them know you are a partner and offer to work side-by-side with them in addressing this important issue.

• Join forces with ISRI. For example, schedule a Day on the Hill of your state capitol with fellow ISRI members to discuss EJ with your state legislators. As amazing as it sounds, you have the power to shape the future of Environmental Justice! If you have never thought of yourself as an influencer of public policy, maybe it’s time to change that!

As recyclers, we have become accustomed to change. While it is rarely easy, we believe that taking proactive steps is the best way to prepare for changes being brought about by the Environmental Justice movement. There are many things we do not know about EJ today. What we do know is this: we need to be educated, be open-minded, be leaders in our communities and be united as One ISRI. As ISRI members, this is our chance to shape the future of recycling and our country.

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1 Epagov/environmentaljustice
2 https://www.mankogold.com/publications-NJDEP-Environmental-Justice-Overburdened-Communities.html

Recommendation to the Board:

To aid in these activities, the ISRI Environmental Justice Working Group recommends that the Executive Committee may request and approve expenditures for advocacy and related expenditures out of an earmark in an amount of up to $500,000. Although the EJWG continues to develop the member engagement strategy, it is expected that expenditures could be used for any combination of the following activities:

- Hiring outside counsel with expertise on *Environmental Justice* and advocacy;
- Studies and/or data generation to support story-telling;
- Potential Chapter support – on a case-by-case basis – for advocacy on specific state/local-level EJ legislation; and
- Other advocacy tools as needed.

Requests coming from Chapters would be reviewed by the Working Group for a recommendation to the Board according to set criteria. The Board would review the request and vote to approve.

The EJWG will develop and implement a process and metrics for evaluating expenditure needs and requests – other than requests from the Chapters – and make such recommendations to the Executive Committee. The EJWG will also keep a detailed accounting of these expenditures and provide reports on expenditures to the Board of Directors at each quarterly meeting.