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Fairchild Challenge #4 Environmental Justice: In the News

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Air Pollution in Disadvantaged Communities

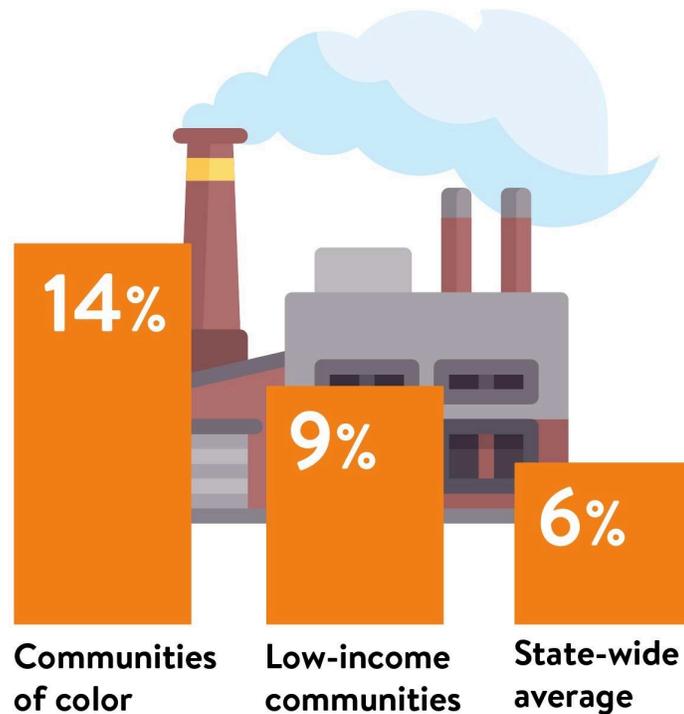
Air pollution is an issue that affects towns and cities all across America, but *who* does it mainly affect? It is a topic in the discussion of environmental justice: the idea that environmental issues in America are aimed more at minority groups and poor communities than others living in advantaged areas. A research study from the University of California, Berkeley, claims that air pollution indeed follows this formula. This statement is correct, and there is plenty of evidence to support that this issue is no minor injustice.

Air pollution is already a problem by itself, but a second layer of evil is added onto the issue when looked at through the lens of environmental equality. If you look at communities with a higher-than-average income, you won't find many smokestacks or industrial facilities. Now if one were to turn around and face a town on the poorer side, that's typically where one would find plenty of clean air regulations being broken. This is consistent throughout the United States and is why racism is brought into the mix, as many of these lower income communities contain mostly a minority population. An article written by the American Lung Association states, "Low socioeconomic status consistently increased the risk of premature death from fine particle pollution among 13.2 million Medicare recipients studied in the largest examination of particle pollution-related mortality nationwide. A 2008 study found that there is greater risk for premature death for communities with higher African American populations; researchers also found greater risk for people living in areas with higher unemployment..." (Disparities in the

Impact of Air Pollution). As you can see, there are gaps in the groups of people in our country affected by air pollution. The information from their study lines up with and supports the information in the article from Berkeley as well, showing that air pollution mainly affects more people who are in unprivileged towns. It is not a small disparity either; it is quite a sizable problem especially since it can be observed so easily.

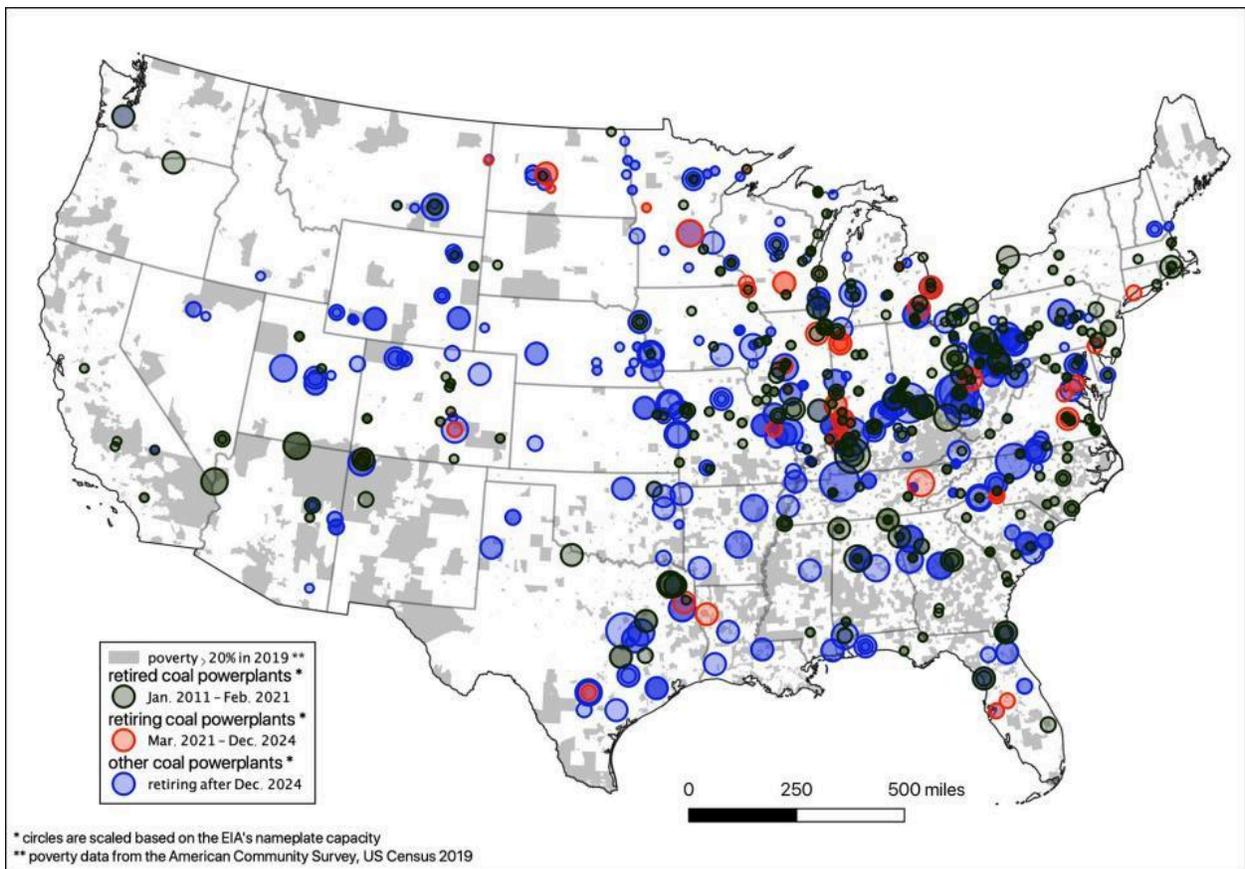
Living near air pollution

Your chances of living near a facility that needs a permit to emit pollutants is higher if you are a person of color or poor in Minnesota.



To solidify this even further, one can take a look at the locations of industrial facilities in the country. They are mostly placed in African American or low-income communities, keeping up with the trend that Berkeley’s study found. One article about this problem in Pennsylvania specifically states, “Black communities in Pennsylvania are twice as likely to live near an existing power plant than the whitest, lower-income neighborhoods. In fact, 85 percent of Pennsylvania’s power plants are located in neighborhoods with more low income and Black families than the state median” (The Racist Placement of Power Plants). This is the explanation

for the fact that people of minority groups tend to be exposed to more air pollution, and as a result suffer more side effects than others. It is due to the placement of the plants themselves that is the culprit for the gap in the statistics. For example, the Braddock area of Pennsylvania has a good amount of steel mills located closely, which definitely affects the population living there. Those people are more likely to develop health problems or die prematurely from the pollution, all because of the proximity to said mills. The reason for their placement does not matter much because the outcome is the same: Lower-income neighborhoods hosting a minority population will have a much higher chance of living near a power plant, and as a result be subject to more harmful conditions than a higher-income white neighborhood for example.



Air pollution in America is an issue that does indeed affect some people more than others. Usually people of a minority group or people of lower socioeconomic status will

experience greater air pollution and its effects, which is an undeniable trend. This is mainly due to the placement of the plants in reference to these communities, which are almost always close. This evidence from other sources like the American Lung Association, and the two air pollution articles does support the article made by the University of California, Berkeley. It proves their claim about air pollution affecting those select communities, and the problem is not exaggerated by their writing.

Works Cited

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