

# A Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay

## YOUR HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay is an eleven-module series created to support decision making by local officials. As a local leader, your decisions set the course for your community. Your actions determine the health and vitality of your jurisdiction, as well as that of local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay. You can achieve win-win outcomes by prioritizing local economic development, infrastructure resiliency, public health, and education while also protecting your environment. This fact sheet accompanies a module about the connections between environmental threats and human health.

### THE THREATS

The module focuses on environmental threats including: emerging concerns like persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and microplastics, among other air and water quality threats, and addressing issues of DEIJ, including environmental justice. There are resources on the next page to learn more about additional threats not covered in the module.



Contamination, whether by PFAS, PCBs, or another environmental threat, is costly to clean up, though restoration efforts do create jobs. Contamination can also affect the recreation and tourism industries if local waterways are compromised and swimming or fishing are prohibited.



All of the environmental threats discussed in the module have public health and safety implications, but some of the most concerning are the emerging contaminants - we don't know the full effects of these toxins down the line.



Contamination can stem from or be exacerbated by old infrastructure. Updating wastewater treatment plants and other outdated infrastructure can mitigate some environmental threats and protect people from health hazards.



Children (and the elderly) are some of the most susceptible populations to environmental contamination, with exposure often leading to lifelong impacts to development and learning.

### ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The conversation on health and the environment would not be complete without mentioning those most vulnerable to threats in our communities. We know that communities of color and low income areas are at a higher risk of suffering from issues of environmental justice. For context, **environmental justice** is 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. To address environmental injustice, there should be a consideration of who is being impacted by environmental hazards as well as who is being excluded from decision-making spaces. The failure to account for these inequities is a civil rights issue. The [Chesapeake Bay Program partners](#) are dedicated to creating a more inclusive space that advances environmental justice outcomes through diversifying stakeholder groups represented in leadership and decision-making roles.

Photo by W. Parson (Chesapeake Bay Program)

# PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY

## WHAT YOU CAN DO



**Know the risks** so you can help your community stay safe. By knowing what environmental risks exist and how they can affect the health and safety of your community, you'll be better prepared to take action.



**Consider WHO is at the greatest risk.** When any environmental issue impacts human health and safety, we must always ask the question, "who is at the greatest risk?" Then, we can take steps that promote environmental justice and protect traditionally marginalized and excluded communities from harm.



**Provide support.** Support looks different for different risks and demographics. Sometimes support takes the form of policy recommendations, legislative action, funding, research, and more.

## A FEW RESOURCES

Beyond this module, here are a few other resources you may find useful.

### Chesapeake Bay Program's Chesapeake Progress

<https://www.chesapeakeprogress.com/engaged-communities/diversity>

Learn about the Bay Program's efforts to diversify its partnerships by exploring the logic and action plan, data, and more.

### NAACP Environmental Justice Policy Recommendations

<https://naacp.org/know-issues/environment-climate-justice/environmental-justice-policies>

Read the NAACP's full list of recommendations on how to prioritize Black communities in environmental solutions.

### EPA's EJScreen Toolkit

<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>

Explore the EPA's Environmental Justice screening and mapping toolkit to learn more about how environmental indicators and demographic data can be used to implement programs to protect people and the planet from injustice.

### Chesapeake Bay Environmental Justice and Equity Dashboard

<https://chesapeake-deij2-chesbay.hub.arcgis.com/#ExampleUses>

Explore the Dashboard to learn about you can incorporate environmental justice and equity into your work. The Dashboard supports a wide variety of users including: restoration planning, conservation, watershed groups, local planners, state agencies, and more.