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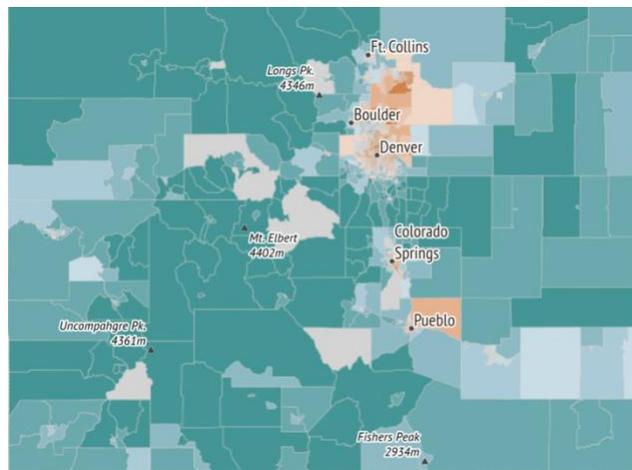
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New Map Reveals Pollution Burden on Communities of Color in Colorado

Environmental justice mapping effort finds stark racial disparities in pollution exposure

Berkeley, CA (January 15, 2021) – [Mapping for Environmental Justice](#) (MEJ), a team of policy and data experts working with communities across the United States to measure environmental justice, recently released its Colorado [map](#). The mapping effort identified several environmental justice hotspots, including North Denver, Pueblo, and Greeley. The hotspots have high levels of pollution burden and are disproportionately communities of color or low-income.



[MEJ's Colorado map](#) shows that communities of color breathe nearly twice as much diesel pollution and are 1.5 times more likely to live near a Superfund site than white communities. The disparity holds across an array of environmental hazards: from wastewater releases to air toxics, Coloradans of color are consistently exposed to more pollution.

MEJ's maps combine population characteristics and pollution indicators into an overall environmental justice score for every area in a state. Adam Buchholz, MEJ's executive director, believes quantifying environmental justice is a crucial step in "showing how pollution and environmental hazards disproportionately, consistently, and predominantly affect low-income communities and communities of color."

Buchholz founded MEJ after seeing the effects of pollution firsthand while working as a teacher in Denver Public Schools. "These maps show the same injustices I saw my students experiencing every day. Many of them had chronic asthma, and many of them lived in areas where there is a high level of air pollution. Our most vulnerable communities are exposed to the worst society has to offer, be it toxic waste dumps, air pollution, traffic, or unhealthy water." For Buchholz, environmental justice mapping is a starting point to remediate past and prevent future harms to historically burdened communities. "Using maps like this to target clean energy and anti-pollution programs is a first step toward fixing the problem," he said.

Colorado's environmental justice hotspots are a consequence of decades of regulatory and permitting processes that, often explicitly, forced the state's most vulnerable people to live near poison. As a result, communities of color in places like Weld County, Denver's Elyria-Swansea neighborhood, and Pueblo have nearly twice as many hazardous waste facilities and wastewater

releases compared to compared to upper-income, predominantly white communities. The same pattern is true for low-income communities.

Mapping for Environmental Justice, a project of Earth Island Institute, is a team of policy, data-science, and community-outreach experts working with communities to develop environmental justice maps for advocacy and policymaking. Their easy-to-use, publicly available maps paint a holistic picture of intersecting environmental, social, and health impacts experienced by communities across the U.S. MEJ envisions a society where all people live in healthy and safe communities regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Find out more at www.mappingforej.berkeley.edu.