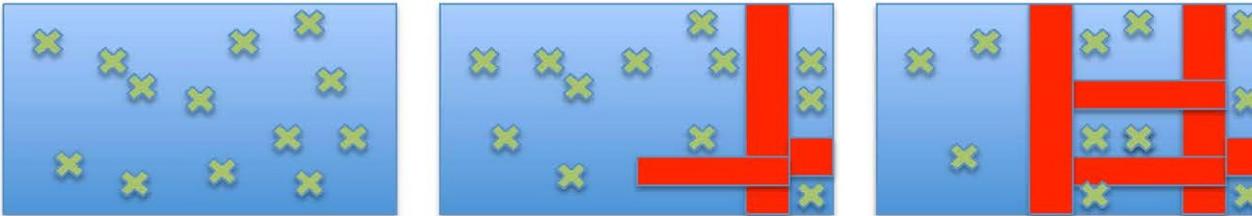


Activity: Environmental Justice Tarp Activity 15 minutes

Spread tarp on the ground. Instruct attendees to find a place on the tarp (A). Have people extend their arms, then turn in place, then do a jumping jack. Lay pieces of tarp (or butcher paper or other material of different sizes) onto the tarp one by one asking people to move to a new place after layering each piece of tarp. Do not layer pieces of tarp equally or symmetrically on top of the tarp. Cluster layers to emphasize industry and cumulative impacts. Explain that people cannot touch the layered pieces of tarp and cannot step over them (B). Have attendees do the above movements after layering each piece of tarp and asking them to move to a new location. Doing the movements will become more and more difficult for the people surrounded by others and multiple layers of tarp (C).

Examples: **X** = person  = layer of tarp (or other material)



Post Questions:

- *What may the layers of tarp represent? (i.e. barriers (natural or unnatural), industry, pollution, etc.)*
- *If you became stuck, how did it make you feel?*
- *Were the layers of tarp put there by accident or on purpose?*
- *If you were on the outside of the layered tarp, how did this make you feel?*
- *Can you see how this is a depiction of a possible environmental injustice?*
- *Would you change anything about this activity if you were to do it with your students?*
- *How would you represent race and class in this exercise?*

Mapping our Community Environment

The goal of this exercise is to identify major sources of pollution in Los Angeles and learn about environmental justice activism in our local communities.

Follow the instructions below with your fellow group members and together answer the questions provided.

1. Look over the map of Los Angeles and the major sources of pollution marked in various colors. Use the map legend provided to figure out what each color represents.

- QUESTION: What kinds of pollution sources are highlighted on the map?
- QUESTION: What do you notice about how those pollution sources are distributed? (For example, do you notice any pollution sources in Beverly Hills or on the Westside?)

2. Place a sticker on the map where you live. Have all members of your group do the same.

- QUESTION: What do you notice about the distribution of where you and your group members live?
- QUESTION: Do you live close to any of the major pollution sources highlighted on the map? Do you know of other sources of pollution in your neighborhood?

3. Review the information cards provided about cases of environmental justice activism in Los Angeles. Find the location of each of these cases marked on the map.

- QUESTION: What kinds of environmental justice activism have taken place in Los Angeles? Do you know of any other environmental justice activism in your community?

4. Be prepared to report back to the rest of the class about major sources of pollution in Los Angeles and environmental justice activism in your community.

Principles of Environmental Justice

([Printable PDF version](#))

Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, *The Principles* have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

- 1) **Environmental Justice** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2) **Environmental Justice** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- 3) **Environmental Justice** mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
- 4) **Environmental Justice** calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
- 5) **Environmental Justice** affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
- 6) **Environmental Justice** demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
- 7) **Environmental Justice** demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
- 8) **Environmental Justice** affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
- 9) **Environmental Justice** protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
- 10) **Environmental Justice** considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of

international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

11) **Environmental Justice** must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

12) **Environmental Justice** affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13) **Environmental Justice** calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14) **Environmental Justice** opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15) **Environmental Justice** opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16) **Environmental Justice** calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17) **Environmental Justice** requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

The Proceedings to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit are available from the **United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice**, 475 Riverside Dr. Suite 1950, New York, NY 10115.

Another source of information is the [Environmental Justice Resource Center](#) (EJRC) at Clark Atlanta University.

Return to the [Environmental Justice / Environmental Racism](#) Homepage

Last modified: 6 April 1996

<http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>

Case Study: 1981-2018 Exide and Lead Poisoning of South East Los Angeles

What is Exide?



For over 30 years, Exide Technologies owned and operated a lead battery recycling facility in South East Los Angeles. The facility processed an average of 120,000 tons of lead annually, equivalent to 11 million batteries.

Exide company melted down old car batteries in the city of Vernon, California but it didn't do a good job of controlling lead from escaping into the air. As a result, the facility was found to have contaminated an estimated 100,000 individuals living in the surrounding

residential neighborhoods, as well as workers at the facility, with lead, arsenic, and other heavy metals. Lead contamination from Exide impacted cities of Bell, Commerce, Huntington Park, East Los Angeles, Maywood, and Vernon, who are predominantly working-class Latino communities. The facility shut down in 2015, and Governor Brown approved \$176.6 million to do community cleanup. The Exide lead contamination is now one of the largest residential cleanups in the country.

How does lead impact human health?

Lead is a neurotoxin; when it gets into the body it impacts the brain and nervous system. It can have serious health impacts on people who have been exposed, especially children, by affecting their brain development, educational achievement, and causing behavioral changes. According to World Health Organization (WHO), exposure to lead also causes anemia, high blood pressure, kidney failure, and toxicity to the reproductive organs. There is no safe level of exposure to lead. WHO classifies lead as 1 of 10 chemicals of major public health concern affecting the health of communities and workers.¹



Photo credit: KPCC online www.scpr.org
September 2013, public hearing at Boyle Heights: pressuring Exide to operate safely in the community of South East LA.

¹ <http://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/lead-poisoning-and-health>

In particular lead can affect children's brain development resulting in reduced intelligence quotient (IQ), behavioral changes such as reduced attention span and increased antisocial behavior and reduced educational attainment. Lead exposure also causes anemia, hypertension, renal impairment, immunotoxicity and toxicity to the reproductive organs. The neurological and behavioral effects of lead are believed to be irreversible.

Sources of lead exposure could come from the environment where people live or work. Exposure could come through inhaling lead particles generated by smelting materials that contain lead, stripping lead paint or using leaded gasoline or fuel. Another source of exposure can be from ingesting lead-contaminated water, food and/or soil.

How have community organizations responded?

Community based organizations and Environmental Justice groups such as East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (EYCEJ), Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), and other local community groups organized to achieve Environmental Justice for communities in South East Los Angeles. These groups played a major role in holding state agencies accountable for allowing Exide operate without a valid permit, polluting the environment with lead, and causing a health burden to the communities. Members of these organizations and Supervisor Hilda Solis went to Sacramento to demand funding for soil testing and lead cleanup.



In 2016, Governor Brown signed legislation approving funding in the amount of \$176.6 million. This amount was targeted at sampling 10,000 properties and cleaning only 2,500 of the properties with the highest lead found in soil. The funding was allocated to DTSC to oversee the lead sampling and cleanup project within the Preliminary Investigation Area (PIA) of 1.7 miles radius from the former Exide facility.

The Cleanup Project

In 2015, Exide shut down permanently and agreed to clean up the facility and few residential properties that were impacted the most by the lead contamination. As of April 2018, Exide has cleaned 186 properties within the Preliminary Investigation Area (PIA).

DTSC approved cleanup plans that started with soil sampling (also known as Phase I of the project) of the 10,000 properties found in the PIA, including residential properties, daycare centers, schools, parks, and other properties. Lead sampling in residential yards—excluding driveways and interiors—began in 2016. As of April 2018, 8,503 properties have been sampled. DTSC is behind schedule on Phase II, which is the removal of soil tested for lead and exceeded

the state's 400 parts per million (ppm) mark. Phase II of this project consists of removing approximately 18 inches of contaminated soil, refiling it with clean soil, and landscaping.

In addition to addressing public health and environmental justice concerns, the goal of the Exide cleanup project includes opportunities for community engagement and job training for residents. This includes the Project Labor Agreement (PLA) initiative which mandates contractors to hire 50% of the workforce from the communities impacted by Exide.

DTSC, UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health (LOSH), NATEC international, INC., and the Los Angeles Trade Technical College (LATTTC) created a workforce development program, **Workforce for Environmental Restoration in Communities (WERC)** to provide job trainings and occupational health and safety trainings. Between 2017-2018, about 90 community members had received Hazmat and other project related trainings and certificates. Some of these individuals went to work on Phase I of the project in 2016/2017 and are now waiting for employment on Phase II.

There is a significant public mistrust of DTSC for allowing Exide to operate without a proper permit for decades. The community continues to demand the following actions:

- 1) Expedite cleanup
- 2) Expand the PIA from 1.7 mile radius to 4.5 miles.
- 3) Improve cleanup plan to include driveways, attics and lead paint removal.
- 4) Find additional funding to cleanup all of the properties.

The case of Exide is one of the largest cleanups in the country, and while it is still ongoing, it is important to note the continued efforts of community-based organizations such as CBE and EYCEJ, as well as community members who are eager to see this resolve for the betterment of their communities, families, and children, whose lives are impacted by lead poisoning the most. There is no safe level of lead exposure, especially to children.



Photo credit: KPCC online www.scpr.org

October 2014, Diana del Pozo-Mora and her seven-year-old daughter, Josephine Mora at a town hall meeting.

EXIDE TIMELINE

1981: GOULD, INC., lead battery recycling plant was issued an “interim status document” and began operation at 2700 S Indiana Avenue, Vernon, California, 90058.

1984: Gould became Gould-National Battery (GNB).

1999: The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) became aware of lead particulates that leaked into the storm water retention pond and ordered the company to clean it up.

2000: Exide Technologies acquired GNB officially and took over all operations including the plant in Vernon.

2004: DTSC implements emergency status and forces Exide to clean up lead-contaminated drainage channel, and public areas.

2006: Exide had been operating a hazardous waste facility without a valid permit. DTSC submits a draft permit for public comment in June of 2006.

2007: A scientific study by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board shows “Exide has contributed through deposition approximately 424 lbs. of lead in both 2004 and 2005 and 712 lbs of lead in 2006 to the watershed.” The finding that over 1500 pounds of lead deposited was shared with DTSC officials.

2008: DTSC forces Exide to clean up lead-contaminated drainage channel, and public areas again.

2010: DTSC fines Exide over \$100,000 for excessive release of lead and environmental pollution.

2013: Exide shuts down temporarily due to high levels of lead and arsenic emission.

2014: After 32 years of operating with temporary permit to recycle lead from batteries, on June 17th DTSC gives Exide 30 days to submit a complete permit application.

In August 2014, a federal grand jury serves Exide with a subpoena stating criminal liability investigation for mishandling hazardous material transportation and emissions.

2015: Exide closes permanently to avoid criminal charges.

2016: Governor Brown approves funding for residential cleanup in the amount of \$176.6 million.

2018: The safe closure and evacuation of the Exide facility is in progress as community cleanup takes place sparingly. Exide and DTSC cleaned a total of 270 properties to date, Exide being responsible for 186 cleanups.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does the story of the Exide facility represent a case of environmental injustice?
2. Who was affected by Exide and how?
3. What role have government agencies played in this case?
4. What role have community organizations played in this case?
5. What outcome would you like to see from this case? How can this outcome be achieved?

Sources of information:

Timeline: Exide's run-ins with regulators: <http://projects.scpr.org/timelines/exide-shutdown-timeline/>

News article: After Decades of Pollution, State Details Cleanup From LA's Exide Battery Plant: <https://www.kqed.org/news/11553538>

Lead poisoning and Health from the World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/lead-poisoning-and-health>

California Environmental Justice Alliance: Governor Brown Proposes \$176.6 Million Exide Clean Up Plan: <https://caleja.org/2016/02/governor-brown-proposes-176-6-million-exide-clean-up-plan/>