



# The Environmental Justice Report

A publication of DEC's Office of Environmental Justice – Fall 2018



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The effects of climate change on our environment are too important to ignore. New York State is already experiencing warmer temperatures and more severe storms, as well as shifts in storm patterns. Most significantly, we have experienced an increase in heavy rain and snow events, resulting in an increased risk of flooding.

From higher temperatures to more severe weather events, climate change poses a risk to New York's infrastructure, ecosystems, and, most importantly, our communities. The effects of climate change threaten air quality, food sources, water safety, and the overall health and the well-being of all New Yorkers.

Extreme weather and increased rainfall contribute to water contamination and the spread of bacterial infections. While this worsens during warmer seasons, flooding from increased rainfall in cooler

seasons can lead to a mixing of storm-water with chemicals, road salt, sewage, and garbage, etc. Since urbanized areas lack natural groundcover, this pollution-ridden cocktail ends up in ditches and storm drains, leading to stream and surface water contamination.

Coastal communities will see a loss of livable areas due to tidal or sunny day flooding caused by sea level rise. Warming global temperatures lead to warmer lake temperatures and later freezing of our lakes during the winter months. When cold Arctic air mixes with unseasonably warm lake water, it results in lake effect snow. Some climate scientists believe that while major snowstorms and record-breaking cold events will become less frequent, when they do occur, they will be more intense and long-lasting.

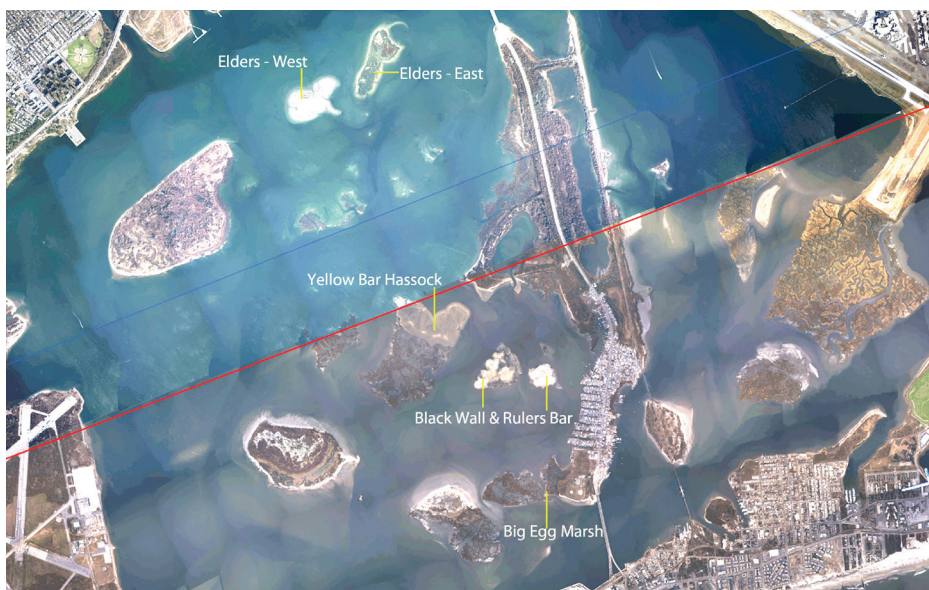
Certain groups of people could face a disproportionate risk from climate change impacts. These groups include low-income households, communities of color, immigrants, limited English profi-

cient groups, indigenous peoples, children and pregnant women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and persons with chronic medical conditions. From an increase in respiratory problems and potential increases in Type 2 diabetes, to increased instances of strokes and car crashes in high traffic areas, climate change is a threat to our environment and our health.

New York is working to adapt to these climate change events to protect our communities and reduce the costs of rebuilding and recovering from events linked to climate change, such as Superstorm Sandy. The Community Risk and Resiliency Act (CRRRA), strengthens New York's preparedness for the effects of climate change and helps protect communities against severe weather and sea level rise.

The CRRRA requires DEC, in consultation with the New York State Department of State, to create a comprehensive package of actions that strengthens and reimagines our infrastructure with future storms in mind. This includes adopting sea level rise projections, mitigation strategies, guidance for natural resiliency measures, and the development of model local laws. In addition, Governor Andrew Cuomo's 2018 State of the State address called for development of a Climate Justice Road Map, with consultation from New York's Environmental Justice and Just Transition Working Group, to identify actions that will address the needs of vulnerable communities.

For more information on how New York is taking on the challenges presented by climate change and increasing community resilience, visit our website <https://dec.ny.gov/energy/44992.html>.





## BROWNFIELDS BRING OPPORTUNITIES

A brownfield is any real property where hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants are present at levels that exceed New York's health-based or environmental standards. This contamination affects the future use of former industrial or commercial sites, limiting the potential for reuse or redevelopment of these properties. Reinvesting in former brownfields encourages the utilization of existing infrastructure, and further reinvestment and job growth in the community.

DEC's remediation and enforcement initiatives, such as its State Superfund and Brownfield programs, ensure the timely and efficient cleanup of contaminated properties to protect public health and potentially spur redevelopment of these sites. DEC employees, like Environmental Engineer Sarah Saucier, work to make sure these properties are cleaned up for the benefit of the communities where they are located.

Sarah is the project manager of the Saranac Lake Gas Company Superfund site, a former manufactured gas plant site in one of the Adirondack Park's most popular destinations. Sarah and other DEC staff assigned to this project oversees all aspects of the cleanup, ensuring that contractors operate according to the approved work plans. "We have environmental controls out here to make sure that we're not spreading the contamination anywhere, that we're actually cleaning things out," Sarah says.

Cleaning up a site can take several years. DEC reviews, oversees and tracks each project's progress from the investigation, design, and completion of each remedial measure to certifying the completion of the cleanup and planning for any future site management needs.

To learn more about Sarah's work and other stories about our staff, please check out our On the Front Lines series (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t68utrCpWXY>)

To learn more about the brownfields, our Brownfield Cleanup Program, and Superfund sites, visit <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/84286.html>



## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: UNITED COMMUNITY CENTER

When we think about New York's agricultural resources, we tend to look to our rural communities, which include more than seven million acres of farmland and 36,000 family-owned farms. New York is also home to an increasing number of urban farms, which actively make efficient use of available resources to cultivate, process, and distribute nutritious and safe foods in our larger cities. These farms provide food security, educational opportunities, and even work experience to urban residents across our state.

In 2017, Governor Cuomo announced Green Jobs for Youth as a part of his aggressive environmental justice platform. The community organizations that received funding are creating or continuing programs that encourage entrepreneurship in urban agriculture and provide the skills young people need for emerging job opportunities in clean energy and green infrastructure construction.

United Community Centers, Inc., a social justice-driven community center and a recipient of \$100,000 from OEJ's Green Jobs for Youth grant, is working to create opportunities for youth to gain urban agriculture skills in their local Brooklyn community. Their East New York Farms! Project partners with the U.S. Forest Service to train 30 youth interns to work in 20 different gardens and two farms in East New York this spring.

The youth involved in the program assisted with the distribution of 7,000 bags of compost and the sale of 1,500 plants. These interns worked at the farmers markets during the summer and participated in 16 workshops about sustainable agriculture, social justice, community history, job skills, and financial management.

To learn more about our grant opportunities, please visit us as <http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html>.

## TIPS FOR WEATHERIZING YOUR HOME

The cold chill of winter can have an equally chilling effect on your heating bills and overall health. If stressing about monstrously high heating rates makes you shiver, here are a few low-cost ideas to keep the cold air outside and more of your money in your wallet:

- **Make sure your heat sources aren't blocked.**

- ~ Moving furniture away from radiators and vents keeps the air circulating and may improve the design flow of your room

- **Look for any gaps at the bottom of your doors and windows and seal them.**

- ~ Placing a towel across the bottom of the door is a nice quick fix.

- ~ At-home window insulation kits are a good investment to cover window gaps and can be easily found at local hardware stores.

- ~ Drapes can enhance your living spaces while adding a layer of warmth between you and the cold outdoors.

- **Check your heating system.**

- ~ Any heating system should be checked annually to make sure it is running safely and optimally.

- **Use a ceiling fan, if you have one.**

- ~ Did you know that by running a ceiling fan in reverse, you can push air downward?

For more tips to learn how to save energy and cut costs, visit

**[www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov).**

Additionally, New York State Homes and Community Renewal's (NYSHCR) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) helps income-eligible families and individuals reduce their heating and cooling costs and address health and safety issues in their homes through energy-efficiency measures.

The program consists of an assessment, or "energy audit," of the residence to identify specific measures to increase energy efficiency. Eligibility requirements can be found at NYSHCR's website ([http://www.nyshcr.org/Programs/WeatherizationAssistance/forms/WAP\\_Income\\_Eligibility.pdf](http://www.nyshcr.org/Programs/WeatherizationAssistance/forms/WAP_Income_Eligibility.pdf)). Program services are available to both homeowners and renters, with priority given to senior citizens, families with children, and persons with disabilities. Households with members who receive Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) benefits or certain other forms of public assistance are automatically eligible for WAP services.

For additional information and forms, please visit (<http://www.nyshcr.org/programs/weatherizationassistance/>). If you have additional questions about this program, please contact the WAP central office in Albany by phone at 518-474-5700 or by e-mail at [weatherization@nyshcr.org](mailto:weatherization@nyshcr.org).

## **SUSTAINABLE HOLIDAY IDEAS**

It's not easy being green, especially around the holidays. From excessive purchases to disposable dinnerware, wasted food, and high electricity bills, the holiday season takes a toll on the environment and your bank account. However, there are many opportunities for the consumer to be more sustainable during the holiday season. Remember, the best way to have a sustainable holiday is to simplify, which will reduce your costs, stress and waste.

**Here are a few tips you might want to try:**

### **Buy Second-Hand Refurbished Goods**

If you didn't have it before, it's new to you. With a few exceptions, you'll find that many items are just as good with a few miles on them.

### **Upcycling**

Repairing older items is nothing new, but upcycling can transform an old piece of clothing or furniture into something unique. Upcycling is a great way to save money, protect the environment, and express your creative side.

### **Reuse It**

Do you have Christmas cards you didn't hand out, or cards you received last year? Don't commit them to the recycling bin, reuse them! Use them to make new, crafty cards or holiday ornaments and bags.

### **Make it Yourself**

This is also not a new trend. There is an entire marketing empire dedicated to the art of Do It Yourself (DIY). Handmade pieces are a wonderful way to save resources and money, while showing off your creative side. And if your talents are in the kitchen, make the holidays all about the food. Cookies, pies and casseroles make wonderful gifts, and not only show you care, but can be shared (and can save you money).

### **Quality over Quantity**

Not all new purchases are bad. When you spend your hard-earned money, make sure you purchase gifts that are long-lasting or can be reused and later recycled.

### **Shop Conscientiously**

Try to shop at local stores. Shopping locally reduces car emissions and helps to support the local economy at the same time.

### **Use Sustainable Materials**

So maybe you aren't that creative, or just don't have the time to make that signature dish. When a previously loved treasure or handmade piece of art just won't do, there are ways to make that pricey purchase a little more sustainable:

- Look for items that don't have packaging. Try to avoid plastics, polyesters, hardwoods and other unsustainable materials.



- Say no to plastic bags and wrapping paper. Consider reusing gift bags, paper grocery store bags, newspapers or using sustainable materials like cotton or other natural fabrics to wrap gifts.

Check our website for more sustainable holiday ideas. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8829.html#Food>.

## **REMINDERS**

### **Conservationist Magazine Sale**

Need a last-minute gift for that environmentally conscious person? Give them a subscription to the *Conservationist*. Published six times a year, our New York State-focused magazine is filled with informative and entertaining articles covering a broad range of environmental and natural history-related topics, including fishing, hiking, outdoor recreation, travel, hunting, and nature studies.

Subscribe or renew today (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/24071.html>)

### **Summer Camp Registration Reminder**

It's never too early to start thinking about summer. DEC's Environmental Education Camp registration opens January 23, 2019. DEC camps combine environmental education, hunter education programs, and outdoor recreation into an adventurous experience. We use a fun, hands-on approach to teach campers about the environment. A week at one of our amazing camps is a great after-Christmas gift.

Visit <https://dec.ny.gov/education/2013.html> to see the 2019 Camp Schedules and Availability



## APPLY FOR FUNDING

Are you a community-based organization looking to fund a project? OEJ offers grants to not-for-profit organizations to address environmental harms in low income and environmental justice communities. For additional information on OEJ grants and a complete list of previous project awardees, please visit our website: [www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html).

## WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

Do you have concerns about the environment where you live? Do you want to make your voice heard? Do you want to stay informed about the different environmental issues affecting the state of New York?

## JOIN OUR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE LISTSERV

Go to: [www.dec.ny.gov/public/65855.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/65855.html) and sign up to receive regular updates from the Office of Environmental Justice. Stay current on the issues that are important to you. As always, you can contact the Office of Environmental Justice with any concerns by sending an e-mail to: [justice@dec.ny.gov](mailto:justice@dec.ny.gov).

Please include:

- Your location/address
- City, town, village or borough
- The environmental concerns you wish to address
- List the potential source if you know
- How or whether you wish to be contacted

## HELP US SERVE YOU



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