

Fighting for Environmental Justice

Penn Loh

Across the U.S., low-income communities and communities of color have been fighting for environmental justice. For decades, these communities have seen their health, economy, and environments destroyed by environmental injustice.

Oil refineries, toxic waste sites, and trash dumps are more likely to be placed in low-income communities and communities of color than in wealthier areas. In Boston, communities of color like Roxbury suffer from high concentrations of diesel pollution and the highest asthma hospitalization rates in Massachusetts.

In Chelsea, Massachusetts, a working-class community with many new immigrants, residents recently fought off a proposed diesel-fueled power plant that was to be located across from the city's elementary school (see p. 23). These same communities are forced to host the filthiest components of the *fossil fuel* economy, but they receive the smallest share of the vast wealth it generates.

We all contribute to and benefit from the fos-

sil fuel economy, but there are vast differences in how much. The U.S. has less than 5% of the world's population, but we use more than 25% of the world's fossil fuels. There are also inequalities *within* the U.S. For example, the average suburban household in Greater Boston buys 85% more gas and uses 20% more electricity than city households. The world's wealthy have benefited the most from *unsustainable* practices. Six of the ten largest corporations in the world in 2007 were oil companies; another three were auto companies.

Low-income communities and communities of color must lead the way towards a green, sustainable future. We cannot trust those who have benefited so much from the current system to fix the problems in a way that will benefit us. We must lead the way ourselves.

Penn Loh is the Executive Director of Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE), an environmental justice group based in Roxbury, MA. This article is based on the Boston Green Justice Coalition's Vision Statement.

The Green Justice Movement at Home and Abroad

- ▶ At the Environmental Justice Resource Center <www.ejrc.cau.edu/>, you can read the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice as well as access a directory of People of Color Environmental Groups.
- ▶ The Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative <www.ejcc.org> promotes "climate justice."
- ▶ Evo Morales, president of Bolivia, has taken a stand on climate change. Read about his "10 Commandments to Save the Planet" at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.



Residents protest the Chelsea diesel power plant.