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Agreement Reached on Environmental Justice Proposal

LOS ANGELES – Efforts to address the issue of environmental justice in California moved forward yesterday as members of the California Environmental Protection Agency’s Advisory Committee on Environmental Justice reached agreement on the final draft of their recommendations for developing a comprehensive environmental justice program in California.

“This could be the turning point for environmental justice policy in California,” said Dr. Joseph Lyou, Executive Director of the California Environmental Rights Alliance and a member of the committee.

The report addresses a wide range of public health and environmental protection issues. The most controversial items include efforts to incorporate key elements of the Precautionary Principle into Cal/EPA decision-making processes and calls for reducing cumulative environmental impacts. The Precautionary Principle places the burden of proof on polluters, incorporates community-based concerns, and supports alternatives that prevent, minimize, or eliminate environmental harm. (See www.sehn.org for more information about the Precautionary Principle.)

California law defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” Most environmental justice advocates endorse a broader definition that focuses on communities of color and low-income neighborhoods and incorporates the principles of civil rights and environmental protection.

The draft report will go through a 60-day public comment period starting July 1st. The advisory committee expects to finalize the recommendations at a two-day meeting, Sept. 29-30, in Oakland, California.

The Cal/EPA Advisory Committee on Environmental Justice includes a broad range of stakeholders from environmental and community organizations, large and small California businesses, and local government and environmental regulatory officials. (See [www.calepa.ca.gov/EnvJustice/Committee/.](http://www.calepa.ca.gov/EnvJustice/Committee/))

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