
HAZARDOUS WASTE, RACE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

APPROVED BY THE 207TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1995)

PREFACE

The 204th General Assembly (1992) mandated that “the Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit as lead entity in consultation with the Committee on Social Witness Policy and Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit . . . prepare a resolution that clarifies the policy of the PC(USA) on the issue of ‘Toxic Waste, Race, and the Environment,’ suggest steps the PC(USA) may take in responding to this issue, and report to the 205th General Assembly (1993)” (*Minutes*, 1992, Part I, pp. 627–28).

The 207th General Assembly (1995) approved a recommendation to amend Section “A. Basic Policies on Hazardous Waste” of the policy statement entitled “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice” adopted by the 202nd General Assembly (1990). The background statement and recommendations, as approved by the 207th General Assembly (1995), appear in the following pages.

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Background

I. Introduction

In highly industrialized nations where resource intensive mass production and high consumption are norms, the production of hazardous waste has exceeded our capability to manage it properly. It can no longer be safely contained within nature. Consequently, it poses a serious threat to the environment, human populations, animal and plant life.¹ As landfills across the nation approach capacity, there has emerged an industry that moves tons of waste across state lines.² This study focuses upon some of the risks that hazardous waste storage and disposal pose for the poor and people of color.

People do not want hazardous production or waste sites in or near their community. Yet many waste sites are located in or close to densely populated neighborhoods. As plans are made for new manufacturing facilities and existing waste facilities reach capacity, decisions about new waste sites are frequently shrouded in protracted controversy as public resistance grows. Citizens in general are concerned about hazardous substances found in discarded goods. The concern involves risks from direct exposure of human populations in close proximity to waste facilities and from contamination of the air, water, and food chain.

There is growing fear in communities of color that decisions about the production and disposal of hazardous materials may be taking the path of least resistance. Since people of color have a history of disempowerment due to racism and its socioeconomic consequences, they feel particularly vulnerable. There is a strong fear that they are bearing a disproportionate burden of risks associated with industrial production and consumption. Some believe that communities of color are intentionally targeted.

Is race a factor influencing decisions on the disposition of hazardous materials? Some studies conclude that it is a central factor influencing the

¹"Rush to Burn," pp. 6, 18; Jeffrey Stinson, "State Puts Squeeze on Garbage Disposal," *The Ithaca [New York] Journal*, October 3, 1988, p. 4.

While these figures are relatively dated, they illustrated the point that waste production and disposal is a growing problem in the nation.

²Hazardous waste includes the broad category of products that are dangerous for human and other life forms. Toxic refers more specifically to hazardous chemicals.

location of hazardous facilities, including manufacturing and disposal.³ Other studies reach a different conclusion. The data in most instances show a strong correlation between race, economics, and the location of manufacturing complexes and hazardous storage and waste disposal sites.⁴ Viewed from this perspective, the data indicate that the poor and people of color are very likely to be disproportionately at risk.

We cannot accept a division between the poor and people of color, especially as it affects economic and environmental justice. We must achieve our ecological health together with social and economic health. If the poor and people of color are endangered, all people are endangered. The delicate fabric of the environment on which we all depend is endangered.

When people are in jeopardy as a consequence of race, economic deprivation, powerlessness, or a combination of these factors, the church must act. It must act because no people should be imperiled as a consequence of their race or socioeconomic condition. In the final analysis, the church's obligation lies not in providing definitive evidence that people of color are intentionally targeted, but in a theological- and biblical-based mandate to respond to the needs of people at risk no matter what the cause. However, our response must be informed. This requires that we seek to understand and address factors that endanger people.

II. Theological Biblical Foundation

The importance of the proclaimed Word has always been an essential characteristic of the Reformed tradition. "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim God?" (Romans 10:14, NRSV). Presbyterians, however, have never been content to be "hearers only" concerning the Word of God. Throughout history they have sought to exemplify the biblical ideal summarized in James 1:25, NRSV: "But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing." Action on behalf of those

³Bunyan and Paul Mahal, editors, *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse*, (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 64-81.

⁴Benjamin A. Goldman, *Not Just Prosperity: Achieving Sustainability with Environmental Justice*, (Washington, D.C., National Wildlife Federation; 1994).

who are disadvantaged is a central theme of justice. This theme is sharply focused in Micah 6:8, NRSV: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

God’s call for justice extends beyond right relationships in the human community. It includes the common good. The common good is invariably linked to the environment in which we live. Justice, therefore, transcends anthropocentric understandings and includes the environment on which human communities depend. The first two chapters of Genesis illustrate this point. Humankind is given responsibility for tilling and caring for the land. This is not limited to agriculture, but includes industrial production and consumption. Consequently, concern for the environment and our social well-being is tied to environmental health. The well-being of the human community, social and economic justice, and ecological health are bound up in a common web of mutuality that includes all of humankind. Thus, no segment of the human population can be environmentally at risk without jeopardizing the whole. We do indeed share a common ecological destiny.

III. Previous Proclamations of the Church

For more than twenty-five years, the Presbyterian church has consistently proclaimed that care for the environment is a hallmark of Christian responsibility inseparable from the Divine Call for communities of faith to seek justice. General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessors have responded to a heightened environmental awareness with policy statements that relate biblical vision and theological reflection to an analysis of contemporary environmental issues. Two substantive summaries of overall Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) policy on the environment are “Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal,” adopted by the 183rd General Assembly (1971) of the United Presbyterian Church⁵ and “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice,” adopted by the 202nd General Assembly (1990).⁶ The former calls for an “eco-ethic” wherein public and corporate

⁵*Minutes*, United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1971, Part I, pp. 574–83.

⁶*Minutes*, 1990, Part 1, pp. 647–90.

decision making would embody a responsible stewardship that anticipated potential hazards before they became critical. The latter links our socioeconomic well-being with ecological health and illuminates the unbreakable link between social, economic, and environmental justice.

The 196th General Assembly (1984) adopted policy statements that encouraged action to achieve what it called “a political economy” that would give special consideration to the needs of the socioeconomically disenfranchised as part of the overall push for ecological well-being. Included are the following statements:

We seek a political economy directed to the protection of the poor and [toward] sufficient and sustainable sustenance of all people;

We accept the responsibility of using political processes to check the abuses of power that would otherwise continue to victimize the earth and the poor;

And we insist that the costs of restoring the polluted environment and structuring sustainable practices of institutions be distributed equitably throughout our society.⁷

The 199th General Assembly (1987) was also quite clear in its view that justice and environmental concerns are inseparable. That assembly stated that Presbyterians should

seek out and offer support to rural residents [who] have become victims of pesticide poisoning through accidental sprayings, pesticide drift, and contaminated drinking water and to work with these people at the community level to cause local officials to clean up or correct the source of these problems; ... [and] encourage increased research and development of alternative means of pest control, other than toxic pesticides.⁸

“Eco-Justice” means that ecological health and wholeness and public health must be seen in conjunction with environmental justice.⁹ Consequently, we are urged to seek just solutions in the selection of sites for the production, use, and disposal of hazardous materials. The 202nd General Assembly (1990) encouraged

Support [for] just solutions to the selection of hazardous waste disposal sites. Incorporate social justice considerations into the criteria for siting waste-producing or handling facilities, recognizing the grievous impact hazardous wastes have had on poor and racial/ethnic communities.¹⁰

⁷*Minutes*, 1984, Part I, p. 349.

⁸*Minutes*, 1987, Part I, p. 796.

⁹*Minutes*, 1990, Part I, p. 648.

¹⁰*Minutes*, 1990, Part I, p. 668.

IV. The Challenge of Environmental Justice

In 1987, the United Church of Christ (UCC) published a report entitled "Toxic Waste and Race in the United States" that identified a strong correlation between race and the location of hazardous-waste treatment and storage facilities. It concluded that race, more than any other single factor, is the key in determining the location of hazardous waste facilities.¹¹ According to a recent review of sixty-four studies on the subject by Benjamin Goldman, sixty-three of sixty-four documented environmental disparities by race and income. The one exception Goldman noted was allegedly funded by one of the largest waste management firms in the nation.¹²

A 1994 follow-up to the 1987 UCC study entitled *Toxic Waste and Race Revisited* was conducted under the joint sponsorship of the Center for Policy Alternatives, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the UCC Commission for Racial Justice. Its findings confirm a correlation between race and the siting of hazardous facilities and show even greater racial disparities in the siting of toxic waste sites than found in the 1987 UCC study.¹³

A. *Some Contributing Factors*

Race is not the only social characteristic correlated with the siting of hazardous waste facilities. Racism is a pervasive social phenomenon that impacts a wide range of variables such as education, economic status, political clout, housing patterns, and employment opportunity. Various combinations of these variables can translate into powerlessness and diminished political clout with minimal influence on public policy.

While the data clearly show a disparity in sitings that correlates significantly with race, it is highly probable that a host of factors are producing the pattern of racial disparity. While correlations do not show causes, we are still confronted with a situation where a segment of the population faces disproportionate risks for hazardous

¹¹Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* (New York: United Church of Christ, 1987), p. xvii.

¹²Benjamin A. Goldman, *Not Just Prosperity: Achieving Sustainability with Environmental Justice* (Washington, D.C., National Wildlife Federation, 1994).

¹³Benjamin A. Goldman and Laura Fitton, *Toxic Wastes and Race Revisited: An update of the 1987 report on the racial and socioeconomic characteristics of communities with hazardous waste sites* (Washington D.C.: Center for Policy Alternatives, 1994).

waste production and disposal. A study conducted by the Highlander Research and Educational Center, with the support of the Tennessee Valley Authority, illumines many factors that probably contribute to environmental injustice. Although the Highlander study focuses primarily on the impact of the waste-disposal dilemma on rural communities in the Southeast, its findings have national implications because the poor, people of color in rural communities, and their urban counterparts share a common profile of powerlessness.

Waste management is a multibillion dollar industry that most likely will expand rapidly within the next decade. Moreover, a legal structure that defines garbage as commerce has helped produce a waste-management industry that is able to wield significant political clout, particularly in areas with a history of economic decline.¹⁴ Consequently, some of the prevailing historic patterns of exploitation are exploding into the area of environmental injustice with serious implications. In this respect, the findings of the Highlander study are ominous. Here is a summary conclusion of the report:

Current waste handling systems threaten our water, air, personal health and collective prosperity. In the past few years especially, with the enormous growth of the waste trade, the risks have been shifted disproportionately to rural, lower income, African American, Native [American] and Latino communities. Thanks to volunteer action by citizens in thousands of communities, some of the worst abuses are being curbed. But the production systems that create the waste are still in place, while federal policy failures and continued economic decline have made it even more difficult for local governments to manage waste or commercial waste enterprises. Finally, while state and local waste management policies have markedly improved under citizen pressure, the planning and regulatory *systems* that have in the past encouraged unsafe and even corrupt practices still have many problems.

We have been able to measure and test for significant differences in socio-economic and demographic variables at the census block level in three rural Tennessee counties where landfills are present and proposed. Our findings lend support to some rural people's suspicions that solid waste facilities are disproportionately proposed for and sited in low income neighborhoods and communities of color. To some extent these block-level results mirror waste siting inequities documented elsewhere between regions and communities.¹⁵

There seems to be two combinations of community characteristics that can individually put a community at risk. When combined they can have devastating consequences. The first is a combination of economic

¹⁴Highlander Research and Education Center and the Tennessee Valley Authority, *Dismantling the Barriers: Rural Communities, Public Participation, and the Solid Waste Policy Dilemma* (New Market, Tennessee: Highlander Center, July 1993),

¹⁵Highlander Research and Education Center and the Tennessee Valley Authority *Dismantling the Barriers: Rural Communities, Public Participation, and the Solid Waste Policy Dilemma* (New Market, Tennessee: Highlander Center, July 1993), p. vii.

depression, rural locality, high concentration of people of color, and a history of race-based discrimination. The historic lack of political power and economic clout make African American, Hispanic American, and Native American communities attractive targets for waste facility sitings. Such places as Emelle, Alabama; Charles City County, Virginia; Hancock County, Georgia; Greene County, Mississippi; Haywood, Tennessee; Caswell County, North Carolina; Rapides Parish, Louisiana; and many other places in the Southeast with high concentrations of African American populations are either already host to large waste landfills or have them under consideration. In the Southwest, landfills are frequently sited among Hispanic populations such as in Hudspeth County, Texas, where two-thirds of the population is Hispanic; and in Loving, New Mexico, with an 80 percent Hispanic population.¹⁶ Hispanic communities throughout the Southwest and West are confronted with serious environmental disparities. Communities around Maquilas along the Texas, New Mexico, and California borders have enormous environmental contamination.¹⁷

Even within this set of communities, Native American communities are strongly devastated. Not only are they economically deprived with very little political clout, they are, by and large, outside the regulatory infrastructure. The waste-management industry is well aware that once a permit is obtained from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, their operations can take place with little or no regulation. Few reservations have any kind of environmental laws; probably none have the political clout to enforce them.¹⁸ According to a 1991 Greenpeace report, there is a special Office of the Nuclear Waste Negotiator set up within the Department of Energy to find states or reservations that are willing to host repositories of nuclear waste.¹⁹ Some tribal governments, as well as poor counties, have responded to financial incentives offered by the Department of Energy for accepting nuclear waste. There is mounting opposition to this idea among Native Americans. Consequently, many people in reservations are split over the issue, ironically caught between the pressing need

¹⁶Highlander Study, *Dismantling the Barriers*, pp. 1–13.

¹⁷More information on this subject can be obtained from Southwest Organizing Project, 210 10th St. SW, Albuquerque, NM, 87102.

¹⁸Highlander Study, *Dismantling the Barriers*, pp. 1–13.

See a report of the National Indian Nuclear Waste Policy Committee, March 16–17, 1993.

¹⁹Bradley Angel, “The Toxic Threat to Indian Lands” *Greenpeace*, June 1991.

for economic development and the hazardous threat of nuclear waste. All too often the poor and people of color face such grim choices.²⁰

The second community characteristic is a combination of mining, adequate transportation infrastructure, favorable political climate, absentee ownership of land, and poverty. This combination makes areas like Appalachia a favorite target for the waste-management industry. Mining sites become landfill sites. In some areas mining operators and waste managements operators are interlinked. This pattern can be seen from Appalachia to California.²¹

As indicated by various studies, when the above two characteristics are combined, the consequences for marginalized people are serious. Paul Mohai and Bunyan Bryant summarized the findings of fifteen different studies that systematized information about the distribution of people by income, race, and their exposure to environmental hazards. In twelve of fourteen cases where income was measured, the distribution of environmental pollution was inequitable. In ten of the eleven cases in which race was measured, there were inequities.²² Benjamin Goldman found the same pattern in sixty-three of sixty-four studies he reviewed.²³ When race and income are combined, communities of color are especially vulnerable.

The conclusion that people of color bear a disproportionate share of the risks associated with the production and disposal of hazardous materials is supported by a convincing body of evidence. When socioeconomic conditions render a segment of the population susceptible to hazardous waste sitings, the data show that waste management industries do target these areas. When race renders a population vulnerable to hazardous sitings, the data show that these populations are targeted. When race and economic status are combined, and unmistakable profile of targeting

²⁰Robert Bryce "Nuclear Waste's Last Stand: Apache Land," *Christian Science Monitor*. September 2, 1994. "One Woman Fights Nuclear Dumping," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 1994.

²¹Highlander Study, *Dismantling the Barriers*, pp. 1-11.

²²Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai, editors, *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 165-67.

²³Benjamin A. Goldman, *Not Just Prosperity: Achieving Sustainability with Environmental Justice* (Washington, D.C.: National Wildlife Federation, 1994).

emerges. Whether communities are targeted because they are poor or because they are people of color is irrelevant. The risks these communities face are exactly the same. Understanding the socioeconomic and racial mechanisms that cause this disparity is essential for finding solutions. But they are not essential for establishing the existence of the disparity. The evidence is sufficient to remove any reasonable doubt that the poor and people of color are bearing a disproportionate burden of the risks associated with the production and disposal of hazardous substances.

Scientific data have become an important factor in the debate about hazardous waste and race. While we await the collection of additional data for conclusive evidence, sufficient evidence is currently available to indicate that both race and income put certain groups in our society at greater risk than others.

B. *Some Health Risk Factors*

The health risks posed by environmental contaminants are not fully assessed at this point. Yet there are numerous indications that something serious is awry. Here are a few examples.

Scientists are discovering that environmental contaminants are altering the hormonal balance in some animal species and disrupting reproductive cycles. Such disruptions have the potential of setting species on a collision course with extinction. Humans also are potentially affected. While scientists do not agree on the extent of the damage, there is no dispute about the problem.²⁴ Rachael Carson could not have been more prophetic when she noted in *Silent Springs*, published in 1962, that humanity neither understood nor appreciated the environmental effects of plunging headlong into the chemical age. The springs are no longer silent. They are speaking loud and their message is clear. Are we listening?

The Defense Department chose a Hispanic community fifteen miles east of Loving, New Mexico, for the construction of a Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). This is one of the largest U.S. disposal facilities for military nuclear waste. According to the Southwest Information and Research Center in Albuquerque, the natural

²⁴William K. Stevens, "Pesticides May Leave Legacy of Hormonal Chaos," *New York Times*, August 23, 1994.

geological profile of the area makes contamination of groundwater and surface water virtually unavoidable.²⁵

A Chicago chemical company dumped thousands of tons of organochlorine pesticides (aldrin, endrin, and dieldrin) in Hardemann County, Tennessee, a poor white rural community. No one paid attention until residents began experiencing birth defects, liver damage, and other serious health problems. When the U.S. Geological Survey studied the dump site, it discovered that pesticides had entered major groundwater aquifers and are now projected to reach the city of Memphis before the year 2000.²⁶

The lands of the Navajo and of the Laguna Pueblo peoples in Arizona and New Mexico, of the Spokane and Ute in the Pacific Northwest, and of the Lakota and Chippewa in the Dakotas, are pockmarked with active and abandoned uranium mines. Around the mines lie acres of sandy residues, or tailing piles. Children play in this seemingly harmless material.²⁷

The sand may be “harmless” in appearance, but it is a dangerous waste that retains much of its original radioactivity. “The radioactivity found in uranium mill tailings results from uranium decay series radionuclides found with the uranium, such as thorium-230, radium-226, radon-222 and associated radon decay products.”²⁸ As this material decays, it releases radon gas into the atmosphere and is often blown away as radioactive dust, contaminating the air and surrounding land areas.²⁹ Cancer rates on some reservations have increased far above the national average. Navajo teenagers have organ cancer seventeen times the national average and bone cancer five times the national average.³⁰ Contamination from uranium mining is suspected.

²⁵*Alternative Policy Institute of the Center for Third World Organizing, Issue PAC #2* (1986) “Toxics & Minority Communities” (Oakland, CA) p. 1.

²⁶*Alternative Policy Institute of the Center for Third World Organizing, Issue PAC #2* (1986) “Toxics & Minority Communities” (Oakland, CA) p. 2.

²⁷*Alternative Policy Institute, Issue PAC #2* (1986) “Toxics & Minority Communities,” p. 8.

²⁸Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai, editors, *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, p. 153.

²⁹*Alternative Policy Institute, Issue PAC #2* (1986) “Toxics & Minority Communities,” p. 8.

Triana, Alabama, is an African American community whose diet has been based on fish from local streams and ponds. Only recently did residents learn that the fish was contaminated with dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB).

Environmental officials traced the DDT to a leaking Olin Chemical Company pesticide dump buried near the Tennessee River one hundred miles upstream from Triana. The source of the PCBs is still unknown. The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta ran tests on 1,000 Triana residents which showed that all residents had significant levels of DDT in their blood. Twelve residents had blood concentrations of DDT from two to four times higher than the highest level previously recorded in medical history.³¹

C. *The Next Link*

As resistance to waste siting grows in the face of increased public awareness, some waste-management industries are turning to developing countries as an alternative.³² Many developing countries are economically weak and politically powerless in relation to highly industrialized nations. Governments in developing countries are lured by large sums of money and waste packaged as economic development. An official of the World Bank caused a stir in Brazil when a memo he wrote leaked to the press. The memo suggested that the World Bank might do well to encourage transfer of waste to less developed countries where concern for pollution and long-term threats to health have a lower priority than in well-developed countries.³³ Governments of some developing countries are rejecting exported hazardous waste.³⁴

By protecting the environmental health of developing countries we also protect ourselves. Every year, about 100 to 150 million pounds of pesticides that are illegal here are exported to other

³⁰*Alternative Policy Institute, Issue PAC #2 (1986) "Toxics & Minority Communities,"* p. 8.

³¹*Alternative Policy Institute, Issue PAC #2 (1986) "Toxics & Minority Communities,"* pp. 1-2. See also Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), p. 2.

³²Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai, editors, *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, pp. 204-14.

Dana Alston, editor, "We Speak for Ourselves: Social Justice, Race and Environment," *Panos Institute*, December 1990, pp. 32-33.

³³Julia Michaels, "South Americans Shut Door on Toxic Imports," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 1992.

³⁴Dana Alston, editor, "We Speak for Ourselves: Social Justice, Race and Environment," *The Panos Institute*, December 1990, p. 33.

countries. The pesticides are banned in the U.S. because they may cause adverse effects on human and animal health and are destructive to the environment.³⁵ These chemicals continue to be manufactured in the U.S. and shipped overseas where farm workers are exposed, runoff from fields contaminates water supplies, drift from spraying pollutes the air, and the food chain is most likely contaminated. Finally, food treated with these chemicals is imported back into the U.S. and sold in grocery stores nationwide. We are globally interconnected. What we do to others will ultimately affect us. Therefore, the solution to the toxic waste problem in this country must not be that of passing it on to developing countries. Moreover, this option is as morally abhorrent as what is being done to the poor and people of color here. We are our brother's and sister's keeper.

V. The Role of Government

Federal, state, and local governments have a responsibility to ensure equal protection of public health and to establish programs to guarantee compliance with environmental, health, and safety laws in ways that do not discriminate. They have an obligation to ensure that neither communities of color nor poor communities become the nation's dumping ground. The Environmental Justice Executive Order, signed by President Clinton in February 1994, requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice concerns into their decision making and to establish an interagency working group to provide guidance on implementing the order. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established a National Environmental Justice Advisory Council. These are important steps, although much more needs to be done.

VI. The Role of the Church

The church has a role to play. From an environmental justice perspective, it must reach out and work in partnership with persons who have been disproportionately affected by hazardous waste. A just society cannot afford to let a certain segment of the population slip through the cracks because of its racial and economic status. The

³⁵Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai, editors, *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, pp. 184–203.

community of faith should not dismiss the environmental consequences of where the poor and people of color live. Hazardous waste negatively affects an entire community. It decreases the ability of children to learn, play, and grow and it also reduces productivity of its labor force.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) policy does not define humans as being above the environment since both are part of God's created order. Neither are humans separated from or subordinated to the environment. In eco-justice, as in creation, these factors—humans and the environment—must exist in harmony.

Justice demands that concerns for sustainability, economic development, and environmental health be defined in terms wherein the health and safety of people are not jeopardized because of where they live or the color of their skin. Because the poor and many people of color live in communities that generally lack the political and economic clout and the knowledge to force polluters to correct health-threatening practices, the church must stand with them and for them. The church is one of the greatest sources of leadership and knowledge of economic and political processes in many of these communities. The church can and must make a difference. Three African American women in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the First Presbyterian Church, Milledgeville, Georgia, linked up and prevented the siting of an eight-hundred-plus acre landfill in Hancock County, Georgia, a place that has been heavily populated by African Americans and the poor since the time of slavery.³⁶

VII. What Can We Learn?

The conclusion that poor communities and communities of color are bearing a disproportionate burden of the nation's hazardous waste sites is unavoidable. Typically, local residents are unaware and rarely are involved in the decision-making process of facilities siting. Besides issues of facility siting, there are also major problems in identifying environmental health hazards.

Too often a heavy burden of proof is placed upon those least able to carry it instead of upon industry. Affected communities do not have easy access to technical information and the political and

³⁶Don Schance, "A Sacrifice for Their Neighbors," *Presbyterian Survey*, September 1994.

economic decision-making processes. Furthermore, a lack of expertise and resources prevent affected communities from utilizing current technical information that could help them identify potential environmental health hazards. Consequently, the choices available to them are narrowed. Even when hazards are identified, affected groups often do not have the financial resources or technical expertise to win against the overwhelming resources of companies or government.

The church can be instrumental in standing beside potentially affected communities by: (1) providing information about resources and technical expertise, and (2) establishing a fund that would make it possible for economically deprived citizens who could be affected by this problem to obtain the technical assistance needed to build a credible case.

There is a critical need to support the development of new participatory mechanisms and structures at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure the involvement of affected citizens in problem definition and solution.³⁷ There is a special need to make sure that these mechanisms include members of poor and racial ethnic communities that do not have a tradition of involvement in community political and economic decision making.

VIII. Recommendations

Resolved, That the 207th General Assembly (1995) do the following:

- 1. Commend “Hazardous Waste, Race, and the Environment” to governing bodies and congregations, urging that it be used as a basis for study, action, and advocacy on matters of hazardous waste and race.**
- 2. Direct the Stated Clerk to distribute this resolution to all congregations and governing bodies.**
- 3. Amend Section “A. Basic Policies on Hazardous Waste” of the policy statement entitled “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice” that was adopted**

³⁷Highlander Study, *Dismantling the Barriers*, pp. 3–78.

by the 202nd General Assembly (1990) as follows [for text of the section of the policy statement to be amended, see *Minutes*, 1990, Part I, pp. 667-68, paragraphs 40.817—.826 or see the booklet *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice*, 1990, pp. 53-54, Items A.1.—A.10.]:*

Section “A. Basic Policies on Hazardous Waste” shall now read as follows:

A. Basic Policies on Hazardous Waste

1. Support the development of public policies that result in reducing the generation of hazardous wastes and reduction in the use of hazardous substances. Techniques include (a) substituting nonhazardous for hazardous substances used in production processes, (b) changing end-products so fewer hazardous substances are required, (c) modifying or modernizing production lines, (d) better housekeeping practices during production, and (e) recycling hazardous substances and other materials within the production process.

2. Support the development of public policies that result in the elimination of the disproportionate risk borne by the poor and people of color, and that encourage industries to engage in clean-up processes.

3. Support policies that reward companies for being environmentally responsible in their production and disposal processes.

4. Support public policies that utilize demographic data to promote sustainable management of natural and human resources and assess risk factors associated with where people live.

5. Advocate environmental justice concerns through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office on behalf of the poor and people of color; and that the Washington Office assist congregations and individuals in their advocacy efforts.

6. Support hazardous waste source reduction public policies, and only as a last resort, public policies that rely on incineration, other treatment technologies, and land disposal.

*The policy resolution, “Hazardous Waste, Race, and the Environment” was approved by the 207th General Assembly (1995). The resolution amends sections of *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice* approved by the 202nd General Assembly (1990). The background statement and recommendations dealing with “Hazardous Waste, Race, and the Environment” will be integrated into the *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice* document as soon as the current inventory is depleted.

7. Support just solutions to the selection of hazardous waste disposal sites. Incorporate social justice considerations into the criteria for siting waste-producing or handling facilities, recognizing the grievous impact hazardous wastes have had on poor and racial ethnic communities.

8. Support policies that require full public disclosure and involvement of all potentially affected groups in communities where waste sites are under consideration.

9. Assist poor and racial ethnic communities in identifying and acquiring technical and legal expertise on environmental issues and risk factors.

10. Profess our solidarity with workers and communities feeling the impact of poor hazardous substance use and disposal practices by supporting policies that (a) encourage the development of consistent environmental regulations across the U.S. and in other nations, (b) provide understandable information to workers and the general public on workplace and community toxic hazards, (c) locate dangerous production facilities away from population centers, and (d) identify and inform those who in the past have been exposed to hazardous substances.

11. Urge this nation to examine how its use of resources and methods of production and consumption jeopardize the well-being of the United States and developing nations.

12. Urge Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to address issues of domestic and transnational corporations with regard to the production and disposal of hazardous substances. This includes the exporting of hazardous waste to developing nations.

13. Support policies with economic disincentives to pollute and create hazardous wastes. Support policies with strong incentives for all producers and consumers to move quickly toward the production and use of nontoxic alternative products and to ensure safe collection and recycling of the wastes.

14. Encourage revision of the pricing of consumer products to reflect the total costs associated with production and disposal, including but not limited to worker health costs, disposal costs of the nonrecyclable by-products of production, and disposal costs for the product when it is no longer useful or needed.

15. Ensure that, as far as possible, those responsible for creating toxic and hazardous pollution bear the cost of cleanup and safe disposition.

16. Encourage public policies that address under-regulated aspects of the hazardous waste problem, such as agricultural application of pesticides, storm and irrigation runoff, and the household use of hazardous substances.

17. Support the development of policies that discourage or prohibit federal, state, and private agencies from storing nuclear waste, if there is no effective infrastructure for dealing with accidents or regulating storage sites.

18. Support policies that require mining industries to clean up hazardous and radioactive residue from mining on Indian reservations and in other areas.

19. Encourage full participation in the decision-making process by all who are affected by the siting or cleanup of hazardous waste sites in their communities.

20. Since economic deprivation mitigates against due process, churches should work ecumenically to make it possible for economically deprived affected citizens to obtain the technical assistance and expertise needed to build credible cases about environmental hazards and health effects. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Fund for Legal Aid and Intercultural Justice can be used to help achieve this goal.

21. Support efforts being made to develop participatory mechanisms and structures at the federal, state, and local levels that will ensure affected residents, including the poor and people of color, are involved in problem definition, establishing criteria, and selection of alternative solutions.

22. Support the development and strengthening of policies that place the burden of proof about production, storage, and disposal methods upon industry instead of upon affected communities.

23. The church should assist with advocacy training and education on public policy issues and community organizing for the poor and racial ethnic persons adversely affected by the production, storage, and disposal of hazardous substances.

24. Educate citizens regarding personal responsibilities for hazardous and solid waste problems through examples of environmentally sensitive individual and institutional decisions.