GAME CHANGERS
Economic Policies for a Working America

POLICY BRIEF

A Clean and Safe Environment for All

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JULY 2026

A clean and safe environment is a basic human right. The starting point for translating this right into a reality for all is to guarantee that communities overburdened by cumulative environmental harms are accorded top priority in pollution prevention and abatement. To this end, the Clean and Safe Environment for All Game Changer has five components:

1. A Constitutional Amendment Guaranteeing the Right to a Clean and Safe Environment

Several states, including Hawaii, Massachusetts, and Montana, have adopted amendments to their state constitutions that guarantee the right to a clean and safe environment for all. A similar amendment, designed as a self-executing right that enables enforcement by individuals and organizations, should be promoted in the individual states and for the Constitution of the United States. Without waiting for adoption, the following policies should be enacted.

2. Identification of Overburdened Communities

The impacts of pollution are not equally distributed across communities. Instead, some communities bear disproportionate harms that have accumulated across pollutants and over time. In effect, these communities, which have been systematically excluded from representation and power, have been treated as "sacrifice zones" where threats to human health and the environment are allowed to pile on top of each other. Environmental justice has its movement origins in the fight against environmental racism. Its imperative and promise of ensuring a clean and safe environment for all extends to every overburdened community. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will be tasked with developing a robust methodology to identify Overburdened Communities.

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3. Installation of Pollution Monitoring Facilities

Equipment for monitoring air and water pollution shall be installed in all Overburdened Communities and in any concerned community, and public access to real-time data online shall be guaranteed.

4. Ban on Additional Pollution in Overburdened Communities

No new polluting facilities will be permitted in Overburdened Communities – a provision modeled on New Jersey's recent landmark legislation. Existing facilities will be encouraged to convert to less polluting alternative technologies.

5. Priority for Overburdened Communities in Pollution Abatement

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will implement measures to reduce annual emissions of pollutants affecting each Overburdened Community at a minimum rate of 8 percent per year, until such time as the community no longer meets the criteria for identification as Overburdened.

*For more information on this topic, including the **Background Paper**, please visit our policy page.*

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