

Living with Environmental Inequalities; Life in the Eastern Coachella Valley

Documentary Commentary

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The National Latino Research Center at California State University San Marcos joins community residents of the Eastern Coachella Valley in their efforts to increase awareness and education about the community's environmental justice struggle for clean and safe water, clean air, and an overall healthy community.

In solidarity with Coachella residents and human rights advocates, we have created the documentary, "Living with Environmental Inequalities; Life in the Eastern Coachella Valley." Our goal is to provide an overview of the community's history of environmental racism and classism as experienced by families who live, work, play, and learn surrounded by environmental hazards. Prevalent problems of arsenic in water, exposed raw sewage, illegal dumping of chemicals, pesticide drift and other environmental hazards afflict families on a daily basis making many ill and vulnerable.

In recent years, environmental justice education and advocacy efforts have coalesced bringing together government agencies, elected officials, funders, community-based organizations, and concerned residents to advocate for improved health. Some of the accomplishments achieved to date include the following:

- ❖ WATER FILTRATION SYSTEMS (2011) - Mobile home park Residents and California Rural Legal Assistance Inc. testified in front of the Senate and Assembly Budget subcommittee regarding AB2515 (Perez), and the need for Arsenic filtration systems. AB2515 was signed into law on It allows the state public health department to enact emergency regulations to govern the permitted use of point of entry or point of use water treatment by public water systems in severely disadvantaged communities in lieu of expensive centralized treatment. The bill was designed with the Coachella Valley in mind where high concentrations of arsenic in groundwater in the east side of the valley where thousands of mobile home residents rely on local well water where high concentrations of arsenic have been detected. The bill also provides a mechanism for emergency funding for the purchase of point of use and point of entry treatment filters that range from \$135 to \$300 per household. The bill remains in effect as a short-term solution with grant money available until January 2014. Local officials state that the long-term solution is a \$22 million pipeline to the west valley where supplies are centrally treated but that such an endeavor is still years off for completion. For more information about AB2515, see http://www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/drinkingwater/Documents/POU/ab_2515_bill_20100930_chaptered.pdf & http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_info/agendas/2011/dec/120511_7.pdf.

- ❖ OVERHAUL OF WATER AUDITS WITHIN THE CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION (2011) - Residents and California Rural Legal Assistance Inc. testified about CPUC (California Public Utilities Commission) deficiencies. It resulted in overhaul of the water and audits division.
- ❖ AFFORDABLE WATER RATES AND PROVISION OF FILTRATION SYSTEMS (2012)- Residents of a mobile home park won litigation. The water rates were re-set to affordable levels and management was required to provide arsenic filtration system. For more information about this, see http://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/published/Final_decision/160229-06.htm.
- ❖ RESTITUTION FOR RESIDENTS IN MOBILE HOME PARKS (2012) – Residents and California Rural Legal Assistance Inc. testified in Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee in support of AB 1830 (Perez) which will provide restitution for future mobile home park residents who are overcharged. Before April, 2012 mobile home park residents did not qualify for restitution of overpayment. For more information about AB1830, see http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120AB1830.

Although important changes are beginning to take place, greater focus and resources are needed to make the changes that are desperately needed. Therefore, affected residents seek protection from key federal, state and county agencies responsible for protecting public health and the environment. Until concrete solutions to protect the health of humans and the environment are identified and implemented, learning in schools is compromised, public health deteriorates, and overall productivity stagnates.

The following news articles bring to light stories from the Coachella Valley that describe the needs and emerging advocacy efforts to bring about change in the community. This list is intended to describe issues at a glance; however, ongoing research is necessary to continue documenting and tracking the community efforts to build a healthier community.

COACHELLA IN THE NEWS	
TOPICS	SOURCES
East Coachella Valley IVAN's	http://www.ivan-coachella.org/
California Rural Legal Assistance	http://www.crla.org/
On Edge of Paradise, Coachella workers live in grim conditions	http://californiawatch.org/health-and-welfare/edge-paradise-coachella-workers-live-grim-conditions-12877
Neglected for Decades, unincorporated communities lack basic public services	http://www.scpd.org/news/2012/04/06/31936/neglected-decades-unincorporated-communities-lack/
Reporting on Health Member Blog	http://www.reportingonhealth.org/blogs/2012/04/06/finding-invisible-public-health-californias-low-income-unincorporated-communities
Residents of Coachella suffer high rates of sickness	http://newamericamedia.org/2012/01/residents-of-coachella-valley-suffer-high-rates-of-sickness.php
On Edge of a desert paradise, Coachella farmworkers live in putrid conditions	http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/10/24/MNOQ1LLR9E.DTL&ao=all
Mobile home park accused of overcharging for tainted water	http://farmworkersforum.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/mobile-home-park-accused-of-overcharging-for-tainted-water/
Coachella Valley to Receive \$53 Million for Air Pollution Reduction Projects	http://www.aqmd.gov/news1/2012/bs020312.htm
Latinos Protecting La Tierra	http://blogs.vidaenelvalle.com/health/category/environment/
Feces Towers and Homelessness: Welcome to the Real Coachella	http://www.good.is/post/in-the-eastern-coachella-valley-residents-are-struggling-to-breathe/
CRLA's Eastern Coachella Valley Tour: Environmental Agencies Witness Firsthand Health and Environmental Hazards Plaguing Community	http://www.crla.org/crlas-eastern-coachella-valley-tour-environmental-agencies-witness-firsthand-health-and-environmenta
Eastern Coachella Valley Fights Pollution: 3 Profiles in Environmental Activism	http://newamericamedia.org/2012/04/eastern-coachella-valley-fights-pollution-3-profiles-in-environmental-activism.php
Designation of Environmental Justice (EJ) Areas for the Coachella Valley Pursuant to AB 1318	http://www.aqmd.gov/hb/attachments/2011-2015/2011Dec/2011-Dec2-017.pdf
Community Worker Comes Home	http://coachellaunincorporated.org/2012/03/27/community-worker-comes-home/
Mecca's Misery	http://www.mydesert.com/article/20120325/NEWS07/203240355/Mecca-smell-odor-misery-EPA-intervention-DTSC-AQMD-Desert-Sun-investigation-iSun
Sewage pile	http://us.foxnews.mobi/quickPage.html?page=33150&content=52909210&pageNum=-1

For more information about Coachella's environmental justice efforts, visit the East Coachella Valley IVAN website at <http://www.ivan-coachella.org/>.