



# Faith & Environmental Organizations Urge Improvements To Air Permitting Processes To Address Environmental Injustice

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ST. LOUIS - Despite ample evidence that air quality is tied to a myriad of poor public health outcomes, Illinois and Missouri continue to lag on implementing adequate air

quality protections on both sides of the Mississippi River. For the second year in a row, a coalition of organizations called attention to this environmental injustice and urged policymakers to swiftly improve air permitting processes.

“Residents in Illinois and Missouri share more than just the Mississippi River. As neighbors, we share air as well,” said DeAndress Green, member of Metropolitan Congregations United and Treasurer of New Cahokia Commons Urban Farm. “I grew up in North St. Louis and was repeatedly exposed to poor air quality. Just last month, I was admitted to the hospital with respiratory health issues, but doctors couldn’t deduce a diagnosis. It hit me that my respiratory health issues are the result of having been exposed to pollutants for years.”

[A national study](#) found that air pollution is responsible for 63 percent of deaths from environmental causes and 3 percent of deaths from all causes. The heavy burden of air pollution in Illinois and Missouri causes innumerable health impacts, including disproportionate rates of respiratory health issues like aggravated asthma and reduced lung function, as well as premature death and heart attacks. This burden has a disproportionate impact on environmental justice communities and is exacerbated by redlining, barriers to public engagement, and lack of funding. Across both states, communities of color are exposed to air pollution from industries, power plants, transportation, and building demolitions at disproportionately high rates. A [cluster of polluting sources](#) is particularly evident along the Mississippi River, in areas with high percentages of residents of color.

“I live near the Veolia plant. Many days, my children are not able to go outside and play because of the poor air quality,” said Mamie Cosey, a great-grandmother, retired preschool teacher, and member of United Congregations of Metro East. “I’m tired of talking about this issue. My life is almost over, but what about my great-grandchildren? Will they be suffering 10 years from today, 20 years from today? It’s time to act on their behalf because they cannot for themselves. We must do something, and we must do it now.”

Earlier this year, the Illinois General Assembly considered a bill dubbed the Environmental Justice Permitting Bill (HB4093/SB2906), which would have addressed air pollution and environmental injustice by codifying improvements to air permitting requirements and processes. The bill, which requires large air pollution facilities to conduct cumulative impact assessments and create avenues for community involvement in the permitting process, did not pass this spring. In Missouri, the Department of Natural Resources (MoDNR) is proposing an ozone rule that omits Ameren’s Labadie coal plant from any pollution reduction. MoDNR will hold a [public hearing](#) on July 28, where many of the participants in today’s rally will testify in favor of modern pollution controls at coal-burning power plants like Labadie that do not have them.

Today, advocates urged Illinois policymakers to prioritize the Environmental Justice Permitting Bill in the next legislative session and called on the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to make similar improvements to the air conservation permits process.

“It’s past time for policymakers in Illinois and Missouri to ensure communities on both sides of the Mississippi River have access to clean air, and fossil fuel polluters are held accountable,” said Dale Wojtkowski, volunteer with the Kaskaskia Group of Sierra Club Illinois. “After all, mother earth does not see our state boundaries, and the air we breathe and the great river we share must be protected.”

Today was the second annual coalition event elevating the need for policymakers to focus on environmental justice and air quality in the Metro East and North St. Louis. Since the inaugural rally last year, Metropolitan Congregations United worked with Washington University in St. Louis to [install air monitors](#) at more than 12 churches to measure ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and other pollutants.