



MARYLAND
LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION
VOTERS

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN PRACTICE: APPLICATION OF MARYLAND STATE DEFINITIONS

OVERVIEW

Environmental Justice (EJ) screening tools are used by federal, state, and local governments and other entities to identify communities that are or could be disproportionately impacted by cumulative public health and environmental burdens. EJ screening tools use environmental and demographic indicators to identify these communities, help prioritize investment and reduce further burden and harm in future siting and decision making.

The following federal agencies house EJ screening tools:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
- U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)
- White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS NOW ACT

On April 8, 2022, Maryland's Climate Solutions Now Act (SB528) was signed into law, amending Maryland Code Ann. §1-701 to include the adoption of a methodology for identifying communities disproportionately affected by climate impacts. Census tracts that are Overburdened and/or Underserved are considered an environmental justice community. The codified definitions (see right) position Maryland as a leader in EJ mapping and screening methodology, and can help the state and its counties and municipalities target support and investments.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Environmental agencies across thirteen states (MD, CA, WA, NC, CO, CT, IL, MA, MI, MN, NJ, NY, PA) operate official environmental justice screening tools. Research institutions are integrating additional public health, socioeconomic, environmental, energy, and climate data into similar spatial indexes as they become available.

UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

An underserved community is defined as any census tract in which, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau Survey:

1. At least 25% of the residents qualify as low-income;
2. At least 50% of the residents identify as nonwhite; or
3. At least 15% of the residents have limited English proficiency.

The indicators used to identify underserved communities are based on the most recent U.S. Census data to capture communities with a higher proportion of non-white, low-income, and linguistically isolated residents than the statewide average. Communities with these characteristics often have higher rates of adverse health outcomes such as asthma and heart disease, lack access to health-promoting infrastructure, and are more likely to live near polluting facilities.

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OVERBURDENED COMMUNITIES

An “overburdened community” is any census tract with three or more of the following environmental health indicators identified above the state’s 75th percentile:

- Particulate matter (PM) 2.5
- Ozone
- National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA) diesel PM
- NATA cancer risk
- NATA respiratory hazard index
- Lead paint indicator
- Wastewater discharge indicator
- Asthma emergency room discharges
- Myocardial infarction discharges
- Low-birth-weight infants
- Percent of the population lacking broadband coverage
- National Priorities List Superfund site proximity
- Risk Management Plan facility proximity
- Hazardous waste proximity
- Traffic proximity
- Proximity to a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO)
- Proximity to emitting power plants
- Proximity to a Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) facility
- Proximity to a brownfields site
- Proximity to mining operations
- Proximity to a hazardous waste landfill

The environmental indicators included in this definition of overburdened are quantifiable and from known datasets. They seek to capture a wide range of hazards present in Maryland and seek to include environmental burdens that both rural and urban populations bear. The indicators also include three adverse health outcomes that are tied to the pollution load in that area - specifically asthma, myocardial infarctions, and low birth weight. Finally, the indicator addressing a population’s lack of access to broadband internet captures how available information is to people in the area.

HOWARD COUNTY

Overview

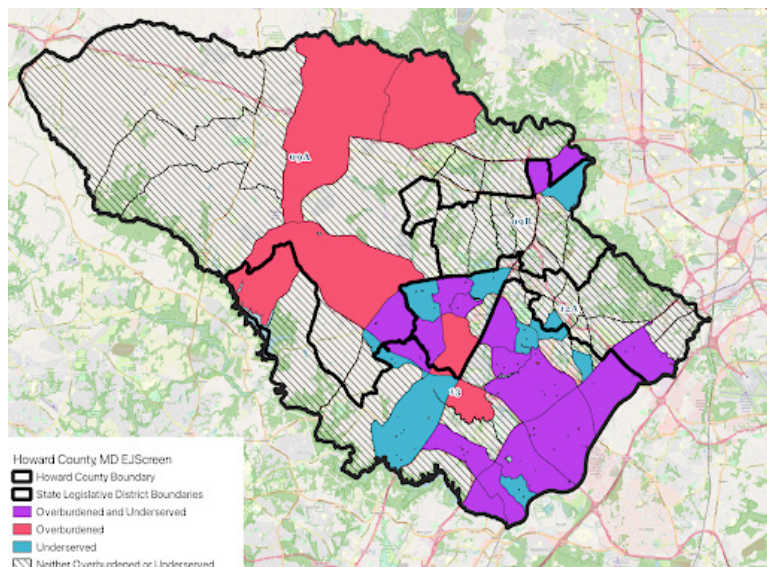
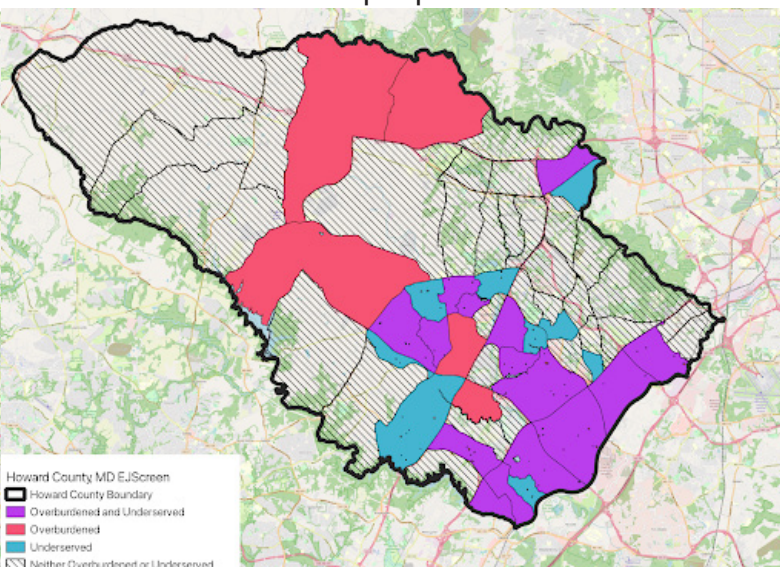
Of the 58 census tracts in Howard County, Maryland, 18 are both overburdened and underserved, 9 are only underserved and 5 are only overburdened. 26 (44.8%) census tracts are neither underserved or overburdened.

Additional Information

The following links to an interactive map that shows which of the indicators contributed to an area’s overburdened or underserved score in the Maryland EJ Screening Tool.

[Howard County Interactive EJScreen](#)

**Images below: Environmental Justice Indicators by Census Tract (Left), Environmental Justice Indicators by Legislative Districts (right)*



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