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Media Advisory

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New Handbook Helps “At Risk” Communities Achieve Environmental Justice

The Environmental Law Institute® (ELI) has just published a new handbook, *A Citizen's Guide to Using Federal Environmental Laws to Secure Environmental Justice*. The report illustrates how citizens can use existing authorities within federal pollution laws to help ensure that communities of color and low-income communities do not bear a disproportionate share of pollution.

The handbook is designed to introduce citizens to some of the ways in which environmental protection laws can be used to secure environmental justice. For example, the handbook can help citizens identify opportunities to participate in government decision making that affect the quality of the air, water and land in their communities.

“In passing environmental laws, Congress intended that citizens have the opportunity to participate in environmental decisions that affect their lives and communities,” states Gerald Torres, Vice Provost and H.O. Head Centennial Professor at University of Texas School of Law, and ELI Board Member. “This handbook helps point out these opportunities so that citizens can provide valuable information to improve government decision making and help ensure that environmental burdened communities are better protected.”

Legal tools that can be used by community residents to advance environmental justice, such as petitions and citizens suits, are also explained. In addition, the handbook highlights resources such as technical assistance grants and information databases that citizens can use to promote environmental justice.

According to Suzi Ruhl, President, Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation, Inc. (LEAF) and member of ELI's Board of Directors, “Although some environmental problems are highly technical and complex (requiring the assistance of lawyers and technical experts), citizens can play a vital role in government decisions. By knowing the basic opportunities and tools provided in environmental laws, citizens ensure that their voices are heard in government decisions that affect their environmentally burdened communities.”

Support for this handbook came from a cooperative agreement from the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Justice. The handbook is a companion to ELI's more technical report *Opportunities for Advancing Environmental Justice: An Analysis of U.S. EPA Statutory Authorities*. Copies of both the handbook and technical report are available for \$20.00 each or \$30 for both (plus \$3.00 shipping) by calling (800) 433-5120. Both reports can be downloaded for free from www.eli.org. For more information about this report or the Environmental Law Institute please visit our website at www.eli.org or call ELI Publications at 202-939-3246.

ELI is an independent, non-profit research and educational organization based in Washington, D.C. The Institute serves the environmental profession in business, government, the private bar, public interest organizations, academia, and the press.

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