ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR ALL VIRGINIANS

The Problem:

• The use of fossil fuels has led to rising global temperatures, or climate change, which exacerbates issues that people of faith already care about: hunger, clean water, immigration, sickness, and global conflict.

• Coastal communities like Hampton Roads are flooding, and low-income residents are burdened with flood insurance premiums and the cost of moving.

• Coal mines in Southwest Virginia pollute the water and air, causing adverse health effects.

• Disruptive and dangerous fossil fuel projects are often placed in communities of color and low-income communities, like the Atlantic Coast Compressor station in Buckingham County.

What is environmental justice?

The Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”

Virginia’s views on climate change:

Over 70% of Virginians believe:

• Global warming will harm plants and animals.
• Global warming will harm future generations.

A majority of Virginians are:

• are worried about global warming
• think that global warming is already harming people in the US

75% of Virginians want carbon dioxide to be regulated as a pollutant.

Policy Recommendations:

• Virginia should pursue and strengthen policy reform on environmental justice including:
  • adopting the U.S. EPA’s definition of environmental justice in the Code;
  • requiring an environmental justice analysis for new energy, industrial and infrastructure project permitting and zonings;
  • weighing health impacts and environmental justice as a factor in all siting, rulemaking, and permitting decisions.

• Virginia should strengthen the Office of Environmental Justice by increasing funding for Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Department of Health.

• Since 2003, the budget for DEQ has been cut by over $40 million. Restoring this funding is necessary to safeguard the health of all Virginians.

• Virginia should strengthen the environmental justice council and appropriate $100,000 for operational funding. This funding would be used for hiring environmental justice expert analysis, outreach to effected communities, reimbursements to Environmental Justice Council members, and providing grants to communities.

• Virginia stays in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a cap and trade program to reduce pollution from power plants, fifty percent of the revenues from the auctions continues to be allocated to energy-efficiency programs for low-income families and individuals and 45% of the revenues to flood resilience efforts.

1) www.climateadvocacylab.org/tools/yale-climate-opinion-maps

Virginia Interfaith Power & Light collaborates, as people of faith, to grow healthy communities and advance climate justice through education, advocacy, and worship.