The self-defined environmental justice movement first emerged in the 1980s, as hundreds of grassroots organizations began to address the disparate social and ecological problems impacting their communities. Plaguing people of color where they “work, live, and play,” unequal exposure to ecological hazards assumed the form of (1) higher concentrations of destructive mining operations, polluting industrial facilities and power plants; (2) greater presence of toxic waste sites and disposal/treatment facilities, including landfills, incinerators, and trash transfer stations; (3) severe occupational and residential health risks from pesticides, lead paint, radiation waste, and other dangerous substances; and (4) lower rates of clean-up and environmental enforcement of existing laws. In the movement’s earliest stages of development, environmental justice organizations were largely isolated or loosely connected to one another and focused on local issues. With the 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit I), however, recognition developed of the need to build stronger institutional linkages between these local community-based groups. As a result, a number of strategic regionally based networks, as well as national constituency-based and issue-based networks for environmental justice, were created and consolidated during the 1990s.

In the new century, as environmental justice activists confront what are (perhaps) their most difficult set of challenges, a third stage of development is being initiated. With a number of new organizational entities, such as the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the consolidation of the regional and national constituency-based networks, the environmen-
The environmental justice movement is attempting to develop a new infrastructure for building internetwork collaboration and coordinated programmatic initiatives that can take the work beyond the local level to have a broader policy impact at the state, national, and international levels. As witnessed by the closing of the Washington Office on Environmental Justice in the late 1990s, as well as the profound tensions between different sectors of the movement present at the 2002 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit II) and the subsequent disbanding of the Environmental Justice Fund (EJF), however, it is clear that this will be no easy task. More than ten years after Executive Order 12898, the EPA has failed to consistently implement its mandate to integrate environmental justice into its day-to-day operations. Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Alexander vs. Sandoval* (April 24, 2001) that demonstrating a racially discriminatory effect (as opposed to the discriminatory intent) of an action is not sufficient to win a Title VI Civil Rights action has proven to be a major legal setback for the environmental justice movement.

Significant organizational problems, political conflicts, and growing pains also plague the movement. To some degree, this is characteristic of any large social movement, particularly one as young and underfunded as the environmental justice movement. Nevertheless, the challenges of winning significant improvements at the federal level—a situation that will likely persist at least until the end of President George W. Bush’s term in office—are compelling activists to focus their attention on more local and state-based strategies (some of these initiatives are part of larger nationally oriented campaigns and alliances). These local and state-based strategies include a return to more collaborative approaches with government agencies, as well as more traditional environmental organizations.

Massachusetts is an example of a state where such a collaboration is taking place. In fact, these collaborations and coalitions have produced exemplary approaches to solving problems of “distributive environmental justice” (approaches aimed at reducing the unequal distribution of ecological hazards), “productive environmental justice” (approaches aimed at reducing the production of ecological hazards at the source), and “transformative environmental justice” (approaches aimed at bridg-
ing the urban/suburban divide to produce greater equality in regional planning). In short, Massachusetts is providing new and exciting models of what can be accomplished when mainstream environmentalists and environmental justice activists join forces to bring about change.

Environmental Injustices in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Since World War II, Massachusetts has witnessed both a dramatic growth in suburban development and a severe socioeconomic decline of the inner cities and older manufacturing centers. As industry and white, middle-class citizens left for the residential outer rings, once-thriving city neighborhoods were left to poorer working-class whites and people of color. As the tax base, schools, property values, and public services in the cities eroded with the exodus, the urban landscape became riddled with vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and brownfields. The concentration of poverty in the inner cities also became more severe. In greater Boston, explicit racial lending policies, known as redlining, further concentrated people of color in the inner city. From a peak population of just more than 800,000 in 1950 (when the city was only 5 percent nonwhite), the city of Boston decreased to just over 560,000 in 1980, a loss of almost 240,000 people. However, the number of poorer racial minorities who moved into the city greatly offset the exodus of middle-class whites. In the most recent 2000 census, people of color have become the majority of Boston’s current population of 580,000 residents for the first time in history.

Over the past four decades, neglected inner-city neighborhoods have become the target for unwanted and noxious land uses, such as trash transfer stations, junkyards, truck and bus depots, incinerators, and auto body shops. Decrepit housing and schools contribute to indoor environmental hazards such as lead paint, asbestos, and mold. The cumulative impact of these relatively smaller and more disperse sources of pollution contribute to and further exacerbate poor health conditions. Residents must also deal daily with hazards from illegal dumping of chemical wastes on vacant lots, toxic air and water pollution from the old “dirty” industries that do remain behind, as well as a lack of greenspace and parks, and inadequate public transportation systems. This dual process of inner-city decline and environmental injustice is well illustrated by the case of Roxbury, a low-income neighborhood of color in Boston.
In Roxbury, divestment and relocation of the manufacturing sector resulted in a decline of the industrial job base from more than 20,000 in 1947 to 4,000 by 1981 (the percentage of jobs in the manufacturing sector in greater Boston declined from 32 percent in 1950 to 17 percent in 1990). Along with this, the number of businesses in the heart of the community around the Dudley Street area declined from 129 in 1950 to only 26 in 1980. Along with the economic decline came the flight of white residents. Redlining denied home loans to people of color, while “block busting” by realtors scared whites into leaving. Arson became an increasingly common means for residents to “escape” the neighborhood. In 1987, the elevated Orange Line discontinued service, cutting off the heart of Roxbury from the region’s rapid transit system and the higher-paying jobs in the growth areas of greater Boston. Thus, a once predominantly white immigrant neighborhood was quickly transformed into a low-income community of color.

By 1996, residents found more than a thousand vacant lots in their 1.5-square-mile area. Noxious and polluting land uses filled the void. In 1999, the Boston Office of Environmental Health found that more than 64 percent of Boston’s seventy-nine trash transfer stations, dumpster storage lots, and junkyards were located in Roxbury and adjoining North Dorchester. A 1997 survey by the Roxbury-based Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE) found that there were more than fifteen bus and truck depots within 1.5 miles of Dudley Square that were used by more than a thousand diesel vehicles (including one half of the public transit bus fleet). Overall, Roxbury now ranks as the eighth most environmentally overburdened community in the state, with an average of forty-eight hazardous waste sites per square mile. Roxbury residents have also been exposed to more than 37,000 pounds of chemical emissions per square mile from large industries between 1990 and 1998.

The prevalence of environmental pollutants such as these are largely responsible for asthma hospitalization rates in Roxbury being more than five and a half times the state average.

These conditions are not unique to Roxbury and Boston alone. Across Massachusetts, environmentally hazardous facilities and sites—ranging from toxic waste dumps to polluting industrial plants, incinerators, power plants, and landfills—are disproportionately located in communities of
color and lower-income communities. Residents in Chelsea, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, and many other urban areas must deal daily with hazards from midnight dumping of chemical wastes on vacant lots, toxic industrial emissions into the air and water, substandard housing contaminated with lead paint, traffic congestion and inadequate mass transportation systems, few parks or recreational spaces, unsightly trash, and a variety of unwanted land uses. As a result, residents of these communities live each day with substantially greater risk of exposure to environmental health hazards than the general citizenry.

Statewide there are more than 21,000 hazardous waste sites. More than 3,380 of these sites are considered by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to pose serious environmental or human health threats. For instance, elevated rates of leukemia (especially among children) have been linked to the industrial chemical trichloroethylene found in the town of Woburn’s drinking water, as well as tetrachloroethylene in drinking water on Upper Cape Cod.

But not all Massachusetts residents are in the same danger: communities of color average an incredible twenty-seven hazardous waste sites per square mile (psm) and low-income communities average fourteen waste sites psm. In contrast, middle-to-upper income white communities average only three sites psm.

White working-class communities and communities of color also bear a significantly greater portion of the pollution emitted by large industrial facilities. According to data collected under the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act (TURA) program, from 1990 to 1998 some 1,029 of the largest industrial facilities statewide produced 164,385,598 pounds of chemical waste byproduct (pollution) that was released on site directly into the environment (discharged into the air, ground, underground, or adjacent bodies of water in the communities in which they were located). This is an amount equivalent to the weight of the Titanic. Low-income communities (average household median income of less than $30,000) received an average of some 73,061 total pounds of chemical emissions psm. This contrasts sharply in comparison to higher income communities (average household median income of $40,000–49,999 or more), which averaged 10,937–12,502 pounds of chemical emissions psm. Communities of color, on the other hand, averaged 110,718–123,770
pounds of chemical emissions psm, compared to 22,735 pounds of chemical emissions psm for “low-minority” communities.

White working-class communities and communities of color are also disproportionately affected by incinerators, landfills, trash transfer stations, power plants, and other environmentally hazardous sites and facilities. In fact, “high-minority” communities face a cumulative exposure rate to all of these environmentally hazardous facilities and sites (including pollution industrial facilities and toxic waste dumps) that is nearly nine times greater than “low-minority” communities. There is consistently sharp increase in the cumulative exposure rate to these hazardous facilities/sites, which directly corresponds to increases in the size of the minority population in all communities. Likewise, low-income communities face a cumulative exposure rate to environmentally hazardous facilities and sites which is 3.13–4.04 times greater than all other communities in the state. Fourteen of the fifteen most intensively environmentally overburdened towns in Massachusetts are of lower-income status, and nine of the fifteen most environmentally overburdened towns in the state are minority communities. This is significant given that there are only twenty communities of color of the 368 communities in the entire state: nearly half are among the worse fifteen. If you live in a community of color in Massachusetts, the chances are nineteen times higher that you live in one of the twenty-five most environmentally overburdened communities in the state.

A New Coalition in Support of “Distributive” Environmental Justice Policy: An Act to Promote Environmental Justice in the Commonwealth

For environmental justice activists, the most immediate mission is to dismantle the mechanisms by which capital and the state disproportionately displace social and ecological burdens onto people of color and working-class families. Although the tactics for attacking environmental inequities are varied, one common political demand of these movements is for greater democratic participation in the governmental decision-making processes affecting their communities. By gaining greater access to policy-makers and agencies, environmental justice activists hope to
initiate better governmental regulation of the discriminatory manner in which the market and policy makers distribute environmental risks. At the national level, this has led important segments of the environmental justice movement to draw upon liberal-democratic strategies aimed at reforming the EPA’s “institutional focus,” particularly the manner by which the agency drafts and enforces environmental policy. This effort resulted in President Clinton signing the Executive Order on Environmental Justice, ordering all federal agencies to begin initiatives aimed at reducing environmental inequities, and creating NEJAC as a formal federal advisory committee to the administrator of the EPA.

In the early part of 2000, Robert Durand, the secretary for the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) under Governors Paul Cellucci and Jane Swift, created a similar advisory body at the state level called the Massachusetts Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (MEJAC). All state environmental agencies in Massachusetts come under the oversight of EOEA. The purpose of MEJAC was to assist the secretary “in the development of a broad-range environmental justice policy that would steer the environmental justice agenda for all of the Commonwealth’s environmental agencies for the first time with cohesion and formality.” In the words of Veronica Eady, former director of environmental justice and brownfields at the EOEA,

MEJAC coordinated all public outreach, held public meetings, conducted neighborhood tours and coordinated presentations by activists across the state in order to expose state policy-makers to the diverse world of environmental justice and communities at risk in Massachusetts. The MEJAC guided the development of the state’s philosophical environmental justice policy and made recommendations for implementation. In the second phase of policy-making, the state working group was charged with developing an implementation strategy based on that philosophical policy.

The initial push for adoption of the EOEA policy came from the Environmental League of Massachusetts (ELM), which filed the first piece of environmental justice legislation in 1998. ELM policy efforts were supplemented by years of community organizing efforts and public pressure led by environmental justice groups across the eastern half of the state. Fusing the struggles for civil rights, social justice, and a healthy environment, these community-based movements for environmental justice were committed to reversing the processes by which business and the
government disproportionately displaces ecological and economic burdens onto working-class families and communities of color. In Boston, organizations such as ACE and the Greater Boston Environmental Justice Network (GBEJN) took up the cause.\(^\text{19}\)

Once the draft environmental justice policy was released for public comment, however, more mainstream environmental organizations such as the Toxics Action Center joined hands with ELM and the environmental justice movement to demand a more comprehensive policy by the EOEA that would be applicable to state agencies across the board (not just environmental agencies). In October 2002, Secretary Durand signed an improved policy that includes detailed definitions and directives for state environmental agencies to use in addressing the issue; however, because the policy failed to provide enforcement provisions, and remained limited to environmental agencies only, the coalition was concerned and began casting about for ways to win further improvements.

Although mainstream environmentalists and environmental justice activists adopted different tactics, both chose to support one another in a larger strategy to win these improvements. As an environmental organization with a long track record, and high comfort level, working within the machinery of the Massachusetts policy system, ELM took the lead in lobbying for the passage of additional environmental justice legislation. ACE and GBEJN, as environmental justice organizations committed to changing the system of power, took the lead in mobilizing significant external public pressure on the legislature in support of ELM advocacy efforts (including generating large turnouts of supporters at legislative hearings). Despite the existence of some very profound differences and problems (including a lack of funder support for ELM to undertake environmental justice work), the more moderate “insider” tactics of ELM and the more radical “outsider” methods of ACE proved to be highly complementary and enabled the committed leadership of both organizations (and movements) to work in close collaboration.\(^\text{20}\)

The collaboration also allowed for the inclusion of religious and faith-based organizations, college students groups, and public health associations in the organizing and lobbying efforts aimed at the Massachusetts State House, further increasing the range of movement sectors working to transform the state’s environmental justice policy into stronger law.
The sought after legislation—termed An Act to Promote Environmental Justice in the Commonwealth—was deemed necessary to protect the policy from potential assault by future governors. The current policy is not binding upon the executive branch, whereas a law would be. If it were to be adopted, this bill would be among the most comprehensive and far-reaching pieces of environmental justice legislation adopted by any state in the nation. The bill is a necessary antidote to the indifference of the EPA and other federal agencies under the control of the Bush Administration to environmental justice concerns and directs the state EOEAA to develop statewide regulations that give communities much greater protection from pollution.

The environmental justice bill now includes a number of innovative and significant measures for enhancing the education, notification, and participation of environmental justice community residents in state-based environmental problem solving. Furthermore, among the important aims of this environmental/environmental justice collaboration are to assist communities in determining whether they qualify for consideration under the law; to establish an environmental justice advisory committee to the director of environmental justice and brownfields redevelopment in the office of the secretary; to develop and maintain a list of alternative information outlets that service environmental justice populations for the purpose of seeking public comments or publishing public notices; and to direct agencies to develop and implement a formal strategy to enhance public participation and input to agency decision making that potentially affects environmental justice communities.

A potential model for other states to emulate (a draft formed the basis for similar efforts in Alabama, led by the Alabama Environmental Council), the environmental justice bill would (1) increase public participation and outreach through environmental justice training programs for government staff (including greater language accessibility); (2) minimize risk by targeting compliance, enforcement, and technical assistance to environmental justice populations and enhancing Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review of new or expanding large sources of air emissions and regional waste facilities in environmental justice neighborhoods; (3) encourage investments by expediting MEPA review of brownfields redevelopment projects that offer opportunities to
clean up contaminated sites and bring them into clean productive use; (4) expand existing brownfields efforts to support the development of an inventory of underutilized commercial/industrial properties in the commonwealth, incorporating environmental justice as a criterion for awarding technical assistance, grants, audits, and toxic waste site investigations in environmental justice populations, and targeting open space resources to more effectively create, restore, and maintain open spaces located in environmental justice neighborhoods; and (5) promote cleaner development by encouraging economic development projects that incorporate state-of-the-art pollution control technology, and alternatives to hazardous chemicals in neighborhoods where environmental justice populations reside.

While ELM leads the charge on the legislative front, ACE is working to see that the existing policy is used to its fullest extent by affected communities and also generating general awareness and support for environmental justice issues through community organizing. Together, ACE and ELM have developed a participatory game, “Pass the Bill,” which is used to educate new partners about the legislative process and highlight the importance of building coalitions to promote bills. In the current political-economic environment in Massachusetts, industry opposition to new environmental regulations is staunch. To make progress, environmentalists and environmental justice activists are finding it advantageous to work together. Each movement brings a different set of political skills, experiences, and constituencies that, when combined, can be far more effective than when the groups work in isolation. Time will tell whether this unique coalition will prove successful. There are also limitations. For instance, as a white-led mainstream environmental organization, ELM receives no foundation support for its work to promote environmental justice (in spite of dedicating significant staff time to the effort for more than three years). Furthermore, ACE and other environmental justice organizations may have more pressing and immediate concerns in their own communities and also face significant resource constraints. Nevertheless, if such a coalition can continue to overcome differences and develop a constructive method for resolving tensions and growing the collaboration, the prospects are bright that Massachusetts may soon adopt the most comprehensive environmental justice legislation of any state in the nation.
A New Collaboration for “Productive” Environmental Justice and the Precautionary Principle: The Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow

An environmental justice policy and politics aimed at eliminating the discriminatory or unequal distribution of ecological hazards is an essential step in the right direction, but alone it is not sufficient. In this respect, although the proposed environmental justice legislation would provide important environmental safeguards often denied to poorer communities of color, this is just one piece in a larger puzzle. Defensive strategies aimed at arresting disproportionate impact can inadvertently result in environmental hazards being shifted out of the poorer communities of color and into other communities, running the risk of turning potential allies into adversaries and thus being political self-defeating. In Massachusetts, there is a sophisticated understanding among the Environmental League of Massachusetts, ACE, and other organizations working on behalf of the environmental justice legislation that the overall struggle for environmental justice is not just about more fairly distributing pollution risks “so that all people are harmed equally.” Rather, the need is for a more “productive” environmental justice politics with an orientation toward preventing environmental risks from being produced in the first place, “so that no one is harmed at all.” A movement for environmental justice is of limited efficacy if the end result is to have all residents poisoned to the same perilous degree, regardless of race, color, or class. The struggle for environmental justice must be about the politics of production per se and the elimination of the ecological threat, not just the “fair” distribution of ecological hazards via better government regulation of inequities in the marketplace.

Any attempt to rectify distributional inequities without attacking the fundamental processes that produce the problems in the first place focuses on symptoms rather than causes and is therefore only a partial, temporary, and necessarily incomplete and insufficient solution. What is needed is a politics for procedural equity that emphasizes democratic participation in capital investment decisions through which environmental burdens are produced and then distributed. As Michael Heiman has observed, “If we settle for liberal procedural and distributional equity, relying upon negotiation, mitigation, and fair-share allocation to address
some sort of disproportional impact, we merely perpetuate the current production system that by its very structure is discriminatory and non-sustainable.” It is precisely this distinction between distributional justice and productive justice that many in the environmental justice and environmental movements in Massachusetts are beginning to address. The transition to clean production and use of the precautionary principle are key components of this more “productive” environmental justice politics.

Formation of the Alliance
Under the leadership of Lee Ketelsen, director of New England Clean Water Action, a statewide coalition was created and now includes more than 150 environmental, labor, consumer product safety, health affected groups (breast cancer, asthma, learning and behavioral disabilities, and others), scientific and public health associations, religious and faith-based organizations, student groups, and community-based environmental justice organizations. Joining hands under the umbrella of the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow (AHT), the coalition’s goal is to help forge a more precautionary and preventive approach to environmental policy in the Bay State. More than thirty-two national and statewide organizations are among the members. Policy and strategy is established by nearly thirty elected organizational and six individual board members (with the input of the full membership), and includes Clean Water Action, Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, Boston Urban Asthma Coalition, Environmental League of Massachusetts, and the Toxics Action Center, among others. Social and environmental justice group members of the governing board include the Coalition for Social Justice/Coalition Against Poverty and the Dorchester Environmental Health Coalition. Labor groups on the governing board include the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health, as well as IUE-CWA (International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine, and Furniture Workers—Communications Workers of America) Local 201. A scientific advisory committee consisting of forty-two scientists specializing in environmental health and chemicals policy provides coalition members with technical information and expertise. For instance, Joel Tickner of the University of Massachusetts—Lowell’s
Center for Sustainable Production has been an international leader on the application of the precautionary principle and substitution principle and plays a lead role in advising the coalition.

In addition to inadequately preventing environmental and community health problems outside of the factory, the current regulatory regime also fails to prevent serious health and safety problems from affecting Bay State workers inside the factory. An estimated 800 workers died from occupational disease, another 1,866 were newly diagnosed with cancer caused by workplace exposures, and 50,000 more were seriously injured in the year 2003. To fully incorporate labor into this larger environmental health coalition, the AHT governing board also created an official labor advisory committee. Made up of AHT board members, member labor groups, and other interested labor union participants, the committee works to strengthen the long-term alliance between labor and AHT through discussions, trainings, sharing information, mutual solidarity work, recruiting labor to the AHT and by soliciting the perspectives and input of labor on AHT goals and strategies.

Tactics and Strategies
Current regulations in Massachusetts do not adequately protect human health and the environment from toxins. Like most federal environmental regulations, such as the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, state policy is aimed at cleaning up existing pollution and limiting the quantity released into the environment. Regulations are not aimed at eliminating the production of the harmful pollutant altogether, as in a clean-production approach. As a result, ineffectual pollution control measures that aim to limit public exposure to “tolerable levels” of industrial toxins are emphasized over pollution prevention measures that deter whole families of dangerous pollutants from being produced in the first place. Most environmental policy is predicated on the use of “risk assessment” to determine whether a substance or practice should be regulated; however, the scientific standards of proof for demonstrating the vast array of potential health impacts of a chemical are very difficult to demonstrate conclusively. More than 70 percent of the 3,000 high-production-volume (HPV) chemicals produced by industry (HPV chemicals are produced in quantities of one million pounds or more annually)
have not undergone even the simplest health and safety testing. In cases where there is a strong potential for adverse health effects from an activity, but not yet “definitive proof,” more and more environmentalists are calling for the adoption of a precautionary approach. According to the Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle,

> When an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.

The AHT is working for the adoption of proactive, prevention-oriented policies that make use of a precautionary approach (the precautionary principle) to toxic hazards, call for the adoption of safer alternatives (the substitution principle), and provide a transition blueprint to a greener economy that is beneficial for workers and environmental justice communities (clean production principle). All three principles are key to the formation of a more “productive” environmental justice politics. In this light, member organizations throughout the coalition are educating and mobilizing their constituencies to assist in the design and adoption of model legislation that is mutually beneficial to all the groups. As part of these efforts, grassroots and professional advocacy organizations alike are being called upon to place both external and internal public pressure upon legislators in their own districts to support a package of key bills in the state legislature and help prepare a set of policy proposals for state agencies that will be packaged as an executive order. These organizing and lobbying efforts were first initiated in 2003 and will take a sustained effort to win passage.

One focus of the effort so far, and an example of the comprehensive and integrated nature of the approach, has been the proposed Act for a Healthy Massachusetts: Safer Alternatives to Toxic Chemicals. This bill aims to create a model for the gradual replacement of toxic chemicals with safer alternatives. It initially targets ten toxic substances used by industry to be replaced with safer alternatives. It does this by laying out a careful process for examining all available evidence to identify safer alternatives and manufacturing processes that will benefit the health of workers, customers, children, the environment, and the economy. The proposed program would also stimulate research and development on new technologies and solutions when a safer alternative is not economically
viable or technically feasible. In addition, it would create programs to assist workers and businesses in the transition to the safest available alternatives, with funding provided through a fee on toxic chemicals.

A number of other legislative initiatives also supported by the AHT are designed to push the state toward the adoption of a more “productive” environmental justice politics. An Act to Promote Sustainable Agriculture and the Use of Non-Toxic Pest Management would remove the sales tax exemption from toxic pesticides and fertilizers and dedicate those dollars to a nontoxic pest management fund. In addition, 30 percent of existing revenues raised from pesticide registration fees and licenses and from certain fines would also be placed directly into the nontoxic pest management fund. This bill complements An Act to Prevent Use of the Most Dangerous Pesticides. Spearheaded by the Environmental League of Massachusetts, this bill will require the Department of Public Health to compile a list of pesticides known to be carcinogenic, mutagenic, or toxic to development or reproduction and prohibit their use by the state, municipal governments, schools, day-care centers, hospitals, health-care facilities, or public housing officials.

AHT has also organized the legislation and pushed for the adoption of An Act to Reduce Asthma and Other Health Threats from Cleaning Products. This legislation would require that no cleaning product may be used in schools, hospitals, and other health-care facilities, day-care centers, public building, and public housing unless the product is included on the “Healthy Cleaning Products” list established annually by the commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH). The bill has enlisted the support of labor unions representing janitors and cleaning workers, as well as environmental health advocates. In addition, An Act Relating to Mercury Reduction and Education supports a regional strategy, set by all New England governors, to reduce mercury emissions 75 percent by 2010 (and for eventual zero mercury emissions in New England). Mercury is a powerful neurotoxin linked to the development of learning disabilities in children. The proposed legislation would (1) require producer take-back, whereby manufacturers of mercury-added production would be financially responsible for collection and recycling of the products; (2) require labeling that reveals the mercury content of the product and advising the purchaser on proper disposal;
and (3) prohibit the knowing collection and disposal of mercury-containing products by solid waste haulers for landfills or incinerators.

The AHT is working for the creation and adoption of a number of these and other far-reaching bills. If adopted, such policies will only be carried out well if the governor and the agencies he controls are supportive. Therefore, AHT will have greater ability to make fundamental change if advocacy is directed at both the executive and the legislature. For these reasons, AHT is also seeking an executive order from current Governor Mitt Romney. Although the state legislature gives authority, mandates, duties, and funds to state agencies, the governor is typically given great leeway and general powers in directing the actions of state agencies. In fact, most existing laws grant environmental and public health agencies in Massachusetts greater power to protect public health from toxic chemicals than they are currently utilizing.

The executive order AHT is seeking would follow the same theme of the legislative campaign around the replacement of toxic chemicals with safer alternatives, rather than permitting supposedly “safe allowable levels” of pollution. The executive order would include very specific directions and implementation plans to specific state agencies, and would direct the state to require the use of the safest feasible alternatives to toxic chemicals in its own activities and through its regulatory powers for private toxic chemical users. Based upon independent scientific information and evidence indicating that a toxic chemical is causing harm to human health, the state government should act, whenever feasible, to require the implementation of safer alternatives. This approach would be included in the permitting process and would target some thirty-five chemicals that the TURA science advisory board selected as the worst chemicals used by Massachusetts industry. Environmental justice communities would enjoy some of the biggest improvements in environmental quality in such a program.

The EOEA would publicize the list of chemicals to be replaced and give notice to companies that these are targeted. DEP would revise regulations regarding its permitting process to require safer alternatives analysis and substitutions be demonstrated in applications and require the use of safer available substitutes by applicants prior to permitting any emissions or discharges of the high-concern chemicals. The Toxics
Use Reduction Institute would provide analysis of safer alternatives and take into account potential effects upon jobs and worker health and safety, environmental health concerns, consumer product safety, and business operations. The executive order would also direct the DPH to take regulatory action to protect the consumer from toxic chemicals in consumer products by using its general mandate to protect public health. Such power would include the authority to ban the sale of products containing hazardous substances that are accessible to children or intended for household use (affecting human health). The authority to ban a product is triggered where the DPH finds that a product contains hazardous substances and that labeling cannot adequately protect health. DPH would also analyze the availability of safer alternatives for the product of concern, and ascertain that consumers would have the ability to purchase safer products that meet the same use before the regulatory action takes effect.

Finally, the proposed executive order would direct all agencies to use the safest cleaning chemicals in all buildings owned and managed by the commonwealth (similar to the proposed legislation, it would utilize the list of products screened by the state’s Environmental Preferable Purchasing Program). It would also require that all state agencies develop and implement plans to avoid the use of toxic pesticides. The advantage of the executive order campaign is that it establishes a clear goal and target for educating and mobilizing the various constituencies of the organizations (and general public) that make up the alliance. It gives the movement a clear way to measure “success” and take advantage of the political competition between a Republican governor and Democratic legislature to promote comprehensive environmental reforms. It also has the advantage of being potentially winnable, but still aggressive with far-reaching, short-term demands.

Expanding the Constituencies

Another interesting component of AHT is the manner in which new constituencies of citizens are recruited to join environmentalists and environmental justice activists in their movement-building work. For instance, Faith in Action: The Greater Boston Interfaith Environmental Justice Project is part of the broader AHT-inspired strategy to build a
popular movement to reduce toxic pollution in Massachusetts. Spearheaded by the Massachusetts Council of Churches, Clean Water Fund, and the Episcopal Divinity School, this subcollaboration brings together the decades of antioppression work of church leaders and communities of faith with the grassroots organizing capabilities of the environmental justice movement and the effective advocacy campaigns of AHT. The theme “Making Connections between Poverty, Health, Racism and the Environment” reflects the aim of the collaborators: to expand the diversity and number of people of faith from communities of color taking action on issues of racism, environmental health, and justice. By placing “Fellows” in six to eight congregations of color within greater Boston and providing them with training, peer group support, mentorship, education tools, and advocacy action resources, Faith in Action will also expand environmental justice and interfaith leadership and participation in the AHT coalition and campaigns.

Making antioppression/antiracism work and health protection the primary focuses for Faith in Action appeals to faith organizations that do not prioritize “environmental” issues. Racial justice, children’s development, and the protection of community health are issues with strong appeal to faith communities. By funneling resources into leadership development and congregation-based social ministry in communities of color, Faith in Action will enable and empower community leaders to be partners in the safer-alternatives movement. Rather than expecting leaders in overburdened communities to take time from any pressing needs to add another “issue” to their agenda, the AHT has raised funds to support leadership and funnel resources into communities of color to build capacity. By increasing awareness and leadership development among people of faith from communities of color, the project hopes to build partnerships between diverse communities of faith and the AHT’s large coalition of secular organizations, and create a stronger movement. By grounding their outreach and mobilization in participatory education, antiracism and antioppression training, leadership development, and religious values and principles, the project promises to create new models for integrating environmental health work into social and environmental justice organizing. With the support of the Massachusetts Council of Churches’ seventeen member communions, including interest
in expanding the project to other communities of color beyond greater Boston, the Faith in Action initiative holds the potential to mobilize faith-based communities to become part of the struggle for a more “productive” environmental justice politics in Massachusetts.

A More Comprehensive Approach to Achieving Social and Environmental Justice: Action for Regional Equity

New environmental coalitions aimed at eliminating both the production and inequitable distribution of ecological hazards are gaining force in Massachusetts and creating exemplary strategies and policies for activists in other parts of the country, but there is an additional component to achieving healthy, livable, and sustainable communities that includes the creation of safe, family-supporting jobs in clean industries; healthy and affordable homes; accessible and efficient public transportation; zoning and land-use planning that accentuates the cultural, economic, social, and natural assets of a community; sufficient public parks, greenfields, and recreational spaces; good schools, libraries, health clinics and hospitals, child care, and other essential social services; racial equality and economic justice; and a profound respect for cultural diversity. The potential benefits of an environmental justice policy are limited if the choices for a marginalized community are to reject construction of a polluting industrial facility that may pose significant health hazards, on the one hand, versus community acceptance of such a facility because of the greater job opportunities and tax revenues it affords, on the other. Unless movements for environmental justice can address the larger political and economic forces that compel communities to make such trade-offs, their ability to achieve significant improvements will remain limited. And while increased participatory democracy by citizens in environmental policy making and local community planning is desirable (if not essential) and should be supported, it is, in and of itself, insufficient. What is needed is a more holistic strategy for achieving social and environmental justice, one that involves moving from locally reactive actions to more regionally proactive approaches to community planning and economic development. To do so requires crossing profound racial and ethnic boundaries and bridging the divides between the white middle-class of
suburbia and poorer people of color and working-class whites in the inner cities.

This is no easy task in Massachusetts. During the 1990s, the Boston metropolitan area grew by 262,000 people, or 6.4 percent. Eighty percent of this population increase occurred in the suburbs surrounding Boston and was fueled by “white flight” from the inner city. In all, more than 47,000 whites left the city of Boston, while suburban communities such as Franklin, Mansfield, Plymouth, and Taunton gained about 90,000 whites. As the whites moved out of neighborhoods such as East Boston, nearly 62,000 residents of color (especially recent Asian and Latino immigrants) moved in to replace them. As a result, whites dropped sharply from 59 percent of the city’s population in 1990 to 49.5 percent in 2000. Although Boston neighborhoods are becoming more multiethnic, the economic segregation of people of color continues. According to the Metro Boston Equity Initiative of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, poor residents of color are twice as likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods (where more than 20 percent of residents are poor) and three times as likely to live in severely distressed neighborhoods than are poor whites. In fact, African-American and Latino households with incomes higher than $50,000 are more likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods than are white households with incomes less than $20,000. As a result, racial segregation in metropolitan Boston is far more intense than income differences would produce. As identified by the Harvard Civil Rights Project, much of the problem lies with the differential treatment people of color receive in the mortgage market.

There is a disturbing pattern of mortgage lending in Massachusetts that reproduces highly segregated patterns of residential location by race and ethnicity. Just a handful of town and cities—typically the most polluted and environmentally degraded communities in the Bay State—account of the majority of loans given to African Americans and Latinos. For instance, just four communities (Brockton, Randolph, Lynn, and Lowell) typically receive more than half of all home-purchase loans to African Americans, whereas five other communities (Lawrence, Lynn, Chelsea, Brockton, and Revere) receive more than half of all home-purchase loans to Latinos. Five of these seven towns (the exceptions
being Randolph and Revere) are ranked among the twenty-five most environmentally overburdened communities in Massachusetts. In addition, African Americans and Latinos at all income levels are more than twice as likely to be rejected for a home-purchase mortgage loan than are white applicants at the same income levels. Racial discrimination of this sort has severely restricted home-ownership opportunities for people of color—opportunities that have facilitated large-scale class and geographic mobility for most white Americans. More than two-thirds (67.8 percent) of the housing units in the city of Boston are rental units (rather than owner-occupied), with home ownership rates for Latinos only one-third those of whites (21.7 percent versus 65.8 percent). For African Americans, ownership rates (31.5 percent) are half those of whites.

A major contradiction now confronting environmental justice activists is that movement victories that result in the substantial environmental cleanup of a community often result in dramatic increases in property values, promote gentrification, and inadvertently displace the (primarily poorer people of color) renter population from the neighborhood. Between 1998 and 2003, the costs of Boston’s rental housing increased 60 percent. By 2003 the National Low Income Housing Coalition ranked Massachusetts the least affordable state in the country for residential rents. High rents created a number of economic hardships for poor residents and the underemployed (between 1992 and 2002 the total number of manufacturing jobs in the state declined by 20 percent). More than 25 percent of Massachusetts workers have low-wage jobs that pay less than $8.84 per hour, or $18,387 per year, working full-time. It is generally accepted that people should strive to spend no more than one-third of their income on rent or mortgage payments. In Massachusetts more than three-quarters of low-wage working families spend more than one-third of their income on housing. As a result, under the Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard—a measure of the real income needed to meet the basic housing, health care, child care, food, and transportation needs of different types of families in specific regions—25 percent of all families in the state (and nearly 50 percent of all urban families) did not earn enough to meet their basic needs in 1998.
The high costs of housing is driving families to search for suburban homes increasingly further from Boston and other cities, as well as places of employment. This contributes to suburban sprawl, which is consuming an ever-larger amount of precious forests, wetlands, farms, and open space for commercial and residential development. According to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, between 1950 and 1990, the state’s population increased by 28 percent, while the amount of developed land increased by 188 percent. Sprawl also requires significant capital investments in public facilities, roads, and infrastructure, creates traffic congestion and travel time, underuses significant public investments in urban infrastructure, and diminishes the overall quality of life. The Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth has found that the number of residents who spend at least ninety minutes commuting each day increased from 11 percent to 18 percent between 1980 and 2000. Well over half a million workers fall into this unenviable category.

To address the social, economic, and environmental dislocations caused by sprawl and other policies in both urban and suburban areas of eastern Massachusetts, another unique alliance of traditional conservation groups, labor, environmental justice organizations, housing advocates, and community-based movements for social justice have recently come together to create Action for Regional Equity (or Action!). The primary mission of the coalition is to launch a movement for a more advanced form of smart growth that would reverse the inequitable patterns of development that have concentrated poverty, segregated communities, and limited opportunities for lower-income residents in the region.

The Action! coalition’s vision for achieving equity in the greater Boston region is guided by four underlying principles: (1) environmental justice and social equity must be central components of regional development; (2) public transit, affordable housing, workforce development, and open space issues are closely linked and require integrated solutions at the regional level; (3) displacement of low-income residents should be avoided through local and regional mechanisms that connect low-income communities to opportunities and resources; and (4) equitable development is guided by policies that promote balanced land-use decisions.
across jurisdictions. These principles imply the adoption of an integrated, multiissue approach to issues of affordable housing, transportation equity, economic investment and development, and environmental justice, whereby formally divided social movements (environmentalists, housing advocates, labor unions, environmental justice activists, and community advocates) in both urban and suburban communities come together to develop a common agenda for dealing with the various aspects of what are the same problems.

Action for Regional Equity has prioritized key policy goals to advance regional equity in greater Boston. The membership and constituencies of their own individual organizations are educated around the issues and mobilized to come together as a coalition to work with government agencies and pressure elected officials to enact appropriate policies. As stated by Dwayne Marsh of PolicyLink, the policies should “enable communities to cooperate across jurisdictions, share fairly in the benefits of development, build a diverse housing stock, ensure accessible green space, create efficient transit systems, and maintain bustling commercial services.” As part of this effort, Action for Regional Equity has endorsed An Act to Promote Environmental Justice in the Commonwealth and An Act for a Healthy Massachusetts.

Conclusion

For too long, mainstream environmentalism has failed to fight against ecological inequities and social injustice. In so doing, far too many mainstream environmental organizations neglect the central social and environmental issues of poor people of color and working-class Americans and are often insufficiently accountable to their own membership as well. In many parts of the country, however, this relationship is beginning to change. In Massachusetts, innovative collaborations between environmentalists and environmental justice activists are emerging to create new and more powerful coalitions for social change. The growth of such coalitions of grassroots environmental and environmental justice organizations committed to genuine base building and community organizing in alliance with more traditional advocacy oriented environmental groups is a reaction to the new challenges posed by the hegemony of
neoliberal politics at both the national and state levels. As we have seen, these coalitions in the Bay State are pushing for comprehensive and progressive approaches to environmental problem solving, such as the adoption of the precautionary principle over risk assessment; source reduction and pollution prevention over pollution control strategies; and regional equity initiatives that address the broader social, economic, and ecological disparities that exist between suburbia and the inner city.

The new environmental and environmental justice coalitions described in this chapter offer enormous potential for revitalizing the environmental movement in a number of ways. First, these coalitions promise (as seen in the environmental justice policy initiative) to bring new constituencies into environmental activism, particularly in terms of oppressed peoples of color, the working poor, and other populations who bear the greatest ecological burden. This can also be seen in the integral involvement of the labor movement, faith-based communities, health professionals, and health activists in the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow and the campaign for pollution prevention and clean production, as well as the coordinated work between housing advocates, preservationist and green space activists, labor, community organizers, environmentalists, and environmental justice proponents on issues of sprawl and regional equity.

Second, each of these coalitions is working to broaden and deepen traditional understandings of ecological impacts, particularly in terms of linking issues to larger structures of state and corporate power. These coalitions are also using traditional forms of professional environmental advocacy that are informed and reinforced by community organizing and grassroots base-building strategies. As a result, the coalitions are developing new organizational models designed to maximize the democratic participation of community residents and organizational members in decision-making processes of both the coalitions and government policy-making bodies. Few coalition organizational structures afford the opportunity for true democratic participation by member groups in the strategic planning of a movement as is provided by the AHT model. In this respect, the environmental justice policy initiatives of ELM and ACE, the safer-substitution policy initiatives of the AHT, and the
regional planning efforts of Action for Regional Equity all serve to connect local grassroots and state-level layers of environmental/environmental justice activism.

The multilayered nature of these coalitions create new pressure points for policy change and help span community boundaries by crossing difficult racial, class, gender-based, and ideological divides that weaken and fragment communities. Because the environmental and environmental justice coalitions described here take a multissue approach, they function as community capacity builders to organize campaigns that address the common links between various social and environmental problems (in contrast to isolated single-issue-oriented groups, which treat problems as distinct). Such a multissue perspective facilitates much more innovative and comprehensive approaches to environmental problem solving and often brings additional social movements into the effort as important allies.

Should the environmental and environmental justice coalitions in Massachusetts continue to build upon the early but already impressive organizing successes and find ways to collaborate with the broad array of other social movements (such as labor), we will witness the birth of a more broadly based, democratic, and effective ecology movement capable of addressing the root causes of the ecological crisis. If such coalitions fail, and retreat back to more traditional forms of environmentalism that conceive of the ecological crisis as a collection of unrelated problems, it is possible that some combination of regulations, incentives, and technical innovations can keep pollution and resource destruction at “tolerable” levels for many people of higher socioeconomic status. Poorer working-class communities and communities of color that lack the political and economic resources to defend themselves, however, will continue to suffer the worst abuses. If the interdependency of issues is emphasized so that environmental devastation, ecological racism, poverty, crime, and social despair are all seen as aspects of a multidimensional web rooted in a larger structural crisis, then a transformative ecology movement can be invented, more diverse people will join the campaigns, and many more victories can be achieved. This is the promise of the new environmental activism in Massachusetts.
Notes

1. Alston, Summit I.
3. Established in 1995, the Environmental Justice Fund is a collaboration of the regional and national networks. It initiated the Strategic Assessment Project in coordination with the Environmental and Economic Justice Project and pursued workplace fundraising strategies as a supplemental means of financing the movement. The fund also served as the lead anchor organization for Summit II, and its meetings provided one of the few venues for strategic face-to-face collaboration among the networks around a variety of initiatives. After the conflicts surrounding the organization of Summit II, as well as the determination that workplace giving was not an option, the fund essentially ceased functioning in 2003.
8. According to the 1990 census, 94 percent of Roxbury’s 60,000 residents are people of color. Roxbury is also among the poorest communities in the entire state, with a household median income of only $20,518. Some 30 percent of the population lives in poverty, as do 45 percent of all children, including 62 percent of all Latino children (Faber, Loh, and Jennings, 2002, pp. 109–132.)
15. According to the 1990 census, higher-income communities, where the household median income is $30,000 or greater, average 3.1 to 4.1 hazardous waste sites per square mile. In contrast, “high-minority” communities, where 25% or more of the population are made up of people of color, average 27.2 hazardous waste sites per square mile. “Low-minority” (5 percent or more minority) communities average 2.9 hazardous waste sites per square mile. As a result, “high-minority” communities average more than nine times the number of hazardous waste sites per square mile than “low-minority” communities (Faber and Krieg, 2001).
19. ACE’s primary constituency is made up of lower-income communities and communities of color in greater Boston, with a focus on their home neighborhood of Roxbury. ACE also provided staff to the Greater Boston Environmental Justice Network, which brings together thirty neighborhood groups and is the New England coordinator for the NEJN.

20. Many of the constituents from the environmental justice movement found the process disconnected from more immediate issues confronting their lives, and experienced difficulty in supporting a fairly abstract principle (the environmental justice bill). Thus, integration of outside environmental justice communities into an essentially “insider” process proved unrewarding to some environmental justice activists.

21. The bill has gone through a number of iterations in various legislative sessions in 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2005. At two legislative hearings on the bill, leaders in communities of color, representatives of public health organizations and affected communities, high school students, and academicians all lined up to make the case for the bill. In a tribute to the breadth of the collaboration, legislators received letters from groups ranging from the Surfrider Foundation and the Essex County Greenbelt Association to Nuestras Raíces and the Massachusetts Public Health Association. For two legislative sessions, the bill has passed the Senate by unanimous vote but failed to reach the House floor for debate. Passage of the bill may take years.


23. Heiman (1996), p. 120.


26. Healthy cleaning products on the list are defined as products that: do not contain chemicals that cause or trigger asthma, as determined by DPH; are on the environmentally preferable products contract list; and are fragrance-free. The legislation requires manufacturers of cleaning products to submit information to DPH that details the ingredients contained in their products and to require worker training and testing (to be paid for by a fee on the manufacturers of cleaning products).

27. Members in this subproject also include Janitors for Justice; No Ordinary Time; Boston Theological Institute and its nine member seminaries; Harvard Divinity School; sixteen member denominations of the Massachusetts Council of Churches; Massachusetts Conference of Catholic Bishops; Leadership Council of Women Religious; and Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston.

28. Blacks comprise roughly a quarter of Boston residents (the largest minority group) and are highly concentrated in the city neighborhoods of Roxbury, Mattapan, South Dorchester, and Hyde Park. Roughly a quarter of the city’s population is foreign born (27 percent). Some 14 percent are immigrants who came to Boston in the last decade. Latinos now make up 39 percent of the population in East Boston (McArdle, 2003, p.1).
36. Vinson and Singh (2003), p. 1
37. The real cost of living in Massachusetts has gone up 17–35 percent in regions across the state between 1998 and 2003, as low-wage working families faced severe job losses and stagnant wages. As a result, it is likely that more than 25 percent of Massachusetts families now earn less than the income needed to meet their basic needs without public or private supports (Boyle, Feinberg and Liebowitz, 2004, pp. 5–11).
39. The average commute in Massachusetts in 2000 was 27 minutes each way, the ninth longest of any state (up from 21.4 minutes in 1980), which translates into twenty-five workdays lost in transit each year. People are moving further away from Boston in search of affordable homes. Sprawling residential and commercial development is largely to blame for the lengthening commute times, affecting the time that people have to spend with their families and participate in civil life or have a social life (Greenberger 2004; Goodman, Ansel, and Nakosteen, 2004).
40. Key participants include Alternatives for Community and the Environment; Asian Community Development Corporation; Boston Tenant Coalition; Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association; Chelsea Human Services Collaborative; City Life/Vida Urbana; Conservation Law Foundation; Environmental League of Massachusetts; Essex County Greenbelt Association; Greater Four Corners Action Coalition; Lexington Fair Housing Committee; Massachusetts AFL-CIO; Massachusetts Affordable Housing Association; Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations; Somerville Community Development Corporation; Tri-City Community Action Program; and Waltham Alliance to Create Housing.

References


