

Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Environmental Justice Maps Update 2022

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why are the Environmental Justice (“EJ”) Maps changing?

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) publishes an EEA Environmental Justice (EJ) Maps Viewer that provides interactive information for areas in the Commonwealth that are identified as EJ Populations based on certain demographic criteria set forth in [An Act Creating a Next Generation Roadmap for MA Climate Policy](#) (“Act”). As required by the legislation, EEA recently updated its EJ Maps viewer with the latest data made available by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Bureau conducted its once-a-decade census in 2020; however, restrictions caused by the COVID pandemic delayed the comprehensive information-gathering that usually occurs as part of the census counts. As a result, the U.S. Census Bureau took steps in 2021 to provide more accuracy to the original 2020 demographic information. The EJ Maps update is based on this more accurate data.

What are the demographic data displayed on the EJ Maps?

When identifying EJ Populations, the Act requires the consideration of the following demographic data for the residents of each U.S. Census block group in the Commonwealth: income level, English language proficiency, self-identified race (i.e. “minority”), or race + municipal income level.¹ The EJ Maps illustrate these data as the U.S. Census reports it, at differing levels of granularity for each of these criteria. Generally, with a few anomalies, the maps display the following data for each block group in Massachusetts: median household income level, percentage of households with limited English proficiency, and percentage of individuals who self-identify as non-white (i.e., “minority”).

¹ The Act defines an EJ Population as the following: “Environmental justice population”, a neighborhood that meets 1 or more of the following criteria: (i) the annual median household income is not more than 65 per cent of the statewide annual median household income; (ii) minorities comprise 40 per cent or more of the population; (iii) 25 per cent or more of households lack English language proficiency; or (iv) minorities comprise 25 per cent or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150 per cent of the statewide annual median household income...” It also provides a way for the Secretary of EEA to exclude or include a sub-block group area from the EJ Population definition, on a case-by-case basis.

Which data sources, specifically, are used to inform the EJ Maps?

The Act requires the use of U.S. Census block groups data to define “EJ Populations” in Massachusetts. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the American Community Survey (ACS) annually and the U.S. Census decennially to gather data and reports that data out assess demographic information at this level.

The ACS is distributed to a representative sampling of residents within a block group or census tract. Survey responses are extrapolated to the entire population of that block group or census tract. Our EJ Maps use ACS data from the most recently available 2016-2020 surveys to inform our income and language thresholds and to convey that information in an interactive graphic form. By contrast, the Census is distributed to every individual resident of the country. Our EJ Maps use the 2020 Census data to inform our race (“minority”) threshold and convey the information likewise.

Are there discrepancies between the information that the U.S. Census Bureau provides and what is required to define EJ Populations in Massachusetts under the state law?

The Act requires the use of demographic data reported by the U.S. Census when identifying a Massachusetts EJ Population. It also requires the exclusion of demographic data of people living in certain housing quarters, such as prisons and college dorms, from the income, language, and race calculations used to identify an EJ Population.²

While this exclusion is already incorporated into U.S. Census block group data for household income and English language proficiency, the U.S. Census does not report data using a methodology that enables the use of race-based demographic information to exclude residents of these certain types of housing. In light of these limitations, EEA interprets the Act to require the use of Census Bureau block group data and, when those data allow, exclusion of residents of certain types of housing quarters.

On November 9, 2022, the Massachusetts Environmental Justice Council, which is comprised of various stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, voted to approve EEA’s interpretation of the Act as related to group housing quarters. As required under the Act, the Environmental Justice Council will continue discussion on this topic as part of its comprehensive analysis of the EJ Population definition.

² The Act defines a “neighborhood” in Massachusetts as “a census block group as defined by the United States Census Bureau, excluding people who live in college dormitories and people who are under formally authorized, supervised care or custody, including federal, state or county prisons.”

How will EEA programs and agencies make this transition between the preliminary maps and the updated maps?

Each of the EEA agencies and programs use the EJ Maps in a way that is tailored to their unique function. They will adopt the information on the updated maps as soon as feasible for their specific programs, but no later than January 3, 2023.

For instance, each grant program will begin to utilize the maps based on the schedule for their grant cycles. Permitting programs will adopt them on a date set by the individual permitting program, considering how much preparation time is required for applicants filing with their programs. The [Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act \(MEPA\) Office](#) will begin to use the new maps as of January 4, 2023. Please refer to each program's implementation schedule for more information.

What changes appear in the updated maps?

Please consult the [EJ Maps](#) for specific information about block groups that meet the criteria for identification as EJ Neighborhoods in Massachusetts.

In general, these updates will result in the following changes:

- The number of EJ block groups is increasing from 2,316 (46% of total) to 2,604 (51% of total), out of a total of 4,985 block groups in Massachusetts
- The number of people living in EJ block groups is increasing from 3,100,468 to 3,487,681 (an increase of 12.5%)
- The number of municipalities with EJ block groups is decreasing from 188 to 187

The following 19 municipalities no longer contain any block groups that meet the EJ criteria, although they did previously:

Abington	Franklin	Southwick
Barre	Georgetown	Swansea
Charlton	Hadley	Wendell
Cheshire	Huntington	West Boylston
East Bridgewater	Ipswich	Whitman
Easton	Lanesborough	
Edgartown	Northbridge	

The following 18 municipalities now contain block groups that meet the EJ criteria for the first time:

Becket
Concord
Halifax
Hawley
Hingham
Holliston

Hopkinton
Leicester
Mansfield
Marshfield
Maynard
Merrimac

Millis
North Brookfield
Savoy
Sheffield
Townsend
Truro