

Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County
Remarks at Chicago Environmental Justice Network press conference
February 23, 2023

I'm Wesley Epplin. I serve as Policy Director at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group. I am also on the leadership team for the Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County.

Urgent action is needed by Mayor Lori Lightfoot, the Chicago Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Allison Arwady, and Chicago's City Council to redress environmental racism in Chicago. So we are in solidarity with this community coalition, the Chicago Environmental Justice Network.

In 2021, Mayor Lori Lightfoot and CDPH [declared that racism is a public health crisis in Chicago](#). Environmental racism is a big part of this crisis.

CDPH recognized that environmental justice is critical for health equity in [Healthy Chicago 2025](#), Chicago's community health improvement plan, stating "communities disproportionately burdened by pollution" will someday be able to "breathe clean air free of harmful pollutants."

CDPH also noted that structural racism is a cause of pollution-related health inequities on the West, Southwest, South, and Southeast Sides of Chicago in the [Chicago Air and Health Report of 2020](#).

Regarding the Hilco Crawford smokestack demolition, CDPH allowed Hilco to expose countless Little Village residents—a predominantly Latine community—to a plume of toxic dust, risking people's health—indeed, harming people's health. The City has not held its employees nor Hilco accountable.

Further, the [Ineffective By Choice report](#) by Neighbors For Environmental Justice outlines how CDPH fails to use its full authority and all tools available to hold polluters accountable. This negligence worsens environmental racism given industrial site locations.

As public health organizations, Health & Medicine Policy Research Group and CHE Cook County call on Mayor Lori Lightfoot, CDPH Commissioner Dr. Allison Arwady, the Chicago Department of Public Health, and Chicago's City Council to act like racism is the public health crisis that it is—and yield to the demands of this coalition.

Furthermore, Chicago needs new policies designed to protect public health and advance environmental justice, such as a cumulative impact ordinance. Thank you.

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