

**Pollution and Poverty in the
Great Lakes River Basin:
Making the Links Between
Environmental Health, Equity & Law**

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CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

- Introduction to CELA?
- Notion of Environmental Justice
- Environmental Justice in Canada
 - Examination of Pollution and Poverty in the Great Lakes Basin
- Example of Interdisciplinary approach to dealing with environmental inequities: Making the Links Project

Notion of Environmental Justice

- The environmental justice movement grew out of the notion of ‘environmental racism’ in the United States
- What is ‘environmental racism’?
 - United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice: the intentional siting of hazardous waste sites, landfills, incinerators and polluting industries in areas inhabited mainly by Blacks, Latinos, Indigenous peoples, Asians, migrant farm workers and low-income peoples.”
 - Bullard (1996): any policy, practice or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or colour
- Researchers in the U.S. have shown that non-white communities are faced with a disproportionate burden of environmental problems, have less say in the design and implementation of environmental regulations, and are less likely to have their contributions regarding the alleviation of environmental degradation considered
- In Canada, racism hasn’t been as strong a focus in consideration of environmental problems



Notion of Environmental Justice con't

- What is 'environmental justice'?
 - Environmental justice links many social movements (anti-racism movements, Aboriginal rights and sovereignty movements, labour union movements, and environmental movement) and embodies a broad conception of the 'environment'
 - Hallmarks of environmental justice include access to information, early and meaningful public participation in environmental decision making, and access to courts and tribunals
 - It is a broader goal that incorporates the more narrowly defined problem of environmental racism



Environmental Inequities in Canada

- Environmental justice efforts in Canada have been somewhat piecemeal
- Canadian cities do not tend to have racial residential segregation in the same way as American cities
- There are low-income areas in Canadian cities comprised of one or more racial groups.
 - Low-income areas are vulnerable in contrast to more affluent areas where residents are able to participate in decision-making and mobilize to protect their own interests



Examination of Pollution and Poverty in the Great Lakes Basin

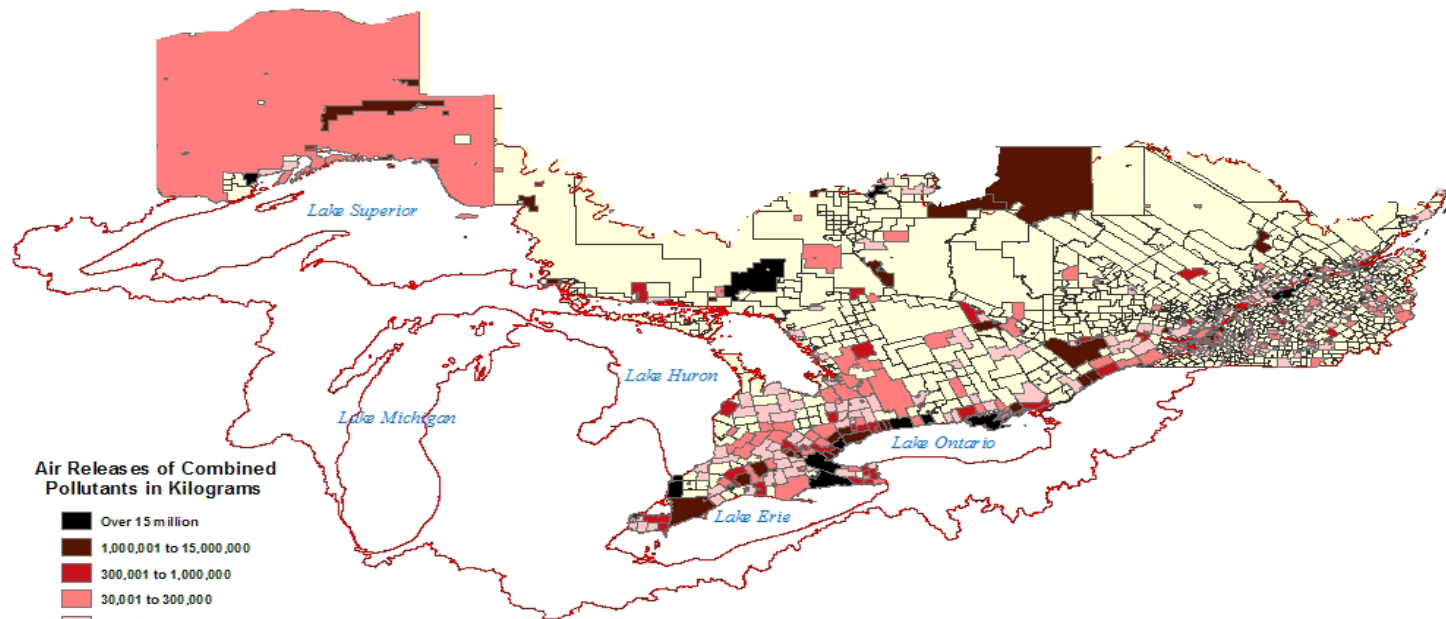
- November 2008 study examining pollution and poverty in the Great Lakes basin completed by Pollution Watch partners (CELA and Environmental Defence)
- More than 1 billion kilograms, or about 25% of total air pollutants reported in Canada, were reported being released to the air in 2005 in the Great Lakes basin.
- The reported releases of air pollutants from industrial facilities vary widely across the Great Lakes basin.
- There are 37 areas in the Great Lakes basin, that have both high reported air releases of toxic pollutants and high poverty rates. People living in these areas may have a double challenge: high potential for exposure to pollutants, as well as all the physical and social vulnerabilities that come with living in poverty



Examination of Pollution and Poverty in the Great Lakes Basin con't

POLLUTION MAP

Air Releases* of Combined Pollutants in Census Subdivisions in the Great Lakes Basin



Air Releases of Combined Pollutants in Kilograms



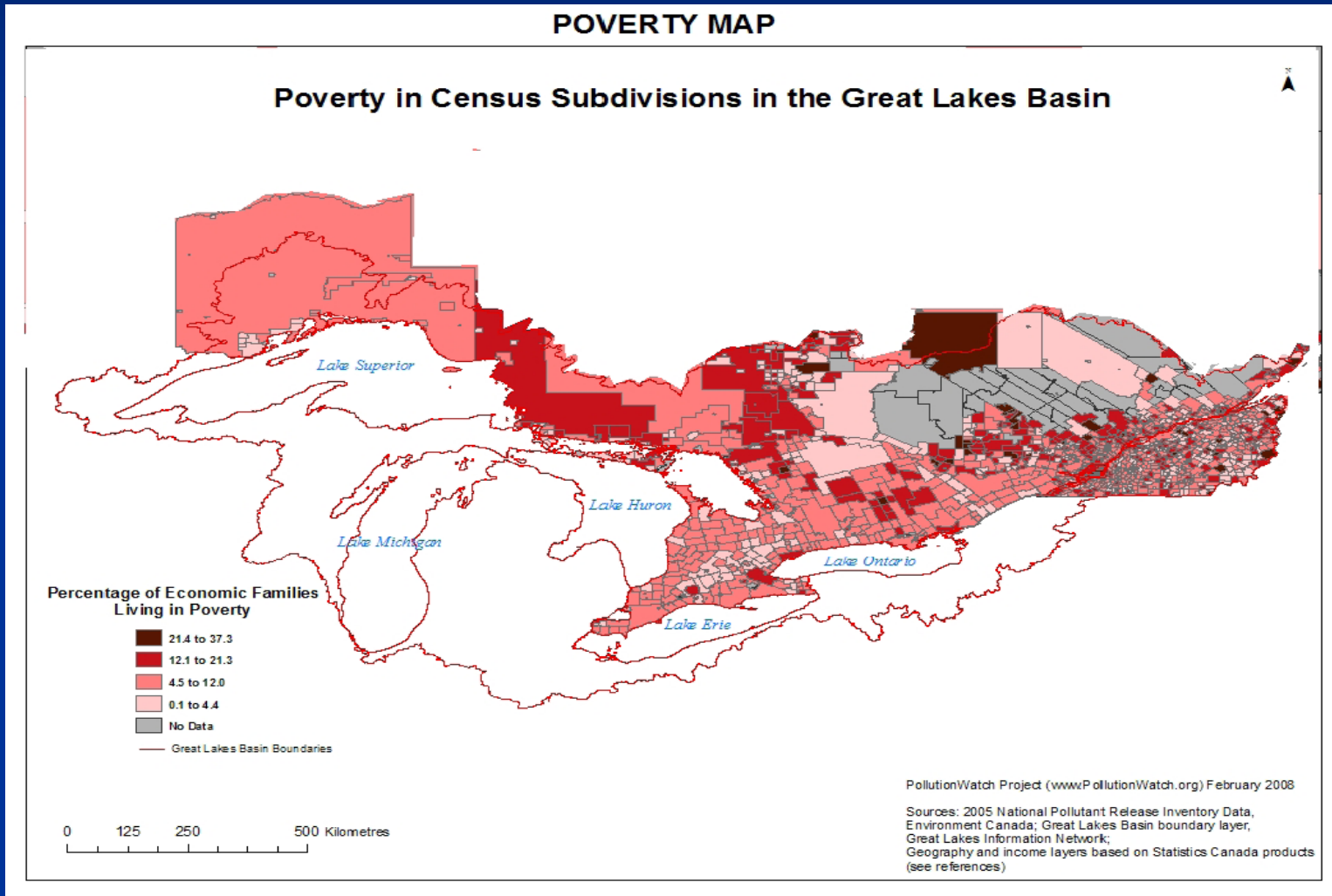
0 125 250 500 Kilometres

PollutionWatch Project (www.PollutionWatch.org) February 2008

Sources: 2005 National Pollutant Release Inventory Data, Environment Canada; Great Lakes Basin boundary layer, Great Lakes Information Network; Geography layer based on Statistics Canada products (see references)

* From industrial sources reporting combined (toxics and criteria air contaminants) air pollutants to the National Pollutant Release Inventory

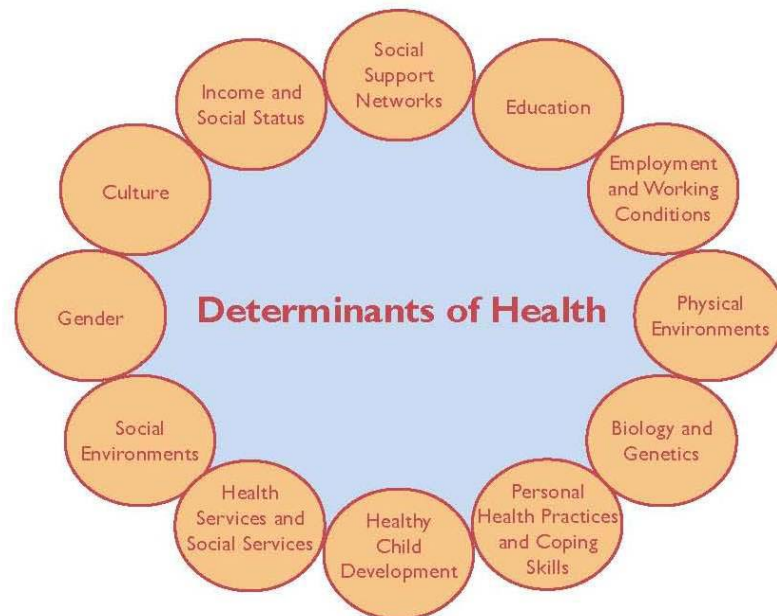
Examination of Pollution and Poverty in the Great Lakes Basin con't



Environmental Equity: Why It Matters

- World Health Organization: A number of factors affect human health, incl. both economic status and physical environment
- Poverty is a cross-cutting determinant

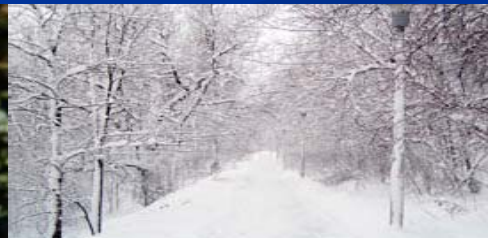
Figure 1: Determinants of Health



Source: World Health Organization, undated.

Environmental Health, Equity, & Law: Making the Links Project

- Three year project undertaken by CELA and the Environmental Health Institute of Canada founded on recognition that vulnerable communities are disproportionately exposed to and affected by environmental contaminants
- Interdisciplinary approach involving frontline doctors, public health practitioners, environmental non-governmental organizations, legal aid clinics, occupational health advocates, community groups and community members
- Six communities involved in the project: Brantford, Cornwall, Hamilton, Kenora, Sarnia, and Windsor



Environmental Health, Equity, & Law: Making the Links Project con't

- Objectives of Project are to:
 - Increase level of engagement in legal system
 - Enhance community knowledge of legal tools
 - Develop community legal skills
 - Improve capacity of frontline workers to protect constituents from environmental threats to health
- Project activities include public legal and medical education and will address a range of environmental health issues of concern
- **Project Activities to date in Cornwall**



Thank you

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