



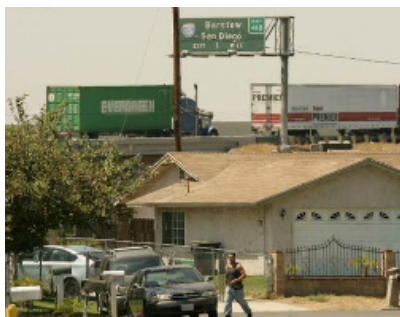
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Community Planning to Overcome Injustice!

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By Carolina Martinez

“I had no idea we had the right to make changes in our community; that we could say: *we don't want this here because it's bad for our health.*”- Maria, resident of Barrio Logan, a neighborhood in San Diego.



Maria's child came home one day to tell her he was having difficulty breathing at school during his gym class. Shortly after, his doctor diagnosed him with the beginning stages of asthma. Maria, like many parents in her neighborhood, made the connection between her son's respiratory problems and the warehouse with dozens of heavy duty trucks travelling daily on her block. She lived across the street from heavy pollution, and now her family was suffering the impacts.

Unfortunately, her story isn't uncommon. In fact, Barrio Logan is the highest at-risk community in San Diego and in the top five percent in the state for hazards of toxic pollution. As an urban planner I can relate to Maria, but I think most people in environmentally compromised communities don't know they can have a say about the layout of their neighborhood.

However, residents can — and should — play an active part in the community planning process. And now, with Environmental Health Coalition's (EHC) groundbreaking video, [Creating Healthy Neighborhoods: Community Planning to Overcome Injustice](#), you have the tools to step up and create positive neighborhood change more than ever! We developed this 20-minute video that uses real-life examples to illustrate a seven-step process we can all use to participate in community-led planning and become better advocates for our neighborhoods and win healthy community visions.

Residents like Maria literally live and breathe the effects of environmental injustice in their neighborhoods. No one is better qualified to recognize and propose solutions than local community members, but the planning processes can feel intimidating and land-use policy often sounds like a foreign language. Residents need to know they have a voice, and with [Creating Healthy Neighborhoods](#), families just like Maria's learn to speak out in the policy and planning processes impacting their community.



So how can you get started steering your community towards a better future? How can you ensure your children grow up in a healthy, safe neighborhood? With this [video](#) (available online and on DVD in both Spanish and English) Environmental Health Coalition walks you through the seven steps to successfully pursue environmental justice for your community through community-engaged planning while highlighting true stories from community members just like you.

When we created this revolutionary tool we wanted to make something to help advocates gain a fuller understanding of their communities and take action to create healthier, more vibrant and livable communities. And although we've only just released it, at the conferences and events we have presented the video at, I have seen people who had little initial knowledge of these issues become very enthusiastic about the community planning process. In fact last week was the first time we presented it to our most involved members in EHC and they loved it! They relayed that the video was engaging and easy to understand, and they are excited to use this video to educate their neighbors on healthy land use principals.

People throughout the country endure impacts of toxic pollution every day because of poorly planned land-use policies, but it *does not have to be this way, and you have the power to change it*. So remember: **community planning is power**. Understanding how to become involved in land-use and planning processes in your community is first step towards a better community for your family today and for generations to come – What will you change?

About the author: Carolina Martinez is a Policy Advocate at the Environmental Health Coalition. She is responsible for supporting residents in National City, a low-income majority Latino community, advocate for land use policies that respect their priorities, improve health, and are consistent with environmental justice principles.

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1. Carlton Eley [permalink](#)
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The environmental sector and the urban planning sector (professional and academia) need more environmental justice tools like this. I hope EHC's example serves as inspiration for others. Synthesizing the lessons from past work can serve as the starting point for creating extremely useful tools. Congratulations!!!

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