



Climate & Environment Policy Priority Brief

Access to Clean Resources

What Is Access to Clean Resources?

Having access to clean resources means ensuring that all communities, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, have equitable, safe, and affordable access to vital natural resources such as soil, air, and water. Ensuring this access involves addressing and eliminating the disproportionate burdens of environmental pollution and resource scarcity that historically marginalized often face. Clean access means implementing policies that guarantee these resources are free from contaminants and managed sustainably in an effort to be of benefit to present and future generations. These measures are essential to foster a healthy community, promote environmental justice, and achieve true equity in our region.

Access to Clean Resources in the South

The United Nations [reported](#) in 2023 that billions of people across the world lack access to clean drinking water. Focusing a bit more narrowly on environmental health in the United States alone, [research](#) has shown that there is a disproportionate burden carried by racial minorities and members of low-income socioeconomic groups related to harmful environmental exposures that affect their homes, workplaces, and neighborhood environments and their overall health and well-being. In the American South, the state of access to clean resources is marked by significant disparities, with many communities, particularly those of color and low-income, still struggling to obtain safe and affordable water, air, and land. Areas such as the Mississippi Delta, parts of Alabama's Black Belt, and rural communities in Louisiana and South Carolina face persistent challenges due to pollution, inadequate infrastructure, and industrial contamination. These inequities are a direct result of historical neglect and systemic environmental racism.

How Can Having Access to Clean Resources Advance Equity in the South?

Addressing issues related to clean resources in the South is crucial for promoting health, sustainability, and justice across the region. Having access to clean resources is a fundamental pillar for advancing racial and class equity in the region. When minority and low-income communities have reliable access to clean water, [air](#), and soil, it directly addresses the historical injustices and systemic inequities that have disproportionately impacted these groups. Ensuring clean resources means reducing the health disparities caused by environmental pollutants, which often lead to higher rates of illnesses such as asthma, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases in marginalized communities. By prioritizing clean resource access, we can create healthier environments that allow individuals to thrive.

Tangible improvements resulting from better access to clean resources include enhanced public health outcomes, increased educational attainment, and economic growth. Healthier communities are [less burdened](#) by medical expenses and lost productivity due to illness, allowing families to invest more in education and career opportunities. Clean air and water contribute to [better cognitive and physical development](#) in children, leading to improved school performance and higher graduation rates. Additionally, safe and sustainable land use can bolster local economies through agriculture, tourism, and small business development, providing jobs and stability to underserved areas.

Ultimately, achieving clean resource access fosters a more just and equitable South where everyone, regardless of race or income, has the opportunity to live and thrive in a safe and healthy environment. It empowers communities to break the cycle of poverty and marginalization, creating a foundation for long-term economic and social progress. EPU is dedicated to working with policymakers and leaders across the region on measures and ideas that ensure equitable distribution and protection of natural resources, recognizing that true equity can only be achieved when all communities in the South can enjoy the fundamental right to a clean and healthy environment.

Legislative Efforts Related to Accessing Clean Resources

1. **Florida:** [Florida HB 1531](#) (failed): This bill would have created climate resilience and drinking water standards in Florida.

2. **Louisiana:** [Senate Bill 503](#) (enacted): This new law provides for the creation of community air monitoring programs to ensure public access to accurate air quality information.
3. **Mississippi:** [House Bill 1150](#) (failed): This bill sought to create the Mississippi Emergency Drinking Water Network Act, including a grant program to increase drinking water security and water system resiliency by equipping water systems and first responders with equipment and training to maintain water service to vital facilities and the public during periods of infrastructure failure.
4. **Kentucky:** [House Bill 302](#) (failed): This bill proposed to create a new section in the Kentucky Constitution to establish a right of the people to have a healthy environment, including a right to clean air, pure water, and ecologically healthy habits, and to declare the Commonwealth's natural resources are the common property of all people.