

Commonly Asked Questions about CT's Environmental Justice Communities

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1. What is a US Census Block?

A US Census block is a statistical area established by the U.S. Census. A Census Block Group is a collection of Census Blocks, and it can be bound by visible features such as roads, streams, and railroad tracks, and divided by less visible boundaries such as property lines, city, township, school district, county limits and short line-of-sight extensions of roads. A Census Block Group usually has 600-3,000 residents in it, but they can sometimes have a zero population. A Census Block Group is one way to find out about a community. You can think of it like a small neighborhood. Looking at a census block group, as opposed to a whole town or city, makes it easier to focus on and understand relevant neighborhood-level socioeconomic data, such as poverty level. A town or city may be made up of many census block groups. Connecticut has a couple of thousand Census Block Groups.

2. Who creates the US Census blocks?

The United States Census Bureau is a federal agency within the Department of Commerce that conducts censuses and surveys to gather data about the nation's people, places, and economy. Census Block Groups are updated every 10 years following the completion of the decennial census. The most recent decennial census occurred in 2020.

3. What is an “environmental justice census block group?”

CT DEEP calculates environmental justice block groups by using US Census Block Group (generally defined every 10 years) and American Community Survey (ACS) data (updated annually). The ACS differs from the US Census in the types of information they collect. The ACS collects data about education, employment, and transportation, whereas the Census collects data about age, sex, race, and renter/owner status. The Census tells us how big the population is, and the ACS tells us what that population may need in terms of economic development.

4. I live in an “environmental justice census block group,” does that mean my whole town is an environmental justice community?

Maybe! You could live in a census block group that meets the definition of “environmental justice community” and that block group could be in a distressed municipality. If that’s the case, then the whole town is an environmental justice community. Or you could live in a census block group that meets the definition of “environmental justice community” (at least 30% under 200% of the federal poverty level) that is NOT in a distressed municipality. In that case, only the census block group(s) that meet the definition would be environmental justice communities.

5. What factors are considered in CT DECD's [Distressed Municipality definition](#)?

Per CGS Section 32-9p, getting added to the distressed municipality list reflects several factors, including:

- High unemployment
- High Poverty
- High Aging housing stock (homes built before 1939)
- Low or declining rates of job creation
- Low or declining rates of population
- Low or declining rates of per capita income

DECD added in a few other factors when it is calculating whether a town is a distressed municipality, such as the level of per capita income and the percept of the population that has a high school degree or higher. The DECD list includes the top 25 towns meeting these criteria. If your town is no longer in the top 25, it will be designated as a Formerly Distressed Municipality. Formerly Distressed Municipalities can return to the list of top 25 towns.

6. My town is listed on DECD's list as a “Formerly Distressed Municipality with Eligibility Remaining”; is my town still considered an environmental justice community?

Yes, you are still considered an environmental justice community. A formerly distressed municipality applies to any town that has an expiration date that is set either 5 or 10 years out from when the town is no longer considered in the top 25 distressed municipalities. Formerly distressed municipalities will remain an environmental justice community until the end of the grace period; the end date is identified on DECD's list, which it updates every year.

7. Are federal and state recognized tribal nations considered environmental justice communities?

Federally recognized tribes are sovereign nations. If they participate in the US Census and ACS, some of their land may be U.S. Census Block Groups that qualify as EJ communities because 30% of the population is below 200% of the federal poverty level. This is the same for state recognized tribal nations. Note that federal and state reservations are never listed as a “Distressed Municipality” because tribal governments are sovereign nations, not municipal governments.

8. What is a municipality?

In Connecticut, a municipality is usually a town or a city. Click [here](#) to read more from Connecticut General Assembly's [Difference Between a Town and City](#).

Other Commonly Used Environmental Justice-related Terms

Neighborhood Revitalization Zone ([CGS 7-600 through 7-608](#))

A program to revitalize neighborhoods through collaborative involvement of residents, businesses and government to determine the priorities of individual neighborhoods. Municipalities may establish NRZ in one or more neighborhoods through local resolution. ([Learn more about NRZ](#))

Enterprise Zones (Targeted Investment Community) (CGS 32-70)

This designation aims to encourage redevelopment of under-used and/or vacant properties, grow certain service and manufacturing industry sectors, and support projects that could bring new jobs to the state. An area of a Distressed Municipality can be designated as an enterprise zone. The criteria for designation are poverty level, enrollment in public assistance or welfare income, and unemployment rate. ([Learn more about Enterprise Zones \(TICs\)](#))

Alliance Districts (CGS 10-262u)

A designation used to allocate increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding to increase student outcomes and close achievement gaps through reforms. This designation is determined by student-centered measures, including statewide assessment results and high school graduation rates. Designations last for five years. ([Learn more about Alliance Districts](#))

Opportunity Districts

Previously known as Educational Reform Districts are a subset of Alliance Districts. These are defined as the 10 lowest performing districts in the state.

Opportunity Zones

Created through the federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017, an Opportunity Zone (OZ) is an economically distressed community where new investments may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. Each state can nominate up to one-quarter of its low-income census tracts as an Opportunity Zone. ([Learn more about Opportunity Zones](#))

Public Investment Communities (PICs) (CGS 7-545)

Municipalities identified as having the highest poverty rates based on per capita income, unemployment rate, and percentage of residents receiving public assistance.

Vulnerable Communities (CGS 16-243y)

This designation is for communities that are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, environmental hazards, pollution, and other environmental injustices. This may include socioeconomically disadvantaged people, people of color, children, elderly individuals, individuals with chronic health conditions, homeless individuals, and individuals with mental health conditions. This designation also includes: Environmental justice communities ([CGS 22a-20a](#)); communities eligible for community reinvestment ([CGS 36a-30](#)).