



# The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

## WHAT IS NEPA?

- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is the voice of the people.
- It is the foundation for reasonable, balanced, and transparent protections for our environment and public health. It is the law that has made informed decisionmaking about public health and the environment a key component of every major federal action.
- NEPA requires federal agencies to engage in a review process to identify any significant environmental, economic, social, or health impacts a project may have before decisions are made and construction begins.
- In many cases, NEPA is the only law that provides local communities the ability to weigh in on federal projects impacting their health and safety.



Public  
Input



Informed  
Decision-  
making

## NEPA IS DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

- 1. Public Input:** Before a project is started, the federal government must ask impacted communities for their input and consider their perspectives. This critical pillar of NEPA draws on our democratic values to ensure federal projects are undertaken with the benefit of communities in mind.
- 2. Impact Review and Informed Decisionmaking:** As the federal government prepares to fund and build a project, NEPA ensures that it evaluates and informs the public of essential information including:
  - How a federal action or project will be constructed/proceed;
  - The consequences of the project/action (good and bad) for or affected communities;
  - Proposed project/action alternatives that still meet the government's needs but may better protect people and the environment; and,
  - Substantive measures that can be taken to lessen any harmful impacts of the project/action.
- 3. Transparency:** The NEPA process requires disclosure of a proposed federal project or action's impacts to the surrounding communities before construction begins – after all, it is the local community that will have to live with the impacts of a bridge, dam, national forest management, or powerplant.
- 4. Accountability:** NEPA ensures that citizens have the right to go to court to enforce environmental laws and hold the government accountable when it violates the law.



Transparency



Accountability

# NEPA PROTECTS PUBLIC HEALTH AND PROMOTES ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Everyone deserves to live, work, and play in healthy communities where the air is safe to breathe and the water is safe to drink. NEPA protects the health and safety of local communities, entire regions, and the country as a whole by ensuring they are properly informed of any possible threats to their health and environment.
- For example, if the federal government wanted or provide funding for a waste incinerator in a residential area, the NEPA environmental review process would almost certainly cite serious long-term health risks to the local community.
- For low-income and minority communities, which are often disproportionately impacted by health problems associated with poorly planned federal projects, NEPA isn't just an environmental protection statute. It's a critical tool for civic engagement and social justice we cannot afford to lose.
- Progress has been made to reduce unhealthy air emissions, but in 2015, 127 million people still lived in counties that exceeded national air quality standards. Almost half of all Latinos live in this country's most polluted cities in areas where incinerators, power plants, and factories are clustered together.
- NEPA doesn't just protect US citizens – it protects everyone. It protects the health and safety of every family and community that stands to be threatened.

## NEPA SAVES TAXPAYER MONEY

1. Shortcutting environmental reviews doesn't just affect the health of our local communities, it also costs taxpayers. NEPA is one of the few tools the public and federal government possess to assess whether proposed projects will have unexpected consequences and cost.
2. By giving the federal government an opportunity to gather all available information, consider project alternatives, and listen to local communities, NEPA ensures public dollars are spent wisely with public input and helps to deter fraude and abuse.
3. In one project in North Carolina alone, NEPA helped save over \$685 million when the review process revealed that improving existing roads in North Carolina rather than constructing a new bypass could meet project goals to reduce severe congestion in the region without significantly impact the environment. Similar NEPA success stories can be found across the nation.

More information and additional resources are available at [protectnepa.org](https://www.protectnepa.org).



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## STRONG ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS PROTECT US ALL



## NEPA MAKES OUR INFRASTRUCTURE MORE RESILIENT

1. As sea levels continue to rise and extreme weather events become more frequent, we must insist that our roads, bridges, and other infrastructure are engineered to be more resilient to the increasingly severe effects of climate change. Hurricanes Irma, Harvey, and Maria have taught us that a “build-first-ask-questions-later” approach is short-sighted, costly, and dangerous.
2. Even if Congress repealed NEPA tomorrow, project sponsors would still have to comply with laws including the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act. The biggest difference is that, without NEPA, these reviews would become fragmented and shielded from public scrutiny.