

Illegal Dumping/Environmental Justice: U.S. Department of Justice Announces City of Houston, Texas, Investigation



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The United States Department of Justice (“DOJ”) announced in a July 22nd news release that it had opened:

. . . an environmental justice investigation into the City of Houston’s operations, policies and practices related to illegal dumping.

DOJ’s Civil Rights Division is stated to be examining whether Houston responds to requests for municipal services (including illegal dumping) in a manner that it discriminates against Black and Latino Houston residents in violation of federal civil rights laws.

Title VI prohibits entities receiving federal assistance from engaging in activities that subject individuals to discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

DOJ states that the examination will include Houston’s enforcement and solid waste management operations. Policies and practices in response to illegal dumping have resulted in the alleged discrimination.

The news release states that addressing discriminatory environmental and health impacts through the civil rights laws is “a top priority for the Department of Justice.”

In regard to “environmental justice,” the news release references:

- The Attorney General’s creation of the first-ever Office of Environmental Justice
- Issuance of DOJ’s Comprehensive Environmental Justice Enforcement Strategy
- Release of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan which includes protecting civil rights and advancing environmental justice as an area of focus
- Announcement of the first Title VI environmental justice investigation (Alabama Department of Health and Lowndes County Health Department)

A July 22nd *New York Times* article states that Houston’s Mayor, Sylvester Turner, was critical of the investigation. He is stated to have indicated that the City had increased fines for illegal dumping and taken steps to improve conditions in the city’s Black and Latino neighborhoods. Further, he is stated to have indicated that his office had “prioritized the needs of communities of color that are historically under-resourced and underserved.

A copy of the DOJ news release can be downloaded [here](#).