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Pastor contributes to new Hurricane Katrina report documenting environmental inequities in disaster rescue

By [Jennifer McNulty](#)

As the next hurricane season quickly approaches, the Gulf Coast's low-income communities of color are still left behind. For them, "days of hurt and loss are likely to become years of grief, dislocation, and displacement," said Manuel Pastor, codirector of the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community at UCSC.

Pastor is one of six experts who explore environmental inequality and public health disparities in the United States in a new report entitled, *In the Wake of the Storm: Environment, Disaster, and Race After Katrina*, available online.

Produced with the support of the Russell Sage Foundation, the report shatters any illusions that disaster rescue in the United States is an equal opportunity affair in which all citizens enjoy the same chances for relief, said Pastor.

"Similar inequities emerged in the wake of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake," said Pastor, a professor of Latin American and Latino studies at UCSC. "Media attention focused on San Francisco and, to a lesser degree, Santa Cruz. Watsonville suffered extensive damage, but appropriate recovery efforts, including language-sensitive services, were much slower to make it to southern Santa Cruz County."

Pastor's coauthors are Robert Bullard, professor of sociology at Clark Atlanta University; James Boyce, professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Alice Fothergill, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Vermont; Rachel Morello-Frosch, assistant professor in the School of Medicine at Brown University; and Beverly Wright, professor of sociology at Dillard University.

"We hope to shed light on many in the U.S. who live their own slow-motion Katrinas--near toxics, suffering with or fearing chronic disease," said the coauthors, all of whom are senior scholars of environmental justice.

"The first step of a 12-step program is to admit you have a problem," said sociologist Robert Bullard. "Our findings suggest we're hooked on hiding hazards among the most vulnerable and disenfranchised. It's time to face reality and offer new strategies."

The authors document the history of disparities evident before, during, and after disasters to put Katrina in a broader context. By tracking the slow recovery of low-income people of color--due to less information, fewer loans, less government relief, and racial bias in housing--they warn of disasters-in-the-making. Additionally, they offer specific recommendations to guarantee environmental quality and incorporate community voices in the Gulf Coast.

In the Wake of the Storm calls for enforcing environmental standards, strengthening public health resources, conducting independent environmental monitoring, balancing green building and equitable development to prevent "hazard shifting" or displacing longtime residents, and developing new mechanisms for community participation.

Finally, the authors stress that it is not just poor and minority communities who are at risk: A hazardous facility can be sited in someone else's backyard, but research shows that the effects soon spill over into other neighborhoods. Establishing fairness as a guidepost for disaster and environmental planning, they argue, is not just the right thing to do--it may be the best thing for protecting the well-being of all Americans.

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Manuel Pastor

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