



LESSONS FROM IVAN WASHINGTON

Recommendations for Prioritizing Environmental
Justice by Improving Environmental Reporting
and Coordination in Washington State

Executive Summary

This report provides a set of recommendations for Washington State agencies for the purpose of prioritizing environmental justice (EJ) in environmental reporting and addressing harms in overburdened communities by improving coordination, trust, transparency, and resolution. The report discusses the disparities in environmental health and reporting faced by frontline communities, states clear areas where beneficial changes can be made to environmental reporting systems, and provides an overview of our experience with the IVAN (Identifying Violations Affecting Neighborhoods) model to lay the groundwork for a set of detailed recommendations for agencies across Washington State.

Our recommendations draw from the successes of IVAN, an innovative tool created by overburdened communities in California to improve environmental monitoring, reporting, and enforcement. **When reduction of environmental health disparities is the goal, communities most impacted by those disparities should be able to influence the decisions that affect their livelihoods.** Accordingly, our recommendations are informed by input from IVAN-Washington (IVAN-WA) community-government workgroups. Both the workgroups and this report are spearheaded by Front and Centered (FC), the most diverse and powerful coalition of frontline communities across Washington State who come together around a vision of a Just Transition.



Front and Centered comprises over seventy Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations representing and serving tens of thousands of people of color, Indigenous peoples, low-income folks, immigrants, and refugees throughout the state. In this capacity, we strongly declare the urgency and importance of improving accessibility to environmental reporting tools and information, particularly for BIPOC, immigrant, and refugee communities. **Developing tools that support multilingual availability and promote transparency will ensure that all individuals—not only those on the frontlines—have the agency and ability to report harms in their communities. By seizing these opportunities, we can create a more equitable and effective environmental enforcement system that protects and serves everyone.**

FC launched an IVAN-WA tool in 2022; the first IVAN tool was launched in 2010 in Imperial Valley, California, developed by the community-based nonprofit organization Comité Civico del Valle. The IVAN-WA project sought to address the harms faced by communities heavily impacted by environmental health disparities. Alongside the IVAN-WA website, FC also launched two community-government working partnerships to identify recommendations for prioritizing EJ in addressing environmental harms and violations faced by Washington State frontline communities.

When active steps are taken to break down institutional barriers to reporting and resolving environmental hazards, frontline communities can better advocate for themselves and government systems will improve. Ultimately, this approach can help build trust and even deeper collaboration between government and frontline communities, as well as address known issues that result in disproportionate environmental harm.

A brief, high-level summary of recommendations for Washington State agencies can be found below, followed by the full report.

Summary of Recommendations for Washington State Agencies

- ◆◆◆ **Agencies should, in coordination, develop a consolidated, user-friendly “one-stop shop” tool that simplifies the public’s experience of reporting environmental concerns.** This tool should feature a simple and comprehensive website interface that prioritizes accessibility and readability, including prominently displayed multilingual options, plain language, high color contrast, text resizable, and visual aids. In addition, the reporting tool should balance agencies’ need for detailed information (including photo and video submissions and geolocation tagging) with community members’ need to retain necessary levels of data privacy. A holistic community education and outreach plan should be part of the development and rollout of this tool, and gradual adoption should be anticipated due to inefficiencies in and lack of trust with the current reporting system.
- ◆◆◆ **Agencies should, in coordination, develop processes to identify, track, and investigate recurring environmental justice issues, utilizing organized data from multiple agencies.** Agencies should also implement and regularly update public-facing tools to make

complaint data and agency actions readily accessible. Such tools should include: frequently updated, report-tracking dashboards; a unified quarterly or annual complaint report submitted to the State Legislature; and documents detailing repeat violations. Communications with affected communities should be consistent and transparent, providing report statuses and updates on actions taken. Agencies should prioritize immediate community updates and look to annual reporting as an opportunity to coordinate with other agencies to highlight issues faced and opportunities for improvement.

- ◆◆◆ **Agencies should enhance coordination efforts to improve efficiency, transparency, effectiveness, and trust.** Two entities—a multi-agency coordination group and a community–agency workgroup—should be established. The multi-agency group should comprise representatives from state and regional agencies with expertise in data, technology, and agency operations. This group can triage reports as necessary, coordinate multi-agency responses, and monitor for repeat violations. The multi-agency group must also be responsible for ensuring that the responding agencies address reports in a timely manner as well as identify bottlenecks or gaps in the reporting process and propose solutions quickly. Meanwhile, the community–agency workgroup should initially focus on developing and distributing resources for community education on the new reporting tool while also intentionally building trust with overburdened communities who currently face the highest rates of environmental violations. After the initial rollout of the system, the workgroup should continue to work on improving and updating the reporting system based on community feedback.

- ◆◆◆ **Agencies must prioritize responding to reports located in overburdened communities.** This is not a new effort—when facing limited resources, certain state agencies in Washington and California have used their bureaucratic discretion to prioritize environmental hazard responses in overburdened communities under the premise of environmental justice. Through our recommendations, this report seeks, in part, to make this equitable dispatching of resources the new standard.