



Water sources in Portland:

- Public bathrooms
- Stored water
- Drinking fountains
- Private water
- Non-profit water

Barriers to accessing water:

- Health
- Financial
- Safety
- COVID-19
- Houseless stigma
- Criminalization of houselessness
- Infrastructure
- Accessibility

Impacts from barriers:

- Health
- Hygiene
- Financial
- Destroyed, lost, or stolen personal belongings
- Mental deterioration

Environmental (In)justice of Water Access for Unhoused Individuals in Portland, OR: A Research Project Centering Unhoused Voices

About the research: PSU Environmental Science and Management graduate student **Alicia Gamble** and **Sisters of the Road** teamed up to understand the environmental justice issues behind accessing water for unhoused community members in Portland. This was done by interviewing unhoused individuals to learn about their experiences getting access to water, the barriers they experience accessing water, and how they are impacted by these barriers, in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is environmental justice?

Environmental justice is a social movement that acts to address decisions, policy-making, and governance about the environment that harms historically marginalized communities. There are 3 pillars of environmental justice.

- **Distributive justice** – equitable distribution of environmental burdens and benefits across a community
- **Procedural justice** – decision-making and processes that allow the freedom of movement of people, ideas, and perspectives
- **Recognition justice** – fairly considering and representing the cultures, values, and situations of all parties affected

Distributive Injustice	Procedural Injustice	Recognition Injustice
Lack of drinking water	Limitation of movement in public & private spaces (criminalization)	Unsanitary bathrooms
Lack of sanitation services (showers, laundromats)	Trade-offs of basic needs	Feeling ashamed of poor hygiene
Water-related illness	COVID-19 shut-offs	Defecating or urinating in public (lack of dignity)
Long wait times for bathrooms and showers	Locking bathrooms	Stigmatization (“othering” of human beings)
Trade-offs	NIMBY sabotage of water resources	Lack of empathy for unhoused individuals



What did we find?

- There can be multiple barriers that could be limiting an unhoused person from getting water
- The rise of the COVID-19 pandemic created more barriers from the water shut-offs, shelter in-place orders, and closure of public buildings
- Public bathrooms (Portland Loos) are not designed and maintained to ensure dignity of all peoples
- Health, comfort, and dignity were the most discussed topics
- **Multiple environmental injustices**

What can be done?

These findings can be used to analyze City codes, procedures, and ordinances to address these injustices within the system. Non-profits and housed community members can also evaluate how they are falling short in supporting unhoused community members and develop inclusive solutions.

“Water access separates subjects from citizens, in that those who are considered to be proper urban citizens are provided water by the state, whereas others are not.” (Sultana, 2020)

SISTERS OF THE ROAD



Questions? Comments? Want to collaborate?
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