

*Audio Podcast about the Symposium on the Science of Disproportionate
Environmental Health Impacts*

LAUREL FIRESTONE: My name is Laurel Firestone and I am the co-Executive Director of the Community Water Center. We're an environmental justice non-profit based in Visalia California in the heart of the San Joaquin valley, a highly agricultural area in California. And our mission is to act as a catalyst for community-driven water solutions, through organizing, education, and advocacy.

CHRISTINE GUITAR: Great, now Laurel, you were there as a discussant. You were at the symposium as a discussant on what, about, physical infrastructure and its impacts. What does physical infrastructure mean to you and your organization?

LAUREL FIRESTONE: The reality is that in rural low income communities of color across the San Joaquin valley, where we work, families lack access to safe drinking water on a daily basis, many families lack access to wastewater infrastructure, as well as transportation infrastructure and decent housing. And many of our communities have been in these conditions for a while over a decade. Each day mothers have to worry about how to find safe water for cooking, whether their child will have safe water to drink in their school, and we know that it's the poorest communities in our state and primarily immigrant communities and communities of color that lack access to what should be a basic human right—safe clean and affordable drinking water and other basic infrastructure. And this article was able to shed light on this issue that isn't traditionally thought of as an example of environmental justice. You know, but we know that physical infrastructure including drinking water systems that we focus on, is a major component of the picture of environmental health disparities in our country. And while we think of this problem, as mostly issues in, say, third world countries, we have many pockets of the U.S. where people don't have basic infrastructure on a day to day basis.

CHRISTINE GUITAR: And do you see there being any clear next step for how EPA, other regulators, other community groups, can, can help with the physical infrastructure issue in communities?

LAUREL FIRESTONE: Yeah, I think that this paper and this symposium was a good first step. I think it highlighted that there haven't been many studies examining certainly exposure to contaminants in drinking water with the relationship with race and class and socioeconomic characteristics. And so I think it was a good start to identify that as a gap and I also thought it was a good way to start discussing and providing opportunity for us to provide input and guidance on how EPA's policies both its regulatory functions and its funding functions and can be better targeted to address the ongoing problems that cause people of color and disproportionately lack access to safe drinking water where they live, work, play, and go to school.

CHRISTINE GUITAR: Laurel, thank you very much.

LAUREL FIRESTONE: Great, thanks so much.