



# Green Allegheny Issue & Policy Agenda



## Executive Summary

Allegheny County has an abundance of natural amenities that make the region special. From our iconic Three Rivers to our beautiful county parks, our natural environment enhances residents' quality of life and makes this a great place to live, work and visit. But we also have a number of challenges to overcome if we want to protect our environment and improve public health.

That's why PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center, along with other environmental groups in the region, developed the Green Allegheny Issue & Policy Agenda, a resource of local data on some of our region's most urgent environmental issues, and things local leaders can do to solve these problems.

For more detailed information, please visit the [Green Allegheny Issue & Policy Agenda](#) on our website.

## Air Quality

Allegheny County's air consistently ranks among the nation's most polluted, due in large part to industrial facilities that release PM 2.5, ozone, and toxic chemicals. These pollutants are linked to serious health issues, including respiratory and cardiovascular problems, as well as premature death. Across Allegheny County, more than 25,000 children suffer from asthma.

Solutions include:

- Strong enforcement of the Clean Air Act
- Direct assistance for communities and people most impacted by air pollution
- Transparent and accessible public education and engagement

## Climate Change

Climate change is already impacting Allegheny County with stronger storms, more extreme temperatures, flooding, and stormwater overflows. Scientists agree that we must transition to clean renewable energy and achieve zero carbon emissions if we are to avoid the most severe impacts of climate change.

Solutions include:

- Increasing energy efficiency of buildings
- Increasing development and uptake of renewable energy, like wind and solar
- Vehicle and transit electrification, and development of EV charging infrastructure
- Expanding public transit access, and options for walking and biking



Pittsburgh Regional Transit Electric Bus

Image courtesy of Pittsburgh Regional Transit

PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center  
6425 Living Pl, Suite 200, Pittsburgh, PA 15206

[PennEnvironmentCenter.org](http://PennEnvironmentCenter.org) | [info@pennenvironment.org](mailto:info@pennenvironment.org)



## Plastic Waste

Nothing we use for 5 minutes should pollute our communities and our environment for decades and centuries to come. Over time, plastic bags and other plastic products break down into microplastics, which are now found in Pittsburgh's Three Rivers, fish, and even the air we breathe. These microplastics contain chemicals linked to cancer and other health hazards.

Solutions include:

- Reduce the distribution of single-use plastic bags, polystyrene takeout containers, and plastic utensils; promote alternative non-plastic options
- Expand and improve curbside recycling programs

## Water Quality

Allegheny County's waterways are iconic and make this region special. Unfortunately, our rivers are not meeting the original aims of the Clean Water Act, thanks to stormwater runoff, combined sewer overflows and industrial pollution.

Solutions include:

- Expanding green infrastructure to capture and absorb stormwater in communities
- Advocating for strong enforcement of the Clean Water Act

## Parks & Wildlife

Allegheny County's 12,000+ acres of parks provide opportunities for recreation, while serving as habitat for wildlife, capturing carbon, mitigating air pollution, and more. But parks are threatened by oil & gas development and chemicals, and they are not accessible to all residents.

Solutions include:

- Protect parks from nearby oil & gas development
- Discontinue use of pesticides and herbicides that can harm pollinators
- Expand public transit to parks
- Provide public information about parks in prevalent non-English languages



Plastic Litter

*Image Public Domain*

## Community Toxics

Lead and PFAS "forever chemicals" endanger our residents' health. Between 2015 and 2021, 2,927 young children in the county had elevated levels of lead, a potent neurotoxin. Lead poisoning occurs when kids consume lead contaminated water, lead in paint chips or dust, and lead in soil. And one in three Pennsylvania drinking water systems exceed the EPA's recommended limits for PFAS, a group of chemicals linked to serious health problems like birth defects and cancer. PFAS chemicals are found in many consumer products, and contamination often occurs due to the use of PFAS firefighting foams at airports and military bases.

Solutions include:

- Create programs to remediate lead in homes and schools
- Replace lead drinking water infrastructure
- Discontinue use of PFAS firefighting foams
- Test and remediate PFAS contamination



**Ashleigh Deemer**

Deputy Director  
PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center

724-316-5853 | ashleigh@pennenvironment.org

