



# UNEARTHING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES IN SEATTLE'S NEW HOLLY NEIGHBORHOOD

*Ishika Nayyar*

*ABSTRACT: Seattle's New Holly neighborhood is home to a diverse community facing numerous environmental challenges. Due to historical redlining and systemic inequality, this community has been disinvested in and exposed to hazardous pollutants, putting them at risk of health issues and displacement. New Holly has some of the least clean air quality in one of America's most polluted cities, and its residents are disproportionately affected by environmental contamination. The lack of efforts and resources to clean up the community puts them at risk of developing health issues and diseases. Transit in the neighborhood also contributes to poor air quality and poses hazards to pedestrians and vehicles due to inadequate safety measures. New developments and projects in the area encourage gentrification and displacement of low-income families. While community members and organizations have been trying to address these issues, systemic and historical factors make public efforts necessary to advocate for change and create an equitable and healthy community.*

In the heart of Seattle, the New Holly neighborhood's vibrant diversity belies the environmental challenges faced by its low-income, minority residents, putting them at risk of health issues, displacement, and exposure to hazardous pollutants. Environmental injustices due to historical redlining, which was the practice of limiting services to specific neighborhoods, and systemic inequality have meant disinvestment in this community. This has led to poor air quality, dangerous public transit intersections, and "green gentrification", which is the implementation of green spaces causing exclusion or displacement of residents already residing in the area. These families are disproportionately affected by environmental contamination in comparison to other communities. It is a newer neighborhood within Rainier Valley, having been redeveloped throughout the past 50 years, it is considered a community at a disadvantage as it faces more than one socioeconomic burden (Council on Environmental Quality, n.d.). Some burdens are due to environmental contaminants in this neighborhood from housing, including metals in soil, industrialized chemical pollutants from

gentrification, lack of green space, hazardous waste facilities, and transportation, all of which have a significant effect on the well-being of those that live in this neighborhoods (Chen, 2008).

New Holly is one of Seattle's neighborhoods that have the least clean air quality in one of America's most-polluted cities and was a community that was redlined with a low grade in the past. When redlined in the 1930s, today's New Holly was one of the communities highlighted to be "D-minus rated" or otherwise not worth investing in. Redlined neighborhoods experience more exposure to poor and contaminated air quality (Turner, 2022). Harmful emissions and increased temperatures expose residents of New Holly to poor air quality because these areas are considered investment risks, increasing nitrogen dioxide emissions from industrial facilities, cargo ships, and vehicle exhaust (Wamsley, 2022). Seattle is one of the most-polluted cities in America, not only due to climate change and wildfires which heighten the ground-level ozone, but also due to oil spills, gas spills, and carbon emissions



## Nayyar

from fossil fuels (Harvey, 2019). King County contains hundreds of sites with environmental contaminants, and while efforts are being made for the clean-up to open space for more affordable housing, the area still contains chemicals, such as metals in the groundwater and soil (Flores, 2022). The hazards New Holly residents are exposed to, and the lack of efforts and resources to clean up the community puts them at risk of possible development of health issues and diseases for this population.

Due to the redlining of this neighborhood, there is less regard for interest in investing in the New Holly community. There is also the contribution of transit in this neighborhood, particularly the Link light-rail (LLR), which serves to reduce carbon emissions and make transportation more accessible. The light-rail stretch of Columbia City Station on Martin Luther King Jr. Way, runs through this community, is one of the most hazardous areas of the LLR, because it is a revealed section of tracks that anything can cross such as pedestrians and vehicles. It's not built to safely prevent individuals from accidentally coming into contact with oncoming trains, as this stretch has the highest number of collisions compared to all other parts of the light-rail (Lindblom, 2022). While developed to accommodate the increase of people on foot, it also accounts for the increase in foot-traffic, accidents, and fatalities.

Due to the increase in migration to the Seattle area, there have been many new developments and projects to accommodate the rush, while still encouraging more people to move here. This is great for the city economically, but it puts low-income families at risk of displacement due to the area's development and gentrification. The land is being taken over by big corporations and companies, raising rents or starting new projects, causing displacement. While the redevelopment project's efforts to make the New Holly neighborhood less hazardous and polluted and more resident-friendly, individuals moving to New Holly are not the original audience the

projects were for. Newly migrated residents are leading the tearing down of green spaces and encouraging the gentrification of neighborhoods through projects such as adding green spaces. Without accounting for the community that lives there causes "green gentrification" by increasing the cost of living, since the intent is to make the area more appealing and safer (Cole, 2020). Going down MLK Way are many new projects and apartments, all less affordable and accessible to those already residing in this community.

Critics may argue addressing the environmental injustice this community faces is not the sole problem, and rather the responsibility of community members and organizations to address these issues. Still, the New Holly community has been trying, yet systemic and historical factors that caused disinvestment. There needs to be public-wide efforts to advocate for change in cleaning up the community to better the environment for all individuals.

The New Holly neighborhood's burdens are consequences of environmental contaminants stemming from various sources. Sources include gentrification, lack of green space, hazardous waste facilities, and transportation, all of which impact the well-being and health of those that live in these affected communities. It is essential that immediate action be taken to tackle these issues, not only the responsibility of community members, as New Holly residents have already made attempts to address them. Government organizations and volunteers from surrounding communities must also take responsibility to create an equitable and healthy community. By working with the community to identify issues, advocating for environmental justice, and using tools to clean up and support this community can help to solve this problem facing Seattle's New Holly neighborhood.