

Renee Hoyos

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Summary: This is a phone interview with former Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Director of Environmental Justice Renee Hoyos. The interview covers her time at DEQ, the agency's attitudes regarding environmental justice, relationships between DEQ and citizens, the Tidewater Air Monitoring Evaluation (TAME), and Hoyos's view on what needs to happen for environmental justice to be treated as priority in the DEQ and beyond.

[00:00:00] **Adrian:** Yeah. Um, so

[00:00:02] **Renee Hoyos:** Did we speak before?

[00:00:04] **Adrian:** Were you doing maybe. Uh, I changed my name in 2021 and I wasn't living in Virginia at that time, but I wonder when that would've been.

[00:00:16] **Renee Hoyos:** Hmm. Okay. I was just curious. That's all. I feel like I talked to a lot of people about environmental justice and I, I lose track, um, especially about my time at, at DEQ.

[00:00:27] **Adrian:** Yeah, of course. Yeah. So you started at DEQ in, in 2021?

[00:00:34] **Renee Hoyos:** Uh, yeah. In, uh, the end of July.

[00:00:38] **Adrian:** Right. And you were there for, um, like a little over a year, is that right?

[00:00:45] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah, I, um, uh, yeah, it was a year and like four months. It wasn't very long.

[00:00:52] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm. So, but before that, you had run for Congress in Tennessee?

[00:00:58] **Renee Hoyos:** I had two election cycles. Yeah.

[00:01:00] **Adrian:** Right. So how did you, can you help me make the connection about, um, how you wound up in DEQ after running for Congress?

[00:01:09] **Renee Hoyos:** Well, um, basically after you run against and lose to the favorite son slash idiot, you don't get a job.

[00:01:18] And, um, it was pretty clear the Tennessee Clean Water Network, which I had worked at for 14 years there, had pretty much died. And it, it had been on its way out for a number of years. It was, it was on life support pretty much. And so there was nothing for me to come back to. I took a leave of absence to run in 2018.

[00:01:36] Um, and then, uh, I just started looking around and I've been working with communities and had a lot of environmental justice training, you know, for over 20 years. Um. And so when the job came up, I applied, but I honestly didn't think I'd get it and I wasn't their first choice. Um, they'd gone through an entire round of interviews and couldn't find anybody, and then went back to their, like, second list.

[00:02:00] Huh. And, uh, yeah. And you know, I think they didn't have a lot of choices because the, the community here was really suspicious of their intent, so they needed to probably bring somebody from outta state to come in.

[00:02:15] **Adrian:** When you say the community, do you mean like, um, like the overall state or, um--

[00:02:22] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah. The folks that are working on environment and con and conservation and justice and social justice issues just were really, I think, um, suspicious of DEQ. DEQ, you know, they don't have a lot of money. That's the agency that always gets cut because industry is pissed that they have to consider protecting the environment under the permitting process. So it's always under fire and it's not staffed up to actually be able to fulfill the Environmental Justice Act. And so they end up making mistakes and doing things because they're understaffed that they might not have done otherwise.

[00:03:00] And, um, frankly, one of them was at the Atlantic Coast Pipeline hearing. They brought in the state police and they didn't do any, they didn't tell folks why they did it. And so everybody that was participating in the hearing thought it was because of them. But that's not what happened. The director had a credible threat against his life.

[00:03:18] **Adrian:** Wow.

[00:03:19] **Renee Hoyos:** And I felt that if, if they, if they had just said that and said "The, the state police are here to protect all of us." I think it would've gone

a long way reducing suspicions that communities had against them. But they just didn't have anybody to help them think through some of their decisions.

[00:03:35] And so they kind of blended and they had bad feelings here in the community and rightfully so. I mean, they don't have the people to, to, to do credible outreach. So when they opened the office, I was very lucky. David Paylor was generous enough to provide me some staff and we set about trying to repair relationships with the community.

[00:04:01] And that was my biggest, that was my biggest task.

[00:04:06] **Adrian:** Yeah. So that, that hearing with the ACP and the police, that was before you came on, right?

[00:04:12] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah. I wasn't here for that, and when they were telling me about it, I was like, "Did you say anything to-- did you get the word out through channels to say, 'Look, there's been a threat and we have to have the state police, and they are probably going to be in riot gear because you know how they are and we just cannot get around this. But if, you know, if somebody comes into that hearing with a gun, they will be there to protect everybody at the hearing. And this is not about you. This is not about what we think about you. This is a, a measure to protect you.'"

[00:04:43] So, you know, it's just stuff like that. It's like, you know, being able to communicate to these folks in a way that's more, um, you know, that that's more transparent, is what they needed. Because nobody knew that. In fact, when I told them that's why they were there, they were like, well, [00:05:00] why didn't they say anything? And I was like, yeah, well, I know.

[00:05:06] **Adrian:** Yeah. Whoa. Okay. So that's the context that you came into the DEQ with.

[00:05:12] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah. And, and a lot of it was like, you know, how can we make things better with the community?

[00:05:19] Okay. Um, that was the big one. And then it was like, how do we incorporate environmental justice into department actions? How do we-- how do we, and you know, the, the definition of environmental justice to me has always been a little-- I'm not very thrilled with it. Um, "the meaningful involvement and fair treatment is a process." Um, and I don't see a lot of like, visionary thinking around environmental justice. It's not really, that definition doesn't really get to restorative justice. Like why are we involving them early?

Are we just telling the bad news early? Um, or are we really trying to provide some environmental justice, which to me was like returning to the community that which was taken from them: clean air, clean water, clean soil. You know, how do we do that in these programs? How do we start this restorative process? And, you know, we were, we just didn't have time. I mean, the, the, there was a transition and then it just kind of fell apart.

[00:06:23] **Adrian:** Hmm. Yeah. So I wanted to ask you what you learned about environmental justice in the state, um, during your time working with DEQ. Could you expand on that a little more?

[00:06:38] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah, I mean, I think, um, the first thing that, that they did was everybody, all eyes turned to DEQ and said "What are you doing." And we really tried under the Northam Administration to expand that to all the agencies. So we had two meetings. Um, of the Interagency Council so that we could educate the rest of the cabinet level positions that environmental justice isn't just through permitting, you know. It's how we look at transportation and its effects on these communities. How we look at housing, education. Um, really the only, the only agency that we sort of gave a pass to was, uh, VITA, the information technology. Um, but everybody else, you know, needed to come to the table and, and have a robust discussion and start thinking about what is environmental justice and how are we gonna do it as a whole of government approach.

[00:07:36] And we had some really good, um, conversations, um, mostly in the Northam in the-- only, in the Northam administration. The Interagency Council never met again, but we did put a, together, a report that talked about, you know, "Can we start looking at resources? Can we start looking at the state holistically? Can we have," you know, one of our ideas was to get centralized mapping so that you're not jumping around from database to database.

[00:08:00] Trying to put together like what are cumulative impacts to these communities. Um. You know, "Can we, uh, you know, start having some cross training with staff from all the agencies? Can they, you know, can they all be participating in environmental justice so that we're on the same page?"

[00:08:18] Um, we were looking at things like the, uh, Virginia Energy had some really good programs where they were across the agency and then vertical across other local agencies trying to put, trying to do sort of a just transition to renewables. And they don't call it that now, but, um, so there's a lot of good efforts I think coming up. And then with the Youngkin administration, you know, that all pretty much went away.

[00:08:46] **Adrian:** Hmm. Interesting. Um, and so you were, so the Tidewater Air Monitoring, um, Evaluation study started maybe right towards the end of your time there.

[00:09:03] **Renee Hoyos:** No, it was ongoing before I got there, but we got caught up in the pandemic. And so we couldn't have meetings. And then after the pandemic sort of cleared and we started having meetings, then we had supply chain issues.

[00:09:15] We were having a hard time getting the monitors and there was a back order. We were able to get the, I think the Purple sensors we were able to get pretty quickly. But the monitors had some delay. And then, you know, we had a lot of public meetings and we're really trying to explain to folks that the big air monitors, even even the sensors, they need electricity and access to wifi.

[00:09:37] And so, uh, I really liked the program that we put together for the community. We did a lot of community meetings and we had them decide where the air monitors went and they got to pick a point on the screen. And say, and we told them, if you want the monitor at your house, pick your house. If we can make it work, we'll set it up there.

[00:09:58] [00:10:00] Um, and uh, we got a lot of really good response. And another thing that was crazy, I just, that whole program just felt, um, just, uh, what is the word? Like everything that could go wrong would go, so I think the first two public meetings we had, we had severe weather. We were under a tornado warning for the first one, and I think the second one, I think there was also another bad storm and people just didn't come out.

[00:10:28] Um, and so we ended up having to do a more diffuse process, which was our coordinators went out and just like did individual meetings with groups and we did some door knocking. Um, and we, we've got the monitors set up and, and, uh, it was, it, it's harder than you think. And, and one thing we wanted to get to, to make a point to the community was the big air monitors are gonna pick up the air from all around, um, the two sites, um, the sensors are going to show you different data. But we just needed sort of all the stars to align to get the monitors, like they had to have wifi and electricity. And if we couldn't have wifi and electricity, those monitors aren't gonna work. And so that really does limit the number of sites that you can have.

[00:11:13] Um, but I think we, we located them very well. We were able to get sensors out. Um, those things also require wifi and some, I think they have little solar panels, so they, um, they can continue without electricity, but they did

need wifi so that they could, uh, talk to the mapping program. And, uh, I haven't looked at the project for a year, so I, I don't, or however many months I've been gone.

[00:11:38] I left in October, so-- did I leave in October? No, I left in August. So it, it's been since August, since I've actually looked at it. But I, I do get notices, um, that the meetings are still ongoing, um, which is good. But you know, that project was really interesting. We had to work through a lot of, um, of issues, just technical issues. Um. To get that thing up and running. But I think it's, you know, I'm in a completely different industry now. I'm in, I'm in consulting and I think it's a model for the way company, you know, communities can start looking at their air quality. And I know that DEQ wanted to create an air monitoring network across the state.

[00:12:19] Um, I don't know how far, I don't know how far they've gotten with that, but that was a goal I think with the air group.

[00:12:27] **Adrian:** Wow. Yeah. So this was like really a new kind of initiative for DEQ.

[00:12:33] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah. I mean that grant was, that grant was applied for back in, I wanna say maybe 2020, 2019. 2020. It would've been, yeah.

[00:12:43] Well, I think they applied for the grant in 2020, in 2019, and they got it. And then the pandemic hit. And then they just couldn't do anything with it. And then once we all got back online, you know, we tried, I think they tried to hold a couple of virtual meetings, but it, and, and they didn't have an, they wanted to kind of wait until they got the EJ director and that was delayed.

[00:13:05] I mean, I applied in like December of 2020 and they didn't call me until late March, I think. March or April. And then they fast tracked me, so, um, I just think there was a lot of like, just, it was just really hard to navigate the pandemic and try to get a new project off the ground.

[00:13:25] **Adrian:** Oh, totally. Yeah.

[00:13:28] Um, yeah. And so when you came in as the EJ director, was that your title Director?

[00:13:38] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah, well, yeah, yeah. Director of Environmental Justice, and we were debating as it was, is environmental justice a department? You know, we opted for office. But there was nothing there. I mean, all there

was was the law. And, um, and, and so, it's like, well, what you-- I had to make stuff outta nothing.

[00:13:57] And, um, luckily David Paylor agreed to allow me to hire four coordinators, and I think that's been a bit of a game changer because they, they are on the ground and can be at your meeting. Um, and there hadn't been a, a sustained presence of DEQ at community meetings just 'cause they didn't have enough staff.

[00:14:17] You know, I think they were down, they didn't even have outreach staff by the time I got there. They had communications, but the education program had been moved to conservation and then pretty much in the outreach over the years had been eroded to almost nothing. So any outreach that was happening was happening with the permit writers, and they, that really wasn't, community engagement was not quite what they had signed up for.

[00:14:40] I mean, they are writing permits. And so they had to facilitate community outreach and, um, you know, that just wasn't, they're engineers and they're, they're scientists. They're, they're not necessarily folks that want, um, to deal with community members who are pissed, [00:15:00] so, um,

[00:15:01] **Adrian:** Totally.

[00:15:02] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah. So, um,

[00:15:03] **Adrian:** It's a different skillset.

[00:15:05] **Renee Hoyos:** It it's a different, yeah, it is a different skillset. And some were good and, and some were just would tell me like, "I, I don't, this is not what I wanna do. Like, I don't wanna make a meeting." And so we really worked hard to take over for the controversial permits. That was gonna be the job of the, of the coordinators was to really start planning the meetings and, and making them more interactive and, and more, um, especially meetings that we were hoping to have early on in the process to start along, folks to, you know, really understand the project and the rules. Because the rules are, you know, the law isn't, isn't just particularly. Um, and sometimes it's not even fair. Um, but the processes are the processes and until you can get legislators to change how those processes are, you're kind of stuck with how it works.

[00:15:56] And so we wanted communities to at least know how the regulatory world works so that they could be more thoughtful about how they engaged. And so an example of that would be there was the Mountain Valley pipeline.

Um. A generation, the, um, I'm forgetting all my words. Um, the, uh, it was a gen, it was a bunch of generators at, uh, it was, it was compress station.

[00:16:23] **Adrian:** Compressor station.

[00:16:23] **Renee Hoyos:** Station. Yeah. And so folks really started ganging up on the permit writer and started, you know, spamming the permit writer with a lot of those, you know, uh, form letters. And the permit writer, they, they don't have any control. They, they are not a decision maker. They are simply following the regulations. And creating a permit. And so one of my jobs was to say, you know, to the communities that were doing this, and I did reach out to a couple and say, you know, "That's not the target. The, the decision is going in front of the air board. The air board is your target. You need to be reaching out to those members, the permit writer, all you're doing is making an enemy."

[00:17:06] Um, so, you know, there was a lot of like reeducation that folks needed to do, um, so that they could better, you know, it's like the, you know, don't, don't use that tactic here, use it there. And you, you might find that you'll get a better outcome. They will understand what you, what your concerns are, and they'll be informed to make the decision.

[00:17:28] Um. And that, and then we worked on a, a guidance that, permitting guidance that was released. Um, and I was, I worked on that some. And then, uh, I left before it had gone to the governor's desk to look at, and I guess now it's out for public comment. Well, I don't guess. It is.

[00:17:55] **Adrian:** Right. And so when you left, um, the DEQ, um, but before you started, where you're at now with the consulting firm, um, what was going on during that time?

[00:18:11] **Renee Hoyos:** The time in between?

[00:18:12] **Adrian:** Yeah.

[00:18:13] **Renee Hoyos:** I was just looking for a job.

[00:18:17] **Adrian:** Right. Yeah. Why did you leave?

[00:18:21] **Renee Hoyos:** Um, it was pretty clear that that, uh, environmental justice wasn't a priority. Um, I, uh, I, I reminded them repeatedly that the law says that communities are entitled to the full cycle of decision making. And in the creation of that guidance, no community members had been informed. I was

told I was not allowed to talk to anybody about the creation of that guidance. And, um, I just felt that some of the things that were going on at the agency were not things in which I wanted to be a part of anymore.

[00:19:04] **Adrian:** When you say the guidance, are you, are you talking about the permit-- permitting guidance?

[00:19:09] **Renee Hoyos:** Yeah, I advocated for a public advisory board and I asked to spend a year working with community members to really work it out and, but I was told originally the task was, I was to write that guidance and it was to be due in two weeks and you know, it didn't come out in two weeks 'cause you can't make a guidance in two weeks.

[00:19:31] But I really wanted a public process so that we could get some really robust input on, on what communities thought DEQ should do towards permitting, because permitting is the one thing that communities are very much concerned about, particularly air, air quality permitting. Um, and I felt that, you know, the, in-- as well, industry should have a shot, um, at it.

[00:19:56] And we had put together a RAP, a [00:20:00] regulatory advisory panel, to look at a section of the air regulations that would allow DEQ to make some siting decisions. Um, and that panel was environmental groups and industry and local government, and it was a very good group of folks. They worked very well together.

[00:20:23] Mm-hmm And I was hoping to reestablish that group and just spend some really concentrated time going, going through what the agency does, what it could do, what other states are doing, and finding, you know, a unique path forward for Virginia.

[00:20:44] **Adrian:** Yeah. Yeah. And you know, I think that's something that just in my research and my understanding of, you know, what is on communities, minds and hearts, something that comes up a lot is relationship between regulatory, regulatory agency and industry.

[00:21:07] Um. And I was wondering if you had any observations about the relationship between DEQ and, um, in particular, like some of the railroad companies that are, um, really big in Virginia.

[00:21:25] **Renee Hoyos:** You know, we don't, we didn't deal much with, I, I didn't see a lot of railroad activity at DEQ. I was there, but I was only there for a year and four months.

[00:21:33] So, you know, things could have changed. We do have a reg-- a railroad commission, if I recall, and I believe that they participated in the Interagency Working Group. Um, but just the way the system is set up, I mean, if you wanna talk about structural issues, it is set up for DEQ and industry to be fairly cozy.

[00:21:57] All the state agents, I'm from Tennessee, and I, I push back on on TDEC repeatedly for their coziness. And you know, folks would say to me, this is in Tennessee, they would say, well, you know, those people are good people. And I would remind them that I'm not. I'm not judging them on their niceness. I'm just saying that there are, you know, there are things to consider, um, that they're not considering.

[00:22:20] And I think, you know, the relationship can only be cozy because they're working together closely to get a permit out. And, you know, the permit writers at, at Virginia are dedicated and they know their business and they are trying desperately to put together a permit that meets the state and federal regulations and they have to work, um, with industry to get that done.

[00:22:46] And so, you know, rapport develops and my office was, was created to have that rapport also with communities so that the agency would be a little bit more balanced. It's not just leaning hard towards industry. My little office was hoping to lean, we always lean towards communities, you know, what do communities want? What are their concerns? Can we take this back to the permit writer and can the permit writer address it even though it might be outside the permit scope? And the the new environmental justice laws that are coming out, certainly in New Jersey are having that, that lean now more towards communities. I mean, in, in New Jersey, if an, if you are creating a disproportionate impact to an environmental justice community, you do not get your permit.

[00:23:39] **Adrian:** Wow.

[00:23:39] **Renee Hoyos:** And yeah, it's a game changer.

[00:23:43] **Adrian:** Fascinating.

[00:23:44] **Renee Hoyos:** There are real concerns about what's, you know about that with industry and you know, I like to remind folks in industry there were big concerns when these environmental laws came out. Everybody got, you know, worked up about it. They got worked up with osha and eventually you operationalize and you settle in and you do the work.

[00:24:05] And everybody's a little freaked out right now. Um, in, in, in New Jersey. Um. They feel industry feels particularly attacked by some of these federal requirements. And some states are really stepping out and saying, you know, you gotta think about the folks that live around your facilities now a little bit more than you have been in the past.

[00:24:25] And that's a good thing, and I think it's gonna be better for, for, uh, companies. I mean, I think we've lost sight of what those environmental laws were supposed to do. They were supposed to eliminate pollution and the water laws was, had a date. And we blew by that date 50 years ago. So, you know, we're coming back to some of the original intent of these environmental laws, which was to not have pollution.

[00:24:52] You know, the goals were to have clean air and clean water, and we don't have that in a lot of places. So how do we get back to that? [00:25:00] And this is, you know, that this is, these laws and those concepts maturing.

[00:25:10] **Adrian:** I mean, interesting. Wow. Um, yeah, I mean, how do you, how do you think we get there?

[00:25:25] **Renee Hoyos:** Well, I think, I think we're moving that way. I mean, I've, I've really just felt a profound shift since the pandemic in so many areas that were, we're no longer, you know. We're discovering that the tenets of capitalism really haven't served us as well as we thought.

[00:25:44] Um, and, and folks are really thinking now more about their behavior and, and how they are towards, um, you know, communities that, quite frankly, through no fault of their own, have been targeted for increased pollution. Um, resources have either not been allocated to these communities or have been taken away.

[00:26:13] Um, and I, I feel like the companies that I work for now at ERM are very much interested in being better neighbors and are looking for ways in which to be better neighbors, which, you know, it's not rocket science. Really, um, you just are nicer and thoughtful and you think about, you know, your behavior and your effects and how it, how it impacts others. It's really quite basic.

[00:26:50] Um, and so, uh. I might have lost track of your question. Oh, it was, how do we get there? And so I think, you know, codifying it is helpful for those that are kind of reluctant. We need to bring them along. Hopefully once they

start operationalizing it and seeing its benefits, it, it will not be as scary or as, um, as scary or as, uh, uh, resistance provoking as it might be now.

[00:27:19] Um. Because like I said, you know, years ago when OSHA came out, you'd have thought, people were like, "Oh my God, they're telling us what to do and you know, nobody's died in my, in my workplace, so why do I have to do this and blah, blah, blah." And now people are like, "OSHA's just something you do," and, and I think that when we require people to behave that way. We're gonna make 'em behave until it becomes a, a habit, and then they'll, and then we'll start behaving that way. But I think one thing we need to do certainly is keep our eye on the final goal, not get wrapped up into the process of, of meaningful involvement and fair treatment without making sure that it, it's attached to a greater restorative justice goal.

[00:28:02] Because I, I do see folks, you know, being like, "Well, I've had extra meetings." Well, okay, you've had extra meetings. That's great. Um, but, but what's the ultimate, what's the ultimate goal? We want here, we want people to have a better life than they've had around your facility, or if it's a new facility. We don't want people's lives to be degraded because you moved in and, and so how do we do that?

[00:28:28] How do we preserve what people have and make it better? And as long as we keep our eyes there, some of the things that we're doing, I think can help us get there. But the ends, the means aren't the ends. And I, I sort of feel with the definitions, we talk a lot about the means and we haven't really talked much about the ends.

[00:28:48] **Adrian:** Yeah. A hundred percent.

[00:28:52] I wanted to ask you, because when you left DEQ, it seems like the natural next step for them would have been to have moved your deputy director into your position as director, but he got, uh, moved into a different, like a regional directorship around the same time.

[00:29:16] **Renee Hoyos:** Mm-hmm.

[00:29:17] **Adrian:** Um, do you know more about how that decision got made?

[00:29:23] **Renee Hoyos:** Well, first of all, the deputy was really, um, Jerome was. In a way on loan, to me, he was the head of water compliance. And he had been doing environmental justice sort of as he could fit it in before it was a

priority. Um, and, you know, he did it and he was, he was good at it. But I, I don't think his career path was necessarily environmental justice.

[00:29:49] Um, you know, he, his, the step that he has is actually a greater career bump. Um, because they diminished the depart, the Office of Environmental [00:30:00] Justice, the Office of Environment. There's no, I don't think there is an Office of Environmental Justice anymore. There might be a name on the website, but the new director, the, there's not a director that's now a program, it's a program manager.

[00:30:12] I reported directly to the director. I was demoted to a, I guess a deputy. And then the new director has been demoted to, uh, a report, a reportee to the deputy. So the whole, the whole department has been diminished to a program where they can simply let it languish. And I think that's what they're planning to do, um, in this administration.

[00:30:36] Um, the next administration may pick it up and restore it to where it was, but being the director for Jerome would not have been, he would've been, been demoted to a program manager and he's now a regional director.

[00:30:50] **Adrian:** Right. So that's a good, that's a good look for him. That's a good thing.

[00:30:53] **Renee Hoyos:** It's a good thing.

[00:30:54] **Adrian:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:30:55] **Renee Hoyos:** That's a good thing. And also I think it's very important. I mean, you know, regulatory agencies tend to be primarily white male, and, uh, we did not have a regional director. We have one woman who's a regional director and one and one and a Black man. And it's important that Jerome be in that position because, uh. You know, the diversity at DEQ is very, very, you know, older male white, and they need, you know, leadership is very older, male, white, and, and they need some diversity. And he'd been there for many years. He knows all the programs, he knows all, he knows all the history. He was an excellent choice for that. And I really adv-- I knew, I didn't know I was gonna leave, but I did know that he needed to be in that position and he was given that position before I left.

[00:31:48] And, and I was really grateful that he got it. I mean, I, I definitely where I could put my 2 cents in.

[00:31:54] **Adrian:** Yeah. That's awesome. Wait, so when you started, David Paylor was the head of the DEQ. Is he still the he, is he still the head?

[00:32:03] **Renee Hoyos:** No.

[00:32:04] **Adrian:** No. Or did he, does the head of the DEQ get appointed by the governor?

[00:32:08] **Renee Hoyos:** Yes.

[00:32:09] **Adrian:** Okay. So Youngkin appointed a new head?

[00:32:12] **Renee Hoyos:** Yes.

[00:32:13] **Adrian:** Okay, and that's when you left?

[00:32:18] **Renee Hoyos:** No, I didn't leave for another eight months.

[00:32:22] **Adrian:** Oh.

[00:32:24] **Renee Hoyos:** I stuck it out for as long as I could.

[00:32:25] **Adrian:** Right.

[00:32:27] **Renee Hoyos:** But the new head was, um, making it clear that environmental justice was not gonna be a priority. Well, he talks about it a lot, but, um, you know, he, uh, he talks about it a lot. But you know, like I said, he wanted me to create a guidance in two weeks. Of course, that can't be done. He appointed three men to help me with the guidance and they basically wrote it. Um, they wouldn't allow me to do a, a public advisory group, which I thought was very important for such a guidance. It needed to be done slowly and thoughtfully.

[00:33:06] And, um, and, you know, that's, I think he, I, I think, uh, Director Rolband really saw it as just another program. And now he is, like I said, uh, the Director no longer. In fact, I don't even think the, the role is called Director. I think it's a program manager now.

[00:33:27] **Adrian:** Okay. Wow. And so how are you, how are you finding your new job?

[00:33:43] **Renee Hoyos:** You know, I'm in a company that's really big. This is a global company, and, um. Uh, I am finding, um, the work, like everything I wanted to do. Um, a lot of companies really want to do environmental justice and to do it right, and I think we're getting a lot of attention paid by the Feds around environmental justice. Not a lot of guidance.

[00:34:13] Uh, that was certainly the case when I was at DEQ. The Feds were not helping us out. Um, we don't have basic definitions for disproportionate and cumulative impacts. We don't have any guidance on how to calculate that. We don't have any guidance on what's a fence line community. I mean, a lot of things that you need to manage a program. The Feds are just like silent. Um, it's sort of a, a cat and mouse game. It's like they're looking at us, we're looking at them. And whoever makes the first move is going to either get the glory or the blame. And New Jersey has stepped out with arguably the most progressive environmental justice law in the country.

[00:34:50] I mean, they, they, they breezed right past California. And, uh, you know, we're all like watching it with great interest to see how that's [00:35:00] gonna play out. Is it, is there gonna be litigation? Is it, is it gonna be caught up in the courts? What's gonna happen? How are they gonna implement it? And it's an opportunity if you're brave to step out and say, we wanna try some things.

[00:35:13] And, uh, you know, this, this, uh, and I think, you know, I'm in a position now where, um, we can try to, you know, we can try some things and we're working with companies that want, that, wanna have better relationships with their communities and that's a good thing.

[00:35:31] **Adrian:** Awesome. Yeah, that sounds, that sounds great. Well, I think that's, um, I think we've covered all of the burning questions I had for you today.

[00:35:47] **Renee Hoyos:** Okay.