

Augusta Native, Climate Doctor Voices Concern Over Biofuel Plant

Dr. Earl Stewart, Jr., Climate and Health Equity Physician, Shares Why Biofuel Plants Present an Issue of Environmental Injustice, Hopes to Provide Guidance

ATLANTA, GEORGIA, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, October 4, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dr. Earl Stewart, Jr., is a native of Augusta, Georgia, Atlanta-based Internal Medicine Physician, and a Climate and Health Equity Fellow (CHEF) with the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health, and he is deeply concerned about sitting a Biofuel plant in South Augusta. Dr. Stewart also serves as founding President/CEO of his namesake Dr. Earl Stewart, Jr., Family Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to social elevation and empowerment of the African-American community throughout the region since its founding in 2017.



Dr. Stewart

"I recently read an article published last month in "The Augusta Chronicle" entitled ['We Don't Want This Here: South Augusta Residents Oppose Proposal](#) for Biofuel Facility,'" Dr. Stewart says. "The Spirit Creek Baptist Church Pastor and church family have this right."

Here's why. The production of biofuels has major threats to water and land use. Their production also leads to the potential for air, soil, and ground water pollution. In the United States, ground water represents 40% of the water used for public supplies and 39% of the water used in agriculture. Even more consequentially, biofuel production can also lead to the emission of even more greenhouse gases than some fossil fuels. The disadvantages and potential harms of these substances was delineated in both the 2011 and 2018 reports to Congress on the environmental impacts of biofuels required by the Energy Independence and Security Act (EISA), showing that the impacts on the environment from biofuel production were likely negative but limited in impact.

Per Dr. Stewart, "What we need to understand is that biofuels are not really the savior they are purported and intended to be. They can cause a lot of harm and damage to the environment. What needs to be asked is why this community? Why that area of Augusta? Why so close to where people live, sleep, eat, and worship? Leaders making these decisions need to look beyond the economic benefits and see the environmental impact. Making these decisions cannot sacrifice an entire community's health for the sake of bringing two dozen jobs to the area."

Where this plant is being considered for placement requires meticulous attention as well. Just last month, a community group in Gary, Indiana, was facing the same issue that the Spirit Creek Baptist Church and South Augusta communities are staring in the face. [Gary Advocates for Responsible Development \(GARD\)](#) reportedly felt "bullied" and "intimidated" by the California-based Fulcrum Biofuel when questioning the biofuel plant emissions calculations and intimated that those calculations violate Indiana law. A study published in "Environmental Justice" in 2018 showed that wood pellet production biofuel plants are commonly placed in environmental justice-designated communities in the Southeastern United States, and these communities are heavily Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. The where and how of these plants being placed must be seen through the environmentally racist lens it is and earnestly combatted.

"I voice unequivocal support for the Pastor Ellis Godbee, Jr., and his parishioners at Spirit Creek Baptist Church in their fight to halt establishing a biofuel plant in their environment and I call on city leaders and the commission in Augusta-Richmond County to not only listen to them but to establish policies to protect them environmentally," Dr. Stewart voices. "This is an issue of environmental injustice, and it will take just and equitable solutions to understand why the sitting of this plant in this community is not a good idea. I'm glad they've recently put the plant's placement on hold and are considering an Environmental Ordinance."

Policies are needed at the national level to ensure that biofuel production is safer, more environmentally just, and poses less threats to individual and community health than they create.

"This is a very personal issue for me because I grew up in the historic Laney-Walker community unfortunately experiencing the brunt of climate change and environmental injustice for much of my youth, and it is a real issue in Augusta," shares Dr. Stewart. "The climate crisis impacts us all. For Black communities and other vulnerable populations, it is a matter of life and death."

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