

N.J.'s goal: Even-handed pollution

By Will Van Sant
KnightRidder

TRENTON, N.J. | Since the early 1970s, regulators, industries and environmental activists have struggled with whether exposing minority or low-income areas to severe pollution amounted to discrimination.

Now New Jersey has become the first state to propose environmental equity rules for businesses looking to locate in minority or low-income communities.

The rules — released this week by the Department of Environmental Protection and open for

New Jersey proposed environmental equity rules for businesses in minority or low-income areas.

to reinvest in cities, you need to set up a structure that makes it easier," said Michael Egenton, assistant vice president of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. "But if you have an issue like environmental justice, that's another hurdle."

Under the regulations, a business seeking an operating permit would have to have its plan run through a computer model comparing census information with pollution data in the area.

If an environmental-equity issue is flagged, the business would have to take part in a community-outreach program allowing residents to be heard.

Jim Sinclair, first vice president of the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, said he had not seen the rules but was worried they would create a roadblock to urban investment.

"From my perspective, anything that puts up an artificial race-based card does not seem like equity," he said.

Olga Pomar, an attorney for residents who prevented a cement plant from opening in Camden, said the proposed rules did not go far enough.

"I think they make it look like the DEP is taking care of the problem of environmental justice when they are not," she said.

"If you want the private sector