



Location

United States and worldwide

Users

Community groups, activists, citizen scientists and schools worldwide

Maintained by

The Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science (Public Lab) is a community – supported by a 501(c) 3 non-profit

Duration

2010 - ongoing

Category

scientific, pedagogical, environment, social

Nr. and Title

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Public Lab

Initiator(s)

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Description

Public Lab is an open network community and non-profit. It is democratising science to address environmental issues that directly affect people. It is an online community through which people can learn how to investigate environmental concerns. Using inexpensive DIY techniques, Public Lab seeks to change how people see and engage with the world in environmental, social, and political terms.

Goals

Public Lab aims to open research from the exclusive hands of scientific experts. By doing so, communities facing environmental justice issues are able to own the science and advocate for the changes they want to see. By promoting a hands-on, do-it-yourself ethos, Public Lab supports each other’s exploration, which leads to technical development and real applications in communities.

Beneficial outcomes

The science, technology and data in Public Lab are community-created and open source. They utilise open data to advocate for better environmental management, regulations and enforcement. These tools enable people to more easily generate knowledge and share data about community environmental health. Public Lab was founded in the wake of the 2010 BP oil disaster. During the spill, there was an information blackout for residents of the coastal region, as well as the rest of the world. No one was accurately tracking what was happening on the ground. In response, a group of concerned residents, environmental advocates, designers, and social scientists lofted “community satellites,” made from balloons, kites and digital cameras, over the spill to collect real-time data about its impact. Local citizens collected the images, and through a newly created open source platform, contributors stitched over 100,000 aerial images into maps of the coastline before, during, and after the oil spread. BBC and New York Times featured these high-resolution maps, among others, allowing residents to speak their truth about what was going on in the Gulf Coast.

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