

UPTOWN EYE

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WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION
WE ACT for ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Vol. IV - No. 3

VEA VERSION EN ESPAÑOL AL REVERSO

VICTORY!



from left: Luis Aguas (community member), Councilman Bill Perkins, Cordell Cleare (NYCCELP), Basilia Gomez (WE ACT), Janet Sanchez (parent), and Zoila Amonte (parent)

PARENTS PREVAIL IN BITTER WAR AGAINST LEAD

By Christopher Greaves

Thanks to the hard work of parents, advocacy groups like West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT, Inc.), the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYCCELP) and countless supporters --the City Council, led by Councilman Bill Perkins and Speaker Gifford Miller-- passed legislation designed to protect thousands of city kids from lead poisoning. The bill, approved December 15th with a vote of 44-to-5, regulates lead paint hazards and mandates the removal of peeling paint in child-occupied apartments by 2007.

The legislation, called Intro 101A, will safeguard city children from lead's harmful effects. A well-known threat to child-health, lead can delay childhood mental development and diminish intelligence even at relatively low levels of exposure. The substance is also linked to a variety of ills, including hypertension, heart attacks, strokes.

Although 101A met with staunch opposition from landlords and housing developers who believe the bill's command to eradicate lead to the "maximum extent possible" exposes them to an unfair level of liability, the City Council courageously sided with the interests of children and families in passing the bill. The developers' claim that the new liability standard could make property liability insurance prohibitively

expensive and slow the pace of affordable housing renovations rang hollow.

"Four thousand children per year are poisoned by lead and 85 percent of them are children of color," said Councilman Bill Perkins, calling on Mayor Bloomberg to support the bill last December. A staggering 94 percent of children poisoned between 1995 and 2000 are African American, Asian, or Latino. "Our mayor can be a Santa Claus or a Scrooge this holiday season," said Perkins.

Citing concerns about liability lawsuits and the purported threat to affordable housing, Mr. Bloomberg played the miser's role in vetoing the bill on December 19th -- days after it was passed by the City Council. But lawmakers overrode the mayor's veto in February -- delivering a decisive and long-awaited victory to parents and children around the city.

"We are very pleased with the council's decision," said WE ACT's Basilia Gomez. "But the battle to uphold and enforce the law is far from over." Gomez has been working closely with parents of lead poisoned children and the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYCCELP) for over five years.

COLUMBIA SEEKS ANOTHER SLICE OF HARLEM

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From The Editor

Harlem -- Symbol of Extreme Sustainability



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IS PLANNING TO EXPAND ITS "MORNING-SIDE HEIGHTS" CAMPUS NORTH INTO HARLEM'S MANHATTANVILLE. THE NYC PLANNING COMMISSION BEGINS A PROCESS TO RE-ZONE THE HARLEM PIERS --A NEW COMMUNITY-DRIVEN WATERFRONT PARK -- TO BE BUILT BY THE NYC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (EDC). NEXT DOOR TO THE IMMINENT WATERFRONT PARK, THE EDC STUDIES THE FINANCES OF TEARING DOWN, REBUILDING, AND TRIPLING THE CAPACITY OF THE 135th STREET MARINE TRANSFER STATION. THE MAYOR MOVES TO SUPPORT TRUE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES BY SUPPORTING AN ENVIRONMENTALLY RACIST PLAN TO DUMP AND BARGE

HALF OF MANHATTAN'S GARBAGE NEXT DOOR TO THE IMMINENT WATERFRONT PARK AND NEXT TO THE NORTH RIVER PLANT THAT TREATS HALF OF MANHATTAN'S RAW SEWAGE.

THE NEW PARK WOULD BE BUILT NEXT TO GARBAGE NOT ON TOP OF SEWAGE. PROGRESS CONTINUES. THESE MUNICIPAL BENEFITS ARE ADJACENT TO THE MTA'S MANHATTANVILLE DIESEL BUS DEPOT WHOSE BUSES SPEW POLLUTANTS (POLYCYCLIC AROMATIC HYDROCARBONS) THAT COLUMBIA'S MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH --AS REPORTED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES-- SAYS CAUSES LOW BIRTH WEIGHT AND HEAD SIZE AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN BABIES. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY WANTS TO BUILD HOUSING THERE. THE NYC PLANNING COMMISSION PROCEEDS TO RE-ZONE THE MANHATTANVILLE MANUFACTURING DISTRICT TO CREATE A MIXED-USE ZONE THAT ALLOWS INCREASED HEIGHT AND DENSITY FOR COLUMBIA'S NEW ASPIRATIONS. MTA'S MANHATTANVILLE DEPOT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF SANITATION'S 135TH STREET MARINE TRANSFER STATION WILL BE EXCLUDED FROM THE RE-ZONING EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT THE LEVEL OF NUISANCE, ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH DEGRADATION FLOURISH. THE MTA PROMISED IN 1988 THAT ONCE THE MANHATTANVILLE DEPOT WAS BUILT, THE AMSTERDAM DEPOT FIVE BLOCKS AWAY WOULD CLOSE. LAST SEPTEMBER 2003, THE AMSTERDAM DEPOT'S BUSES WERE DEPLOYED ELSEWHERE WHEN THE MTA REBUILT A TWO-STORY DEPOT AT 100TH STREET IN EAST HARLEM, HOME TO THE HIGHEST ASTHMA RATES IN THE NATION, TO TWELVE STORIES AND BROUGHT OVER ONE HUNDRED DIESEL BUSES FROM 16TH STREET BECAUSE THAT DEPOT WOULD INTERFERE WITH DOWNTOWN'S HUDSON RIVER PARK. THE COMMUNITY ENVISIONS A COMMUNITY CENTER WHERE THE AMSTERDAM DEPOT STANDS, AND THE MTA BIDS ON NYC PRIVATE BUS LINES THAT SERVICE QUEENS AND WOULD BE HOUSED AT THE AMSTERDAM DEPOT IN HARLEM. THE NYC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STUDIES A BROAD SWATH OF THE HARLEM CORRIDOR WITH A STRATEGIC EYE TOWARD INCREASED TRAFFIC, TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES AND CONGESTION MITIGATION. MEANWHILE, THE NYC PLANNING COMMISSION BEGINS TO ASSESS ITS SWATH OF THE HARLEM CORRIDOR RIVER TO RIVER, MAPPING THE MANY LARGE AND NEW DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS CHUGGING THROUGH THE UPPER MANHATTAN EMPOWERMENT ZONE CREATING JOBS, SMART GROWTH, AND LAND EMPOWERMENT. GENTRIFICATION THREATENS?

Harlem residents must plan to address these challenges with caution, care, and creativity. If you want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem, call WE ACT. WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE!

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COLUMBIA EYES A BIGGER SLICE OF HARLEM

Columbia University, whose roots in Harlem date back to 1897, is making a new bid for land here in "Manhattanville".

The university, which needs space to house its growing student body and planned academic centers, has been on a dizzying buying spree that may eventually give another section of West Harlem a distinctly collegiate feel. A stretch of land extending from 125th to 133rd Street and bordered by Broadway and 12th Avenue already has Columbia's name written all over it -- and Columbia, under President Lee C. Bollinger, seems to be vying for more.

The school has made it clear that it will not disrupt plans initiated by community residents, WE ACT, and Community Board 9 to develop the Hudson River waterfront, a five-block stretch at the end of West 125th Street. In fact, Columbia was a member of the waterfront steering committee and hosted two of the community forums on the plan. Though unbashful in its quest for space, the school has made forthrightness a virtue in getting community input on its expansion plans. As Columbia's 1968 plan to construct a gymnasium in Morningside Park sparked a flurry of protests when students learned that separate facilities, and entrances, had been allotted for community residents--the school is wisely distancing itself from its "Gym Crow"-era faux pas.

While Columbia's openness has eased fears that it intends an 'unneighborly' expansion, many residents are still wary that its maneuvers could have a displacing effect. They worry that Columbia's enhanced presence could make rents prohibitively high and leave longtime residents out on the street. Moreover, residents are circumspect about promises that Columbia will bring more jobs for locals.

"Developers of all stripes have long wielded such oaths as a license to set up shop here," says a community activist who has worked in Harlem since the Civil Rights era. "Usually these jobs are low-paying; jobs that are worthwhile, more often than not, go to people from outside the community."

Community groups like WE ACT are keeping a

watchful eye on Columbia to ensure that residents are treated fairly. "Though we appreciate Columbia's candor in this matter, it's too early to make any judgments," said WE ACT Program Director, Cecil Corbin-Mark. "We are watching this develop and assessing the impact on our community," he said.

The school has reportedly said that it will avoid a series of apartment buildings along Broadway between 133rd and 132nd Street, as it focuses energies on developing "Manhattanville"--as the area between 125th and 133rd is historically known.



WE ACT's 2003 Honorees

OUR 15TH ANNIVERSARY UPRISING

By Christopher Greaves

West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT), celebrated its fifteenth year in existence on Tuesday, October 21st, by honoring nine heroes and "sheroes" who have made significant contributions to the struggle for environmental justice in Northern Manhattan's African American and Latino neighborhoods.

The honorees included: environmental scientist Barry Commoner; former New York City Mayor David N. Dinkins; WE ACT founding member the late Genevieve Eason; New York League of Conservation Voters former chair, Paul J. Elston; director of external affairs at Baruch College's

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EAST HARLEM TENANTS KICKING TRASH TO THE CURB?

By Christopher Greaves

With the mingled odor of diesel exhaust and day-old rubbish growing increasingly distinct at a 99th street sanitation garage, tenants next door may finally be making city garbage trucks hit the road after years of dispute.

Calling a mid-November meeting with Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, Councilmember Phil Reed, and Assemblyman Adam Clayton Powell IV and New York State Senator Olga Mendez, tenants at 342 East 100th Street --a stone's throw from a Department of Sanitation (DSNY) lot-- finally cleared the sordid air with the, hitherto, unresponsive DSNY. The Sanitation Department and Community Board 11 are now considering alternative sites for the garage --including three sites in the region of 155th street and Macombs Place near the FDR Drive.

"DSNY trucks are left idling all hours of the night," said Addie Jones, president of 342's tenant association at a tenant meeting last fall. Jones, whose ground level apartment opens out to an unseemly vista of garbage-filled trucks, has clandestinely filmed hours of tape showing drivers idling their trucks in a DSNY lot on 99th Street and 1st Avenue --a mere 14 feet from residents' homes. At times, said Jones, the entire fleet of trucks is turned on at once, filling adjacent apartments with diesel fumes and deafening engine noise, often at pre-dawn hours. "When I wake up at that time," said Jones at a tenant association meeting last year, "I am not all



smiles."

Her neighbors at 100th Street weren't grinning either. Idling is prohibited by law and diesel exhaust from running engines is linked to a variety of ills, including cancer, heart disease, and asthma.

Residents at the Harlem mid-rise may be breathing easier very soon, however, as DSNY is reviewing a proposal to provide air conditioners, HEPA vacuums, and --possibly-- sound proof windows to residents directly affected by the trucks.

West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. and Community Board 11 have been working closely with tenants to ameliorate conditions at 99th Street for several

years as part of a broad struggle to preserve and protect the health and well-being of Northern Manhattan residents. In early December, Senator Olga Mendez met with Mayor Bloomberg and raised the issue.

The depot, which garages a minimum of 25 garbage trucks, services not only Manhattan Community Planning Board 11, but houses the overflow from several other districts, including the Upper East Side. The depot is directly across the street from Junior High School 99 and Metropolitan Hospital. East Harlem has the highest rate of childhood asthma hospitalizations in the country.

Pictured above (from left): Johnnie Mae Bradshaw, Ms. Cruz, Rose Linen, and Addie Jones celebrate victory at 100th Street.



UPTOWN EYE

ROAD RAGE AT 100th STREET

RESIDENTS TAKE ON MTA AT SEPTEMBER 7th RALLY

By Christopher Greaves



Father Skelly, St. Cecilia's Church

With kids already gasping for air in the country's Asthma Capital, why is New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) coming to the rescue with a fleet of tailpipe inhalers? WE ACT, the 100th Street Bus Depot Coalition, elected officials, and East Harlem residents posed this query with banners and bullhorns last September.

Ignoring evidence that diesel bus emissions potentially cause cancer, precipitate heart attacks, and trigger asthma, the MTA reopened the 100th Street depot in East Harlem -- a neighborhood that leads the country in childhood asthma hospitalizations. Seeing the move as a slap in the face -- the facility at 100th Street is substantially larger the depot it replaces -- bewildered residents voiced their distress with indignation; 100th Street's September 7th opening day, an otherwise picturesque Sunday afternoon, was thus met with a raucous response from residents and their advocates.

"Hey, hey, ho, ho, this bus depot has got to go," shouted Cecil Corbin-Mark, WE ACT's program director, as residents clustered around chanting buoyantly in support. Protestors clad in protective air filter face masks added a touch of drama: "The MTA won't be happy 'til everybody's wearing one of these," exclaimed Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, illustratively waving a protective mask in the air. State Senator Olga Mendez was also on hand



to voice her disapproval. Several MTA workers emerged from the building to observe the crowd in action.

The rally --called after Gov. George



Pataki ignored a letter from four elected officials and twelve local environmental groups asking him to delay the depot's opening-- was a response to the MTA's history of ignoring community concerns about its depots.

Although WE ACT filed an official complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation charging the MTA with violating residents' civil rights in November 2000, the investigation has been sluggish. The MTA, moving slower than a rush hour



Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields

M101 on 125th Street, responded by saying that our claims of racism rang "hollow" and called for the dismissal of the complaint. The letter to Pataki had voiced concerns about the MTA's decision to reintroduce the 100th Street Depot in residential East Harlem as it closed the Hudson Depot in an industrial area downtown to make room for a park. When Pataki failed to forestall the plans, WE ACT helped residents take the issue to the streets.

"Six out of Manhattan's seven bus depots are located in Northern Manhattan's communities of color," said Peggy Shepard, WE ACT's executive director. "People of color bear an inordinate amount of the city's pollutants and are suffering real and quantifiable health risks as a result," she said.

The rally was one of the latest developments in WE ACT's ongoing efforts to safeguard public health and secure environmental justice in communities of color, a battle it has fought on behalf of Northern Manhattan since 1988. In addition to organizing the local response to the MTA, WE ACT is pressuring the agency to comply with a directive from the governor to convert the Manhattanville Depot at 133rd Street from diesel to compressed natural gas (CNG) buses -- a cleaner alternative. Though the MTA converted its Long Island fleet some time ago, it has been slow to act in the boroughs. Studies show that CNG buses emit 40 to 86 percent less particulate matter, and 38 to 58 percent less nitrogen oxide than diesel buses.

HARLEM ON THE RIVER

By Cecil Corbin-Mark

"See them out on the street at night, walkin' picking up on all kinds of strangers if the price is right..." Donna Summer's 1976 smash hit could well have been referring to the strolls of both women and men engaged in the world's oldest profession at the Harlem Piers in the late 80's and early 90's. And where there was prostitution there was drug trafficking. Yes, the Harlem Piers had it all! Those days were bleak indeed.

Today, however, we are on the advent of a new day. Thanks, in no small measure, to the efforts of hundreds of my fellow community residents who responded when we asked them to join WE ACT and Community Board 9 as we dared to translate our dreams for the Harlem Piers into a vision for development. Thanks to all of our efforts the city will be breaking ground



Viaduct near the historic Harlem Piers.

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RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM COLUMBIA MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

BAD AIR LINKED TO LOW BIRTH WEIGHT, SMALL HEAD SIZE

By Christopher Greaves

A new study from the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health (CCCEH) has expectant city moms holding their breath.

CCCEH, whose studies stretch from our beloved Big Apple to lands as far off as China, has discovered that the combination of secondhand smoke and urban air pollution can seriously hamper fetal development. A recently released study, focusing on the infants of non-smoking African American and Dominican women in Washington Heights, Central Harlem, and the South Bronx, showed that women exposed to polluted air gave birth to underweight babies, with smaller head sizes--on average.

"This is a shocking finding," said WE ACT Environmental Health Director Swati Prakash. "Considering that the women are exposed to ordinary conditions, the level of harm done to unborn babies is striking," she said.

The Center's study revealed that an expectant mother's exposure to smoke and polluted air reduced the infant's birth weight by 7 percent and resulted in a 3 percent reduction in head circumference. As pollution from cars, trucks, buses, and a host of other sources is especially ubiquitous in Northern Manhattan --due to the disproportionate presence of polluting facilities in the area--

the findings give added credence to WE ACT's position that residents are

bearing an unduly heavy burden of harmful pollutants.

Thus, while the ills that befoul Northern Manhattan are aptly identified, the struggle to clear the air rages on.

"This study provides additional fodder for WE ACT's ongoing effort to empower community residents to hold polluters accountable," said WE ACT's Executive Director Peggy Shepard. "This has never been a matter of aesthetics--pollutants are placing our kids at a significant developmental disadvantage and impacting their life chances," she said.

According to Dr. Frederica P. Perera, director of the Children's Center and principal author of the study, women's best bet is to abstain from smoking and limit their exposure to secondhand smoke while pregnant.

The Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health --part of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University-- is a leading research organization dedicated to understanding and preventing environmentally related disease in children. The study, part of a broader, multi-year research project was made possible by research grants from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well

as a number of private foundations. Other key investigators on this study include Dr. Virginia Rauh, Dr. Robin Whyatt, and Dr. Deliang Tang, also of the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health. WE ACT Executive Director Peggy Shepard is co-director of the Community Outreach and Translational Research Core with Dr. Mindy Fullilove.



LEAD LINKED TO ESSENTIAL TREMOR

According to a study by Columbia's Center for Environmental Health in Northern Manhattan (CEHNM), essential tremor (ET) --a progressive, disabling, and incurable neurological disease that results from damage to the brain's base and its connections in the brain-- may be linked to environmental lead exposure. ET, characterized by trembling of the hands and/or head, affects as many as one in five people over age 65.

The connection between elevated blood lead levels and essential tremor, observed by Dr. Elan D. Louis, co-director of the Center's Neurological Disorder research division and his colleagues, may add yet another ailment to lead's ill-famed credentials. After accounting for age, sex, smoking, diet, and occupational differences, researchers found that blood lead concentrations were noticeably higher in ET patients than in those without the disorder. Essential tremor, which also afflicts the middle-aged, hampers muscular coordination and produces abnormalities of the brain and nervous system.

Still, while the Center's scientists say there is a clear correlation between lead and ET, they are not yet ready to presume that lead actually *causes* the disorder. "Determining whether this association is due to increased exposure to lead or a difference in how ET patients' bodies [process] lead requires some further investigation," said Dr. Louis.

While scientists try to better understand the exact relationship between lead and ET, WE ACT Environmental Health Director Swati Prakash notes that there are plenty of other reasons to reduce lead exposure. Since medical treatment, which aims to lessen the severity of the tremor, is ineffective in nearly half of ET patients--prevention may literally be the only medicine. "This is just one more reason why we need to monitor lead exposure on all fronts and encourage lead abatement or removal whenever possible," says Prakash.

The blood lead concentrations were analyzed at the Trace Metals Facility Core laboratory of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. The Center's paper was published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, a journal published by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

NEW FINDINGS LINK ESTROGEN TO BREAST AND UTERINE CANCERS

By Jessica DiCamillo

For years, scientists have noticed a curious correlation between high exposure to estrogen and a person's chances of developing breast, endometrial, and uterine cancers. For example, women who begin menstruating early, or who start menopause late, produce more estrogen over their lifetimes and have been found to have a higher risk of breast cancer. The source of this correlation has long remained a mystery, but in December 2003, researchers from the Columbia's Center in Environmental Health in Northern Manhattan (NIEHS) finally made a discovery that secured estrogen's place on its list of known cancer-causing agents.

A research team led by Dr. Hari Bhat has provided evidence that cancer is likely caused by oxidative stress produced by certain types of estrogen. Oxidative stress is caused by substances inside our cells called free radicals, of which oxygen radicals is one type. In experiments conducted by implanting estrogen pellets in hamsters, onset of cancer was always accompanied by the presence of oxygen radicals. These molecules were absent in healthy hamsters. These results led the scientists to conclude that "oxidative stress," is necessary for estrogen to cause cancer.

Dr. Bhat hopes that this study will be the first step in developing improved methods of treating and preventing breast, endometrial, and uterine cancers. "Antioxidants should be tried more extensively to reduce the risk of cancer in general and breast cancer in particular," says Dr. Bhat. That means load up on fruits and vegetables and talk to your doctor about taking oxidant supplements like vitamins C and E, if you are worried about cancer risks.

Although more research is needed in this area, this new understanding of how estrogen causes cancer is an exciting and vital piece in the puzzle of cancer prevention.



UPTOWN EYE

THE R-A-P ON MTS

PANEL ADDRESSES FATE OF MARINE TRANSFER STATION (MTS)

By Leon Tulton

Mayor Bloomberg's plans to re-open the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station (MTS), defunct since the closure of Fresh Kills landfill two years ago, has drawn sharp criticism from a broad range of community groups wary of its potential impact on Harlem. When the MTS was operational, it was the only such facility in Manhattan operating 24-hours a day and drew 93 garbage trucks per day (1 truck every 15.5 minutes) up and down Harlem's narrow brownstone streets. These trucks spewed noxious diesel fumes and threatened pedestrian safety, while the MTS drew rats, flies, and mosquitoes year round. Under Bloomberg's plan, the MTS will be greatly expanded. Preliminary documents developed by an engineering firm hired by the city proposed a scheme that would have the 135th Street MTS processing more than three times the waste of the 91st Street MTS, and twice the waste of the 59th Street MTS.

On February 6, 2003, more than ten groups agreed to form the Northern Manhattan Environmental Justice

Coalition to initiate and implement a Northern Manhattan community planning process that will result in a just and equitable waste disposal plan for New York City, as well as address a number of other environmental issues. Last April, 120 residents attended and participated in workshops that identified ways the community can reduce the amount of waste it generates. The following article is a synopsis of that event:

A coalition of community residents and environmentalists convened last spring to address the issue of solid waste management and how Harlem, and the broader Northern Manhattan area, will be affected by Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan to reopen the 135th Street MTS. The purpose of the April colloquium was to bring the community together to learn about solid waste and solid waste management and get feedback on the mayor's proposal to reopen the marine transfer stations.

WE ACT Program Director, Cecil Corbin-Mark explained that Bloomberg's plan to reopen New York City Department

of Sanitation-owned (DSNY) marine transfer stations citywide demands immediate action, because the operation of the W. 135th St. facility poses an obvious threat to community health and quality of life.

According to the DSNY website, the agency plans to utilize and upgrade the city's existing marine transfer stations system to include containerization and waste



compaction at each site. Currently, most of the city's non-recycled waste is trucked to land-based transfer stations or incinerators in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island, or New Jersey and then either loaded on trains or trucked to out-of-state landfills. Since the closing of the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island in 2001, the

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David Dinkins with Peggy Shepard and WE ACT Board Chair Dennis Derryck
Photo: Annie Etheridge

OUR 15TH ANNIVERSARY UPRISING

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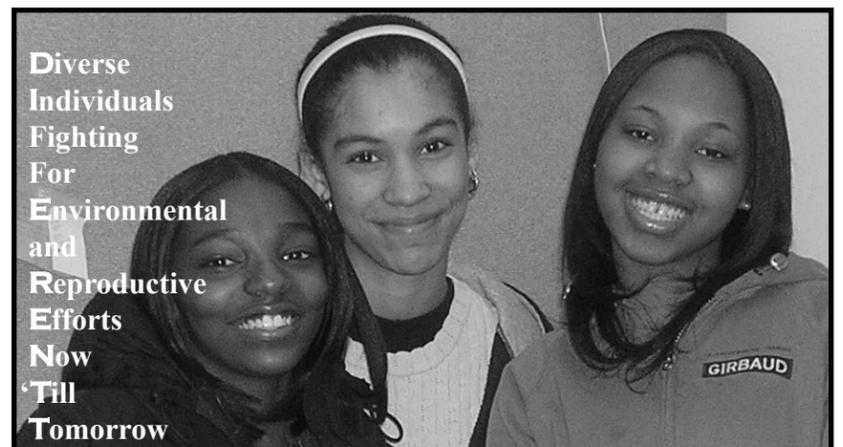
School of Public Affairs, Barbara J. Fife; the former chief of pulmonary and critical care medicine at Harlem Hospital, Dr. Jean G. Ford; Natural Resources Defense Council senior attorney Eric A. Goldstein; former New York Deputy Mayor William Lynch Jr.; and WE ACT co-founder Vernice Miller-Travis.

"This is a rare opportunity to publicly recognize individuals who have had a lasting impact on the struggle for environmental justice," said WE ACT Executive Director Peggy Shepard. "We want to show our gratitude for their contributions and encourage their continued involvement with our communities," said Shepard.

The event, held at International House, at 500 Riverside Drive, was a first push to raise funds for WE ACT's Environmental Justice Center, a Harlem brownstone at 459 West 140th Street that WE ACT plans to renovate into a state-of-the-art "green" building. The Center, which will serve as a model of environmentally responsible design, will house a library dedicated to environment and environmental health issues for the community to access. It will also serve as WE ACT's new home.

A D.I.F.F.E.R.E.N.T.T. WORLD

Youth Group Says It's "Primetime" to Add Fresh Voices to Women's Rights Agenda



from left: Jenna Martin, Sulay Hiraldo, Shevonne Bowman

DIFFERENTT, WE ACT's youth component is injecting new energy into the arena of women's reproductive rights. Through DIFFERENTT, our talented and devoted junior corps, a new generation of advocates are bringing their voices to bear on the fight for reproductive rights and incorporating the perspectives of women of color in gender, sexuality, and environmental issues. Via community forums, peer exchanges, policy sessions with elected officials, and the drafting of the New York City Young Women of Color Reproductive Rights Agenda, the ladies of DIFFERENTT are ensuring that their voices are heard.

Last year, the ladies embarked on a campaign to educate residents about the effect of phthalates on the human reproductive system. Phthalates--chemicals found in perfumes, hair care and nail products--can cause hormone disruption and birth defects. "Most people aren't aware of the damage long-term use of these products can cause," said WE ACT Youth Coordinator Alice McIntosh.

DIFFERENTT will be distributing phthalate-free products as substitutes for products that contain the harmful chemicals to twenty nail and hair salons in Harlem. Through their workshops, the young advocates will encourage salon-goers to abandon phthalate-containing products in favor of safe alternatives. The young women are producing a show on their efforts to educate consumers and beauticians for the Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN). Check back with us for an update on the show's status in April!! For more information on phthalates visit WE ACT's website at www.weact.org.

NEW UPTOWN DIESEL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL TO CHECK MTA



Yolande Cadore

Residents Rising to Fight Diesel Pollution

Yolande Cadore, WE ACT's director of community organizing, has facilitated the creation of a community Leadership Council to develop residents' capacity to lead the struggle against dirty diesel in Northern Manhattan. The group will hold bi-annual accountability sessions bringing together elected officials, community organizations, and the MTA to hear directly from community residents.

Leadership Council members will meet every other month to ensure that the concerns identified at the accountability sessions are addressed. The council's objectives include:

- (1) Drastically reducing the number of buses garaged in northern Manhattan;
- (2) Compelling the governor, the MTA, and other decision-makers to live up to their commitment to convert buses from diesel to compressed natural gas (CNG);
- (3) Increasing understanding of the dangers of diesel and the racially disparate impact of the MTA's policies both among residents of Northern Manhattan and in New York City as a whole;
- (4) Identifying and training leaders to spearhead recruitment efforts;
- (5) Organizing trainings and briefing sessions on how city agencies function and make decisions;
- (6) Creating a glossary of MTA jargon and legalese to equip residents for dialogue with decision-makers.
- (7) Producing and circulating a newsletter for Leadership Council members, stakeholders, and the community at large.

"The only way to effectively combat the MTA is by inviting informed participation by the affected communities," says Cadore. Council participants will be drawn from areas surrounding the 126th Street Depot, the 100th Street Depot, the Manhattanville Depot, the Amsterdam Depot, the Mother Clara Hale Depot, and the Kingsbridge Depot.

For more information contact Yolande Cadore at (212) 961-1000, ext. 316 or e-mail: yolande@weact.org.



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT



Tools for Schools

Mission

By promoting and facilitating the reuse of office materials, Tools for Schools protects the environment and builds the capacity of New York City's underfunded schools and non-profits.

Overview

Every corporate relocation or downsizing overwhelms the city's waste stream with functional office furniture and equipment -- the same materials that underfunded schools and nonprofits desperately seek.

Tools for Schools (TFS) bridges the gap by soliciting donations of reusable items from corporations and channeling them to organizations in need.

We notify organizations directly if items match their wish lists. Otherwise we bring the donated materials to our warehouse in Harlem where potential recipients can view them. The only cost to recipients is a small handling fee.

We address the needs of:

The environment by keeping reusable items out of the waste stream.

Schools and non-profits by providing the tools they need.

Corporations by saving them the cost of disposal and earning them a tax deduction for their donation.

TFS began as a volunteer project in 1992 and was established as a 501-(c)(3) in 1998. Two years ago, we opened an office and warehouse in Harlem and began operating TFS full-time.

Contact Information

Would you like to donate money, time, or office materials? Do you know of an organization that could use our services?

Please contact us!

Phone: 646-548-9675

Email: tools4schools@earthlink.net

Website: www.toolsforschoolssolutions.org

*This public service announcement is from Tools for Schools. **WE ACT is not affiliated with Tools for Schools.***

R-A-P On MTS, *continued from page 6*

city exports 100 percent of its waste at a cost of more than \$313 million a year through a complicated system of trucks, barges, and trains. The agency believes that using existing facilities will reduce the costly and environmentally damaging process of trucking garbage out of the city.



opposed to the reopening of the W. 135th St. marine transfer station. Repeating his comment from a March 28th hearing, Jackson said loudly, "I don't want it reopened at all!" Jackson explained that DSNY Commissioner

John J. Doherty wants all the marine transfer stations to be reopened by 2005. The councilmember questioned why the city's garbage plan doesn't include building more marine transfer stations below 96th St. "Politically, we have to look at what 96th St. residents are doing," Jackson said. Manhattan Borough President

Samara Swanston, Esq. of the Organizations United for Trash Reduction and Garbage Equity (OUTRAGE), a community activist confederacy based in Brooklyn, warned Harlem residents that the environmental

"New York City has a history of placing air-polluting facilities in poor minority communities."

--Samara Swanston

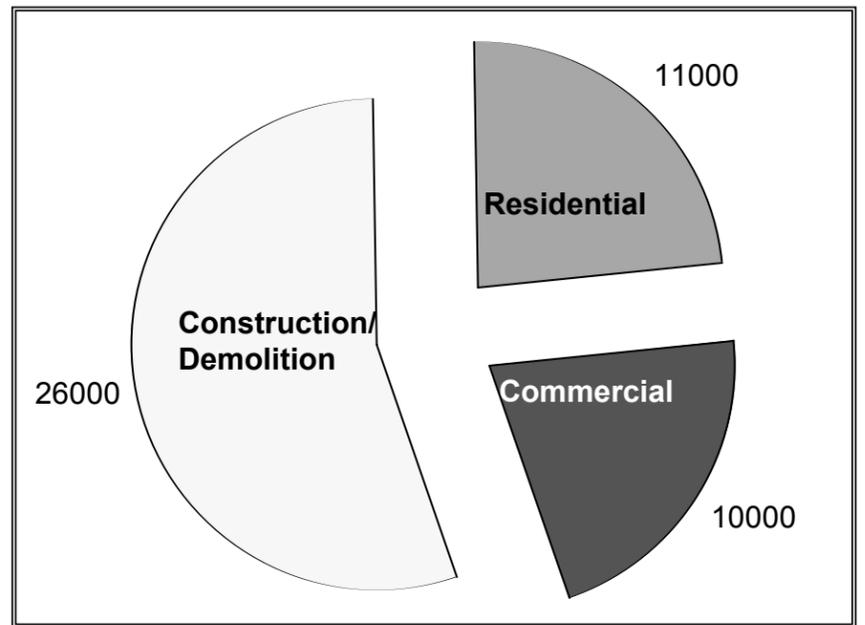
hazards they will face will be similar to those present in East Williamsburg and Greenpoint, where residents are presently coping with the waste management facilities in their communities. She told the audience that quality of life concerns Harlemites will encounter, includes increased air pollution, odor, and property devaluation. Swanston said government agencies are mandated to consider the possible impact on the environment and health of a community when conducting policy-making decisions. "New York City has a history of placing air-polluting facilities in poor minority communities," she said. Swanston told residents that they needed to create alternative community plans of dealing with garbage. "You can't have a community plan without vision," she said. "If the community doesn't have a plan, someone else will and you [the community] may not like it."

Elected officials were also present to voice their concerns about the reopening of the marine transfer station in Northern Manhattan. New York City Councilmember Robert Jackson of the 7th City Council District told the audience that his constituents are

C. Virginia Fields also expressed her opposition to the possible reopening of the W. 135th St. marine transfer station. Fields said she fears the facility will have a large negative impact on Northern Manhattan (i.e. declining air quality) because it will run 24 hours, 7 days a week. Although she opposes the reopening of the facility, Fields said that precautionary measures should be established to insure that residential garbage exclusively, not commercial waste, will be handled if the W. 135th St. marine transfer station is reopened. She said her office is looking for alternative ideas to present to the mayor. One idea she suggested is building a garbage facility in a remote non-residential area. "We won't allow anything environmentally insensitive or unsound into our community," Fields said.

After the event, Corbin-Mark said the meeting was very productive. "We now know that the community doesn't want the marine transfer station [on W. 135th St.] to be reopened," he said. "Now we as a coalition need to determine the next step."

NEW YORK CITY'S WASTE DISPOSAL PROBLEM



ESTIMATED TONS PRODUCED PER DAY

New York City no longer has any operating waste disposal facilities (landfills or incinerators) within its borders. As a result, all waste produced in the City that is not recycled or composted, must be exported to disposal facilities elsewhere. New York City currently produces about 11,000 tons per day of residential waste, 10,000 tons per day of commercial waste, and 26,000 tons per day of construction and demolition debris. Although WE ACT and community residents have stated their reservations about the proposed reopening of the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station to manage some of this residential waste, the city's current method of exporting trash outside city limits also presents a variety of problems.

What does export mean to NYC?

Since the closure of the Fresh Kills landfill, the Department of Sanitation's (DSNY's) cost for waste disposal have increased from \$42 per ton at Fresh Kills to over \$60 per ton for export. In addition, now that the City is 100% dependent on export for disposal, it is vulnerable to possible inter-state restrictions on waste movement, or new laws such as the \$4 per ton tax Pennsylvania levied on all waste disposed of in its landfills. The City is now considering development of a landfill upstate that would reduce the risks associated with inter-state disposal.

In addition to the financial cost, waste export has led to a major increase in truck traffic in NYC. In the long term, DSNY intends to have a waste export system that relies on barges and trains. However, today, the system depends almost entirely on trucks. According to the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, the Closure of Fresh Kills landfill has added an estimated 264,000 outbound truck trips per year to the City's bridges and tunnels.

Best Practices for Waste Disposal

There are several ways to minimize the problems in NYC associated with waste export. One is to minimize the waste that needs to be exported in the first place through waste prevention, recycling, and composting. Other cities, such as San Francisco, California and Portland, Oregon are recycling close to 50% of their waste, and have set targets as high as 75%.

Another way to reduce the problem of export is to develop barge and rail based transfer and transportation systems to minimize the trucking needed to handle the waste that remains after waste prevention, recycling, and composting. In addition, a good distribution of transfer points is critical to minimize the distance that collection trucks must travel before dumping their load.

In Manhattan, advocacy for barge and rail-based transfer must focus only on lower Manhattan (south of 59th street) for several reasons:

Continued on next page, column 1

NYC's Waste Disposal Problem

from previous page

First, below 59th street is where the vast majority of commercial waste is produced, and the most economic and efficient plan for moving that waste would require marine and rail transfer systems located below 59th street.

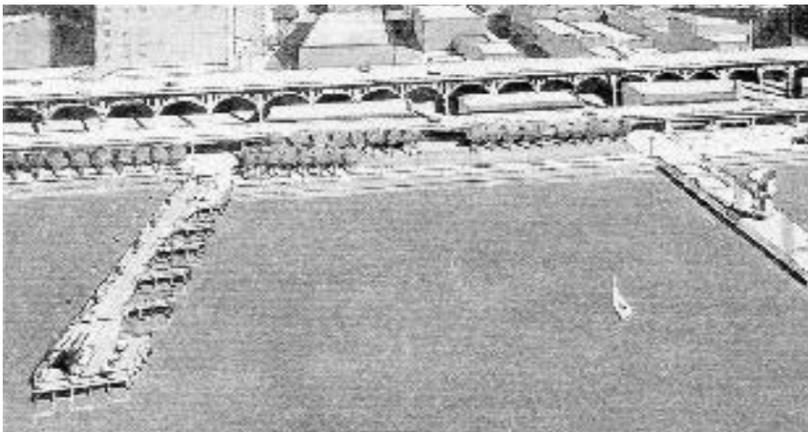
Second, northern Manhattan is already home to many polluting and noxious facilities that provide a benefit to all Manhattan residents, but impose a significant air quality and health burden on those of us that live and work in northern Manhattan. Although northern Manhattan is only 7.25-square miles, among the many polluting and noxious facilities are:

- The only two outdoor New York City Transit Authority train yards in Manhattan.
- One of Manhattan's two Port Authority bus terminals.
- Two sewage treatment plants (the city's second and third largest diesel-powered plants).
- Six of Manhattan's seven diesel bus depots.
- Several city-owned diesel truck depots

These facilities contribute to the poor air quality in Northern Manhattan, which in turn impact the health of the residents who live there. Northern Manhattan has the highest rates of asthma hospitalizations not only in Manhattan, but in the entire City. Downtown Manhattan must begin to take more of these facilities which provide a borough-wide benefit.

Options for Action

- (1) Minimize the amount of waste you produce by reducing waste at the source, recycling, and composting.
- (2) Participate in the city's planning process for marine and rail-based export facilities.



A skyview of the Harlem Piers.

HARLEM ON THE RIVER

continued from page 4

this spring for the first phase of the West Harlem Waterfront Master plan, a waterfront park.

The Harlem Piers, which run from St. Clair Place to West 135th Street and from Marginal Street to the Hudson River, will soon be home to one of the newest green spaces in the city. The New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), over the last year, has worked with the West Harlem community and other regulatory agencies to finalize the schematic design for the waterfront park.

Harlem on the River: An Inspired Vision

The centerpiece of the new waterfront park will be a sunken cove at the foot of West 125th Street. The cove will serve as a venue for outdoor performances. I am already dreaming of the sounds of cool jazz at Harlem's Hudson River waterfront park on a hot summer evening.

Our new waterfront park will be crowned by a cozy woodland at the northern end. This woodland will offer groves of trees with meandering paths and intimate seating areas. It will create an inviting outdoor room-offering the visitor rest from the hustle and bustle of our dense and sometimes frenetic city.

But one of the best parts of our new waterfront park will be the piers. Since the 1950's the Harlem Piers have not had actual piers. As the new waterfront park gets built, two new piers will

once again grace Harlem's Hudson River shoreline. The first pier, dubbed the Ferry/Excursion Boat Pier and located just south of West 125th, will accommodate vessels that ply the river for either transport or recreation and entertainment. The second pier in the schematic design for the future park will be dedicated to recreation and fishing. Reaching out into the Hudson River, this pier will offer visitors the opportunity to fish, or just relax and enjoy the soothing effect of being on the water.

Another signature feature of our future waterfront park will be a bicycle path. The bicycle path will run along the eastern edge of the park, and it will connect to Riverwalk, a joint effort of EDC and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, between West 133rd Street and West 135th Street. When these projects are completed they will connect our new waterfront park to the northern segment of Riverside Park and provide a missing link in the greenway loop around Manhattan.

Finally, residents of Harlem will be able to join the thousands of New Yorkers who launched kayaks into the Hudson last year from our very own Kayak Float at the new waterfront park. This amenity will provide residents of West Harlem and others the opportunity to get directly into the water, which the residents of this neighborhood have not been able to do for decades.

Yes, a groundbreaking is scheduled for the West Harlem waterfront park in the spring, but this is not the time for us to forget what it took to get to this point, and, more importantly, what it will take for us to get where we want to be. This victory was built on the foundation of community organizing and community-based visioning and planning.

First, let us realize, as Frederick Douglass did, that power yields nothing without a fight. In order for us to get this far we had to fight. Do you remember Harlem on the Hudson-a plan to develop a gated community of luxury condominiums and boutiques that

In the months and years ahead, you can count on WE ACT to continue our organizing with fellow residents; to engage our community in savvy planning processes; and to continue advocating for the environment in Northern Manhattan.

would have walled out the rest of Harlem? Or how about the proposals for a hotel on our waterfront? Did you get angry, as I did, as story after story in the *New York Times* heralded the arrival of the Hudson River Park (59th Street to the Battery), while people fishing at the Harlem Piers had to play hop-scotch to avoid falling into the Hudson because our bulkhead was collapsing. It is only after two decades of organizing and our community taking matters into its own hands and developing our vision through the charrette sponsored by WE ACT and Community Board 9 that we have arrived at this point.

Second, while we applaud the New York City Economic Development Corporation-especially the hardworking staff who have been dedicated to this project, the mayor, the Governor, Borough President C. Virginia Fields, Councilman Robert Jackson, and Congressman Charles B. Rangel-for coming on board to support the community vision, we must not lose site of the fact that there is still much to be done. Our community vision called for Marginal Street to be closed, except around Fairway Market, to increase the acreage for the waterfront park. Likewise, our community vision called for a Metro-North station in the Harlem Piers area. We offered a skeletal framework for economic development in the area. And looming large for the future of the area is the mayor's proposal to enlarge and reopen the garbage marine transfer station. All of these issues will require that our community be vigilant, organized, and ready to articulate a clear vision.

In the months and years ahead, you can count on WE ACT to continue our organizing with fellow residents; to engage our community in savvy planning processes; and to continue advocating for the environment in Northern Manhattan. We will be calling on the community to join us as we work together to develop a transportation plan, which will help us get Marginal Street closed, except around Fairway Market and will help us get that Metro-North station. We are getting ready to launch a project, with assistance from Environmental Defense-one of the nation's leading environmental organizations-to work with residents and other key stakeholders to develop an environmental community benefit index for businesses in Harlem, which we will share with the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone. And, finally, we will continue our organizing efforts to get residents ready to challenge the Mayor's plan to expand and reopen the 135th Street garbage marine transfer station.

As Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. would say, "keep the faith baby", but more importantly keep up the fight if you don't want a return to the place that Donna Summer sang about in her 1976 Smash hit, "Bad Girls". See you in the new waterfront park.



UPTOWN EYE

GLOBAL EYE

WE ACT seeks to make connections with environmental struggles in communities of color beyond our national borders.

The organization was present at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa in September 2001, where we --and our allies in the environmental justice movement-- succeeded in getting environmental justice language woven into official conference documents and recommendations. In 2002, WE ACT participated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development. As our activities and alliances increasingly reach out to the rest of the world, we see it fit to feature global issues to show our readers what environmental justice looks like around the globe. As corporations go global, so do we!

In this issue, let's take a look at what's happening in Nigeria, where Shell Oil is engaged in practices that are despoiling one community.

NIGERIA UNDER SIEGE

By Patrick Naagbanton, ERA

AN EXPLOSION TOO MANY

A huge explosion occurred on December 3, 2003 in the Rukpokwu community called Mini-Ihie. Several houses in the community, forests, farmlands, ecological sanctuaries, habitats, plants and animals surrendered to the raging inferno. Sixty-one year-old Mr. Woke, a father of nine children and a hunter, farmer and fisherman from the affected community is full of tears and anger.

He cried to Environmental Rights Action (ERA) saying, "I was going to my farmland with my wife, Mrs. Grace Woke, around the Mini-Ihie (where the incident occurred) to harvest cassava and check my traps in the Mini-Ihie forest to see whether the traps had caught some bush pigs and grass cutters we use for food. At about 10 a.m., just in front of us we heard a huge explosion and suddenly a bad odor of gas mixed with fuel, and later a big tongue of fire ravaging nearby farmlands, forests, including my own. See! All my farmlands of cassava, traps, and fishponds are all burnt. How will I feed my nine children now?"

SHELL'S POLICE SEIZE COMMUNITY

On December 3, 2003 immediately after the incident occurred, a delegation of the Community visited Shell office in Port Harcourt and reported the matter.

And in the early hours of December 19, 2003, Shell's high-powered "investigating team" with over 200 battle-ready mobile policeman stormed the community unannounced. Mr. Joseph Mgbakiri, a fairly educated forty-eight year-old, a well-known community

leader and father of three children takes a swipe at Shell's alleged belligerency and penchant for violence against the poor unarmed community people.

Hear Mgbakiri:

"On December 19, 2003, Shell did not even inform us that they were coming. They invaded our community with over two hundred armed Mobile Policemen. Shell knows what these Mobile Police had done in this part of the country and can still do. Initially, they had spread the rumour that it is sabotage and since such theory could not work, they are now silent over this incident. The truth of the matter is that the pipeline is too old; it was laid in 1963 and since then, they have not changed it. I personally led the delegation to Shell. When they were coming, they did not even inform us. The place where the incident occurred is an open and accessible place. They can't say anybody is stopping them. Even Shell had commended us in one of their publications that we are a good community. But I can't understand their attitude. They came in as if we are at war. Do we have guns to fight? Shell should treat us as civilized people. They went 'round the place and merely covered the affected spot with sand. The place is still leaking".

ERA'S OBSERVATION

The explosion is unprecedented in the history of spills in the community. Apart from the December 3, 2003 explosion, ERA's investigations revealed that there have been other spills at the affected facility.

On May 20, 1996, an explosion occurred at the facility. On July 18, 2003 at the same spot, another major explosion occurred too. In all these spills, Shell has not demonstrated corporate accountability and good corporate citizenship.

ERA observed that the burnt area



AFRICA

LOCATION:

Rukpokwu, Obio/ Akpor
Local Government Area, Rivers State
Nigeria

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Community Forests Farmlands & Fishponds go up in Flames
- Hunger, Refugee crises looms
- Shell refuses to stop spill
- Shell's kill-and-go police invade communities

BACKGROUND:

Rukpokwu is a vast rural community in the Ikwerre ethnic nationality in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria; it is administratively located in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The livelihood sources of the people are farming, fishing and hunting. Shell started its operation in the community in 1963 with the laying of the Rumuekpe - Rukpokwu trunk line (the facility that caused the latest inferno). The trunk line runs through the heart of the community and other nearby ones.



GLOBAL EYE

was an ecological sanctuary with all sorts of unique animal and plant species, such as monkeys, bush pigs, grass cutters, mahogany, Iroko trees, etc. Many of these creatures were either burnt or deserted the area. This could be a massive bio-diversity tragedy.

Apart from the Rukpokwu community, the following communities were also affected - Mgbuche, Elikpokwuodu, because of the presence of river systems that flow into one another.

ERA'S RECOMMENDATION

SPDC should take immediate steps to halt the spill arising from the explosion, clean the mess and overhaul its old facilities to forestall any further re-occurrence.

Shell should send relief materials and pay compensation to the rural people who are affected by the incident. The company should demonstrate good corporate citizenship, accept their liability and avoid corporate deceit, violence, and arrogance in the Rukpokwu community and other parts of the Niger Delta.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Send protest letters asking SPDC to overhaul its facility in the area to avoid further devastation of the rural environment and people. It should also send relief materials and pay compensation to the people.

Send copies of your letter to Local and International media, environmental groups to mount campaigns against such environmental malpractice by Shell. Speak up against corporate insensitivity and greed.

Send copies of your letter to Federal and State Ministry of Environment and also legislators (If Nigerian) representing your constituency to raise issues of environmental concerns as a critical part of their mandate to the people of the Rukpokwu community.

Mail to Shell can be sent to:

**SPDC NIG. LTD
FREEMAN HOUSE
21/22 Marina, P.M.B 2418, Lagos, Nigeria**

**Tel: +234 1 2601600-19
Fax: +234 1 2636681
E-mail: info@spdc.shell.com**

BRING A GARDEN TO YOUR COMMUNITY

The roots of community gardening run deep throughout New York City where there are oases of vegetables, fruits, flowers and tranquility in neighborhoods where concrete otherwise rules. They are available and open to the community for picnics, cookouts, birthday parties and other community gatherings, and are special places for residents of all ages, with and without green thumbs. The community gardens create a network of green spaces in the city in an unprecedented way.

New York Garden Trust (NYGT) commits to stewardship and restores the gardens and lots, placing its gardens in land trust, allowing them to remain community gardens indefinitely, while providing ongoing support to community gardeners including design consultation, garden materials, volunteers, community outreach and educational programming. Local residents, serving the community as garden managers, enter into a contract with NYGT outlining the responsibilities of each manager and the services provided by NYGT. Hundreds of vacant lots and acres of parkland and gardens throughout New York City remain to be reclaimed for neighborhoods under-



served for open space.

NYGT maintains gardens in the area including those at 176 E. 111th Street; Pleasant Park, at 114th St.; St. Mark's at E.117th St.; Los Amigos Garden at 326 Pleasant Ave.; Maggie's Garden at 149th St.; and 150th St. Garden at 499 W. 150th St.

NYGT works with the local residents to develop open spaces and programming in keeping with the needs of the community. We look forward to these gardens being a focal point of education about environmental issues, community restoration, and improving quality of life in our neighborhoods. We encourage schools, community-based organizations, and gardeners. Anyone interested to contact us if they have any questions or suggestions about an NYGT garden. Please call William Curtis-Bey at 718-537-5123 or 646-733-7917 or email inquiries to wcurtis-bey@nyrp.org.



UPTOWN EYE

NORTHERN MANHATTAN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COALITION

City College Architectural Center
Council Member Robert Jackson
Dominican Women Caucus
DONAR, Inc
Dominican 2000, Inc
Faith Coalition for Political Action
Fairway
General Grant Residents Association
Hamilton Heights Homeowners'
Association
Hamilton Heights/West Harlem Community
Preservation Organization
Harlem Heights Heritage Area Foundation
Harlem Tenants' Council



Justicia Ambiental Latina
Manhattan Community Planning Board #9
Manhattan Community Planning Board #11
Manhattanville Residents' Association
Morningside Heights Historic Committee
P.S 161
Riverside Beer, Inc
Riverside Park Tenants Association
St. Mary's Church
Tiemann Place Volunteers
The Brotherhood / Sister Sol
W. 138th Street Homeowners' Association
West Harlem Art Fund, Inc.
West Harlem Coalition
West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.
Westside Heights HDFC Council
1580 Amsterdam HDFC
Church of the Intercession
Broadway Housing Company (583 Riverside Drive)
Monte Fiore Neighborhood Parks Association
Citizens for Social Justice
608-610 W. 139th Street Tenants Association
W. 139th Street Block Association
575 Riverside Drive Tenants Association
342 E. 100th Street Residents Association

PARTNERS IN NORTHERN MANHATTAN'S STRUGGLE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



UPTOWN EYE

WE ACT TO DEVELOP NEW YORK ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CENTER IN HARLEM



WE ACT's future home at 459 W. 140th Street

West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT) is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary of winning victories for environmental justice by launching a capital campaign to support the construction and maintenance of its new home this year: The New York City Environmental Justice Center (the Center). The Center — an abandoned Harlem townhouse to be renovated as a state-of-the-art “green” building — will serve as a major new resource for supporting the advocacy, organizing, research and education work of environmental justice activists locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. The Center will serve three primary aims: (1) the expansion of WE ACT’s capacity to fulfill its mission to secure environmental justice; (2) the demonstration of environmentally sustainable design techniques that can be replicated by other homes and workplaces; and (3) the provision of organizing and training assistance to advance the work of community residents and environmental justice advocates throughout the world.

As WE ACT’s new home in West Harlem at 459 West 140th Street, the Center will comfortably house and support WE ACT’s programs with 6,210 square feet of quiet offices, spacious conference rooms and upgraded telecommunications and computer equipment. It will allow WE ACT to conduct its business in a fully professional atmosphere and to educate guests from all over the world about Harlem’s history.

As a state-of-the-art “green” building, the Center will serve as a model of environmentally responsible design. The Center will be energy-efficient, incorporate replicable environmental technologies, utilize environmentally responsible building materials, and employ environmentally friendly construction processes. Specific features the Center will incorporate are: a garden roof that provides open space; an electro-magnetic elevator that reduces energy consumption; an atrium watered by roof runoff rather than tap water; non-toxic paint and carpeting; and modular storage and organizing systems built from sustainably produced materials. An educational tour that explains the building’s many “green” features will encourage Center visitors — including neighborhood residents, environmental justice advocates, design professionals and others interested in environmentally healthy homes and workplaces — to utilize such sustainable design techniques in their own construction and renovation projects.

As a new resource for community residents and environmental justice advocates, the Center will advance the work of environmental justice by providing much-needed meeting space, videoconferencing equipment and technical assistance programs. The Center’s unique environmental resource library will help make it a destination point for environmental justice advocates from throughout the nation and world. Not only will the library house hard-to-find books, journals, periodicals and other environmental and environmental health publications (including those suitable for children and youth), it will also collect multi-media materials such as video and audiotapes, documentary films, slide shows, and archival records, many of which will be available for use in schools, as well as by researchers. Supported by the library’s resources, the Center will offer workshops and trainings that will facilitate the community organizing, policy development, strategic planning and sustainable development work of the socially and professionally diverse constituencies that comprise the environmental justice movement.

HELP MAKE OUR VISION A REALITY BY SENDING A DONATION PAYABLE TO WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

at

271 West 125th Street, Suite 308, New York, New York 10027.

WE ACT WINNERS!!

Peggy M. Shepard honored for pioneering urban activism against environmental injustice

Endow a true visionary with a mixture of foresight and resolve, and you end up with a combination of dynamism guaranteed to reach untold heights.

This, in an all-too limited nutshell, describes Peggy Shepard, whose intolerance for injustice and impassioned activism garnered her the Heinz Award for the Environment last year. Shepard, the founder and executive director of West Harlem Environmental Action, was one of five recipients of the \$250,000 awards, presented in five categories by the Heinz Family Foundation in December.

Shepard, who helped win a \$1.1 million settlement against New York City regarding the North River Sewage Treatment Plant—a poorly managed and noxious facility in West Harlem—has long been a staunch advocate for environmental justice locally, nationally, and internationally.

“Peggy Shepard raised her voice—and later a veritable army—against a systemic form of racism that wittingly or not, sacrifices the environmental health of poor urban areas,” said Teresa Heinz, chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation.



“Today, the systematic nature of the environment and ill health have made all of us, and particularly children, claw and fight for environmental justice.”

Under Shepard’s leadership, WE ACT operates programs in environmental health, environmental education, and community and youth empowerment. It also has cooperative partnerships with physicians and scientists at leading medical institutions, labor unions and diverse environmental, public health and urban constituencies. Shepard has successfully combined grassroots organization, environmental advocacy and scientific research to become one of the most highly respected environmental advocates in the country today.

A former reporter with an almost prescient sense, she has sensed trends as they are developing and helped place issues on the city’s agenda that likely would have been ignored. A fighter nonpareil, Ms. Shepard gives no indications that she plans on letting up anytime soon.

“This cause is closer to its beginning than its end,” says Shepard. And by all accounts, she is poised for the road ahead.

Congratulations, Peggy!!

Basilia Gomez Honored for Fight Against Lead



Basilia Gomez

Basilia Gomez also won WE ACT one for the trophy case last fall.

Recognized for her steadfast commitment to residents of Northern Manhattan and her tireless efforts to protect children from lead poisoning, Gomez received the Excellence in Health Award from the Dominican American National RoundTable on October 12th.

A concerned resident and accomplished public speaker, Ms. Gomez has been fighting together, shoulder-to-shoulder, with parents of lead poisoned children for the passage of a strong and comprehensive lead bill. “Lead poisoning is a terrible disease, and the good news is that it is entirely preventable; all of us working together can end lead poisoning,” says Gomez.

Through working and living in communities greatly affected by the lead poisoning problem and grappling with landlords’ negligence on repair issues, she is quite convinced that good lead legislation will make the difference. She was enthused by the City Council’s passing of a tougher lead abatement law this year.

Her previous work around issues of lead poisoning includes training and organizing community residents and parents of lead poisoned children for the Lead Buster program in Washington Heights. Her background as a tenant leader gave her a tool she gladly shares with her parent participants to fight effectively for their rights as tenants. Currently, Basilia is a representative of WE ACT with The New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning, where efforts to organize parents have been invaluable in helping them to speak for themselves.

Congratulations Basilia!!!!



BASILIA’S LEAD CHECKLIST

Have your child tested at ages one and two years.

Talk to your doctor at each visit about whether your child needs additional lead tests, up to age 7.

Keep children away from peeling paint.

If your home was built before 1960, and you have peeling paint and children younger than seven, call the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) at 3-1-1 to request a "peeling paint inspection". Then notify your landlord by certified letter.

Children and women of child-bearing age should be kept away from paint chips and dust caused by home repair and renovations.

Wash children's hands before they eat, after they play outdoors and before they go to sleep.

Wash your hands before preparing food. Wash toys, pacifiers, and other things children put in their mouths often.

Wet-mop floors, and wet-wipe furniture, window sills and other dusty surfaces often.

Don't let children play under bridges, near highways and heavily traveled roads.

Run cold water for at least a minute before using.

Never use hot water from the faucet to make baby formula or for cooking!!

JOIN US!!!!

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“Asthma, Children, and Pollution Free Neighborhoods”

Sponsored by WE ACT, Inc.

Hosted By Our Lady of Lourdes School & Church,

468 W. 143rd Street (bet. Amsterdam & Convent Avenues) on

Saturday, May 15th from 9AM—4:30PM

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