



## WE ACT – Dedicated to Empowering Communities to Fight for Environmental Justice

### Calendar of Events:

- ❖ April 5-11<sup>th</sup> – Public Health Week
- ❖ April 13<sup>th</sup> - Town Hall Meeting at Harlem School of the Arts.
- ❖ April 22<sup>nd</sup> – Earth Day

Please confirm meeting times and locations with Charles Callaway (347-465-8492), [charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org).

### Campaign Highlights:

North River Treatment Plant Pollution	1
Acting Locally and Globally	2
Oil Tank Emissions But, No Hot Water	3
Are you Safe from Environmental Chemicals?	4
CCNY Term at 3333 Broadway	6
Celebrating our Community	7

## Residents Worry Worsening Operations at North River Will Endanger Health – Again

The North River Waste Water Treatment Plant's air and water pollution generation is once again becoming a nuisance to Harlem community members. Residents living along Riverside Drive and at 3333 Broadway have been contacting WE ACT about the Plant's increasing air emissions and their health and safety concerns about this pollution.

We listened, and this is what we have learned. Air pollution complaints include: 1) the plant is emitting odors

plant's stacks. Water pollution complaints include: 1) Release of waste water that has a layer of white to yellow foam on top, 2) daily, waste water releases appear "greasy" and the film spreads as far down as the southern most pier head at Harlem Piers Park, 3) residents were informed of three major sew-age spills at the Plant -- two in November and December 2009 and one just this past January; 4) residents report seeing New York City Department of Environmental Protection barges traveling down the



that range from methane to an "eggy", sulfurous smell to diesel to an unidentifiable "chemically" odor that causes headache and nausea; 2) the odors have been increasing in intensity since last November; and 3) increased dark gray to black smoke emit from the

Hudson with much greater frequency -- every other day -- than before, and 5) the City is dumping street salts and snow on the riverfront at River Bank Park -- residents are concerned that this will endanger the Harlem waterfront and their health. According to residents we spoke with, when they tried to report

the air pollution issues they had to 311, they were sent on circular wild goose chases around DEP only to be transferred back to 311 with a promise something would be done. Needless to say, they feel very frustrated about the process.

*Continued on Page 2*

### About WE ACT

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.) is a non-profit, community-based, environmental justice organization dedicated to building community power to fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color. WE ACT accomplishes this mission through community organizing, education and training, advocacy and research, and public policy development.

## Are you Safe from Environmental Chemicals?

Research shows even the most health conscious individuals still have toxic chemicals within our bodies. This is because we are exposed to the environmental toxins caused by air pollution from fuel burning (such as diesel exhaust), secondhand smoke, pesticides, pest allergens (including cockroaches, mice, and dust mites), mold, lead, and mercury. Chemicals are all around in places that we cannot see and, sometimes, cannot avoid. Specifically, the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health researchers have demonstrated members of the communities of Washington Heights, Harlem and the South Bronx are disproportionately affected by environmental toxins. Moreover, prenatal and childhood exposure to toxins increases risk of developing cancer, asthma, and developmental delays.

In 2006, the UK adopted REACH, Registration, Evaluation, Authorization, and Restriction of CHemical Substances, a law requiring industries to manage the risks from chemicals through the accurate and early detection their harmful properties. The law also requires industries provide safety information and replace current dangerous chemicals with safer alternatives. The United States' version of REACH, The proposed Kids Safe Chemical Act, which will reform the current regulatory procedures used by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Some provisions of the reform require that industrial chemicals be safe for

infants and kids as well as safety testing new chemicals before they are sold. Supporters believe that reducing environmental toxins will reduce the burden of chronic and childhood disease.

Advocacy organizations (such as Just Green Partnership and Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families) hope Kids Safe will reform U.S. chemical policy. In 1976, Congress passed the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) to protect Americans from toxic chemicals. Under TSCA chemicals are considered safe until proven otherwise. Since its passage, only 200 (of more than 80,000) chemicals have been tested and 5 are regulated under the TSCA. The proposed reform promotes the precautionary principle, which shifts the burden of proving chemical safety to the producers and sellers of chemicals. WE ACT has been a leader in the Just Green Partnership to promote environmental justice through chemical policy change.

Join us for the special Community Forum on April 13<sup>th</sup> at the Harlem School of the Arts. Researchers from Columbia University's National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), WE ACT, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will be speaking about how air pollution, allergens, environmental toxins contribute to poor health outcomes in Northern Manhattan. We welcome you to ask questions of the panels and find out how you can reduce your family's toxic exposures. Please contact Charles Callaway 347-465-8492 or [charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org)

## North River Operations Threaten Health *Cont'd from Page 1*

At the monthly meeting of the River Bank Park Advisory Board in January, residents were told by the New York State Department of Parks that North River is taking roughly 140 million gallons of sewage of Eastside waste a week because Ward's Island Water Treatment Plant (the facility responsible for processing this waste water) has exceeded its nitrogen limit. Residents also learned at this meeting that the City was dumping snow in Harlem after they asked River Bank Park administrators about the mysterious snow accumulation in the park.

As the Harlem community well knows, WE ACT has had a long history of fighting North River's polluting this community. We were in fact formed as a result of community struggles to clean up the Plant's air emissions. We are working with residents to develop a plan to resolve the current problems. One action we have identified thus far is to coordinate a 311 call-in campaign, but we can do more to clean up the Plant's act. Please contact Charles Callaway for more information 347-465-8492 or [charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org)

***“Even though we have an oil tank outside our building we still don’t have hot water!”***

Many members of the Harlem community know of the ongoing struggles residents of the Riverside Park Community, or more commonly known around the neighborhood as 3333 Broadway, have been experiencing around affordable housing. Some may even know of the problems the complex is having with regard to garbage and pest management.

Recently, residents have also told WE ACT about the complex’s air quality issues connected to the removal of its heating oil tanks. According to residents, sometime last fall, the tank began “broke” and the complex’s management proceeded to remove the leaking tank as part of an effort to replace it. They started the project by switching oil deliveries to a temporary tank, which is anticipated to be in use until October or November of 2010, while the work of removing the old tank, testing the soil for petroleum contamination, performing the appropriate soil remediation work and installation of the new tank is complete. The tank was temporarily placed aboveground near the entrance of the building. So while the replacement construction work progresses, residents of the complex have to endure the petroleum fumes, noise, and unsightliness associated with the outside fuel tank.

3333 Broadway, like many large complexes around the City and in Harlem, uses Number 6 heating oil, the petroleum product that remains after most of the useful fuels have been distilled from the fuel stock. The air pollution associated with this residual fuel are worse than any other fuel type (such as natural gas or Number 2 oils) and includes particulate matter, benzene, and other chemicals that are known to cause or contribute to poor health outcomes. Residents in the complex have complained of headaches and nausea as a result of the tank removal work.

They have asked the complex’s management to conduct air monitoring and take steps to mitigate the problems.

The outdoor placement of the oil tank also impacts other community members. Attached to the complex are three middle schools and a childcare center. Consequently, the school- and childcare children who spend 8-10 hours a day in this environment will also become exposed to the petroleum pollution and the noxious fumes emanating from the tanks.



In addition to the tank removal, the complex’s management also plans major construction to renovate the main entrance and lobby – a project that will generate dust and other particles. 3333 Broadway residents are hoping for a swift resolution to their construction problems.

The Tenant Association is planning a campaign aimed at letting management about the health and environmental problems they have been having. WE ACT is giving them some technical supporting this effort. If you have questions about 3333 Broadway’s campaign or want some advice about how to organize your own building around pollution issues, please contact our community organizer Charles Callaway at 347-465-8492 or [charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org)

## About the Harlem Community Voices Newsletter

***We're on the Web!***

Visit us at:  
[www.weact.org](http://www.weact.org)

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We publish this newsletter to keep you informed about WE ACT's organizing campaigns and our progress toward a more healthy, sustainable and just environment. We are working for you, so please let contact us if you have any concerns or issues you want to address in the community.

We also always look forward to hearing your comments on the work we do.

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***Please contact us if you are interested in  
getting involved with any of our  
Campaigns!***

***Harlem Community Voices***

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