



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

About WE ACT

Calendar of Events:

- ❖ **Garbage, Pests and Pesticides:** Every 3rd Wednesday.
- ❖ **Mother Clara Hale Task Force:** Last Thursday of every month.
- ❖ **Faith Leaders:** Quarterly. Next meeting: September 17 & December 3

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

Campaign Highlights:

- The Mother Clara Hale Community Task Force 2
- The Garbage, Pests & Pesticides Campaign 3
- The Manhattan Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice Collaborative 3
- Community Perspectives on Organizing 4
- The History of WE ACT's Waste Management Work 5

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.

As a result of our ongoing work to educate and mobilize our community – the more than 630,000 residents of Northern Manhattan – on environmental issues affecting their quality of life, WE ACT has become a leader in the nationwide movement for environmental justice, influencing the creation and implementation of federal, state and local policies affecting the environment.

One of the first environmental organizations in New York State to be run by people of color, and the first environmental justice organization in New York City, WE ACT was founded and incorporated in 1988 as the result of local community

struggles around environmental threats and the resulting health disparities created by the (mis)operation of the North River Sewage Treatment, a facility that is ironically run by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Since then, WE ACT has been struggling against the institutionalized racism that has led to the siting and mismanagement of toxic facilities up-town (including the Sewage Treatment Plant, the 6 out of 7 Manhattan bus depots, Manhattan's only 24-hour marine garbage transfer station – at 135th Street, and the general use of Northern Manhattan communities as NYC's dumping ground) and the exclusion of communities of color and low-income from the political process.

After 20 years, WE ACT is going strong and continuing the fight for environmental justice on behalf of communities of color everywhere. We hope you enjoy reading about our campaigns and join us in our struggles – there is a lot of work left to do, but together we can get it done!

WE ACT's Organizing Campaigns

Mobilizing Community Power to Improve Health and the Environment

The Mother Clara Hale Community Task Force – the MCHC Task Force is comprised of Harlem community residents who work to hold government institutions (such as the Metropolitan Transit Authority) accountable for the improvement of health by ensuring environmentally sustainable and healthy practices.

The Garbage, Pests & Pesticides Community Advisory Group – the GPP Advisory Group is a diverse group of residents, public health professionals, and government officials who either work or live in Northern Manhattan working to identify garbage and pest related health hazards and takes proactive steps to eliminate them from our community.

The Manhattan Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice Collaborative – the Faith Leaders Collaborative is a partnership of interfaith leaders who have come together to address environmental threats in their communities; these include access to affordable healthy foods, climate change, and toxics.

The Mother Clara Hale Community Task Force Greens Harlem, One Depot at a Time

The Mother Clara Hale Community Task Force formed in 2007 as a result of WE ACT's organizing campaign in response to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's announcement of plans to demolish and rebuild the Mother Clara Hale Depot (MCH Depot) located on Lenox Avenue at 146th Street in Harlem. The depot was named for "Mother" Clara Hale, a humanitarian and activist who founded the Hale House in response to community outcry over the lack of government facilities to care for infants who are born addicted to illegal drugs and/or infected with HIV.

The MCH Depot was originally constructed as a two-story trolley barn in the 1890's but was modified for use as a bus depot in 1939. The depot currently services some 123 buses a day but the MTA plans to increase its capacity by 20% and add more back office facilities as part of the rebuild. Over the years, MTA poor management of the depot's operation has been linked to the neighborhood's high asthma (and other diesel in the depot is an industrial

land use on an otherwise residential. pollution related diseases) rates, which are among the highest in Harlem before them, the Task Force is comprised of community residents who took an active part in cleaning up the pollution that has been dumped on Harlem and to work to improve the Harlem community's quality of life. The Task Force's goal is to ensure that the new depot's design would meet Leadership in Energy Efficiency Design Standards (LEEDS), operate in an environmental responsible and sustainable manner, and reflect the African American contribution to building transit facilities in the New York region. As a result of the MCH Community Task Force's persistence, the MTA agreed to partner with the community in conducting a collaborative planning process that identified key design and operating principles to meet the community's criteria.

Community-Identified Needs in the Mother Clara Hale Depot Rebuild

- Vigilant air and pollution monitoring during the demolition and construction phases
- Community notification on site remediation work
- LEEDS certified depot building
- Energy efficiency features
- Gray water reclamation system
- Ecological green roof to improve the aesthetics of the neighborhood and serve as a demonstration of urban heat island effect mitigation techniques
- Air pollution controls on the new depot building
- Initiation of depot improvement program including landscaping and art installations.



WE ACT, MCH Community Task Force, and MTA Collaborate in holding planning charrette to develop design elements and operation of the rebuilt Mother Clara Hale Depot

WE ACT Garbage, Pests & Pesticides Campaign Changes the Way Harlem Manages Waste

Low-income communities of color face a plethora of environmental hazards daily. We need to do more than fight against pollution; we need to work to ensure Harlem's increased livability and beautification.

Garbage, Pests and Pesticides is a dynamic organizing campaign involving a cadre of motivated, community leaders from across New York City, who are committed to creating healthier communities through education and direct action.

One of the biggest source of toxics exposure arises from improper waste management – and we must all play our part in creating change. First, the City must change the poor garbage pick-up policies that contribute to the blight and unclean appearance of our neighborhoods. More importantly, substandard garbage practices in low-income communities exacerbate the problem with pest – insects and rodents – infestations. If garbage overflow is not properly dealt with, then our homes become a breeding and feeding ground for a variety of pests. Pests in turn feed into the toxic cycle of garbage, pests, and pesticide use.

Because of its convenience, the weapon of choice to combat pest problems (both indoors and outdoors) for many landlords and building superintendents is toxic pesticides.

Some pests carry disease and contribute to asthma, and pesticide use is bad for our health: they trigger asthma, are associated with cancer, and have a variety negative impacts on children's health. Worst of all, pesticides don't work – it's a quick fix but once the chemicals wear off, the pests come back. This means you have to re-apply and continue the toxic exposure – and expenses! A more sustainable approach is to use integrated pest management techniques (IPM). IPM deals with the pest problem at its source – getting rid of the sources of food, water and shelter which they need to survive. This strategy improves on community in many dimensions: health, community aesthetics, the built environment, and avoids repercussions of ineffective solutions.

The Manhattan Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice Collaborative

The **Faith Leaders Collaborative** is a partnership of faith-based organizations and their leaders dedicated to advancing environmental justice. Collaborative members donate staff time and materials; they hold quarterly breakfasts to educate members on important EJ issues and coordinate campaign activities.

- ❖ Churches and Religious Institutions
- ❖ NY Faith & Justice
- ❖ WE ACT
- ❖ The Interfaith Center Of New York
- ❖ New York Lawyers For the Public Interest
- ❖ New York Theological Seminary
- ❖ Ecologies of Learning

The **Collaborative** was formed in 2008 because interfaith leaders from environmental justice communities throughout New York City recognized that City and State government were not doing enough to safeguard the health and well-being of their communities. At that time, the member organizations agreed to a set of principles of collaboration and the goal of organizing diverse community stakeholders to advocate for environmental justice, sustainable community planning, and wise health policies and practices. Collaborative members currently participate in three key work groups: environmental health, climate justice, and food justice.



Faith Leaders organize communities to create positive change

Engagement Changes Residents' View of the Political Process – Community Members' Share Their Perspectives

Frederick Wilson

(Member, 146th Street Block Association)

I first got involved with the Mother Clara Hale Community Task Force in June 2008. I attended many meetings concerning the Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot project, but the most important meeting I attended was on September 20, 2008, [the day of the design charrette where I participated in] the Air Quality Breakout Session for the Mother Clara Hale Design Charrette. During the session I learned many things concerning Asbestos Contaminated Material (ACM) and the procedures that should be employed to properly remove [it]. In addition, I learned about air monitoring and...what we can do to help our community to remain free of contaminated dust particles flowing in the air.

I shared all that I learned with the leadership team of 146th SBA and [used this information in speaking] with the NYC Housing Preservation and Development

(HPD) and the co-developers of a building on West 146th Street, [which was known to contain hazardous material (including asbestos) but nevertheless was allowed by the City to undergo extensive demolition and renovation without much community notification]. We knew what questions to ask and we knew what the answer should be, therefore no one at the table could give provide us with just any answer.

Knowledge is Power and with the help of Mr. Charles Callaway of WE ACT and the Task Force we were able to protect our block from a [potential health hazard]. As a result of this training HPD and the co-developers are aware of what the 1000+ residents living in 146th Street need and demand – that we should be protected against the asbestos inside and outside of the during renovation of the building. [We have] a right to live in a clean safe and healthy environment.

“Knowledge is Power, and with the help of Mr. Charles Callaway of WE ACT and the Task Force we were able to protect our block from a potential health hazard...”

“It is a delightful experience to be a part of an increasingly informed neighborhood which desires to become green and instill a better quality of life..”

Ms. Rita Miller

(Member, Mother Clara Hale Community Task Force)

My name is Rita Miller, and my first experience was a satisfying and delightful introduction to WE ACT. My first experience was when I attended the charrette concerning the Mother Clara Hale Depot reconstruction. There was a wonderful turnout of attendance – very motivating to say the least. Hence, I became very encouraged to attend subsequent meetings – becoming an active part and member of the Task Force and expressing our community concerns.

WE ACT in all our subsequent meetings has kept our community Task Force well informed. Keeping us informed with the bus depot's project and the official s responsible for the depot's efficient and long-term success.

I have gained knowledge about chemicals, boiler fuels, boiler types, park and recreation necessities, and better community quality of living. For example, our Task Force has discussed: water and air quality issues, materials and other environmental concerns relative to green house gases and quality of life.

I am pleased to say my confidence is lifted due to WE ACT's guidance and education – to our neighborhood and community as a whole. In addition Charles Callaway of WE ACT who chairs our meetings keeps our task force consistent and well informed. It is a delightful experience to be a part of an increasingly informed neighborhood which desires to become green and instill better quality of life.

Garbage, Pests & Pesticides Campaign has Deep Roots in WE ACT's Efforts to Improve Harlem's Environment



Garbage left uncollected in West Harlem

Although the Harlem community face numerous environmental health dangers, **WE ACT's** community members, as part of a 2005 community pulse-taking campaign, identified garbage and pests as the most pressing concern to local residents' quality of life. Residents agreed that the first task in alleviating this problem was to uncover the complicated nexus between ineffective garbage management by local building managers and city government, the seemingly never-ending increase in outbreaks of pests, and the lack of community participation in dealing with these issues.

WE ACT took its cue and incorporated pest and waste management into its Healthy Homes campaign. Our staff began conducting workshops around safe management of pests and garbage in a series entitled, "Safer Ways to

Eliminate rats and Roaches: Creating a Healthier Home". Training participants learned the science, health and legal basics of environmental health issues associated with poor pest and garbage management, especially as they relate to families and children living in urban communities of color. A key aspect of the training was to create a framework in which participants could use their knowledge to create and implement positive social change in their communities. WE ACT and workshop participants agreed that they needed to form a core group that would help to organize and educate their neighbors to take action around the issues they learned; thus was created the **Healthy Homes Street Team**. The **Street Team** uses research, investigation, and peer-to-peer communication to build community capacity to address environmental health concerns.

The Core Beliefs of Street Team Members

The *Garbage, Pests & Pesticides* Task Force's Street Team:

- Believes everyone is entitled to clean air, clean water and the benefits of a safe environment.
- Believes that environmental burdens should not fall disproportionately on communities of color.
- Believes that government should be accountable to the people they represent and that our mission and objectives can be achieved when community residents actively participate in policy-making.
- Believes that open decision-making with full public participation is essential to ensure justice in government decision-making.
- Believes that community residents are entitled to obtain complete information about environmental projects and proposals that affect their community.
- Values the importance of community and effective bilingual communication.
- Values collaborations and partnerships with other groups and organizations that can help us accomplish our mission.



WE ACT's Street Team Tackles Tough Environmental Problems in an Effort to Beautify Harlem

Goals of Garbage, Pests & Pesticides



Community Advisors Working Collaboratively with WE ACT to Develop the Goals of Garbage, Pests, & Pesticides

Increase community awareness about the cycle of garbage, pests, and pesticide use in New York City

- ❖ Residential garbage generation and disposal
- ❖ Dept. of Sanitation's (DOS) collection and maintenance procedure
- ❖ Smart waste management as the key to stop pest outbreaks and alleviates need for pesticides

Identify and address problem areas

- ❖ Identify barriers to effective garbage and pest management and reduction of pesticide use
- ❖ Identify priority areas in Northern Manhattan
- ❖ Develop and implement (small scale) demonstration project for waste and pest management

Change Ineffective Policies

- ❖ Improve guidelines for garbage collection and street cleaning
- ❖ Ensure adequate buildings have enough storage for garbage disposal
- ❖ Encourage community involvement in decision-making processes

Working with Decision makers

- ❖ Discuss problem with local and regional public housing officials to change pesticide policies
- ❖ What are the toughest/dirtiest areas to clean and maintain?
- ❖ Discuss ideas for increasing enforcement of garbage and pest management laws

Keep an Eye out for Our Work on These Issues ...

❖ Climate Change

Strengthening the Capacity of Communities of Color and Low Income to Impact Climate Policy (Write stephanie@weact.org)

❖ Environmental Health

Promoting Environmental Health Policy Through Community Participatory Research and Education (Write ogonnaya@weact.org)

❖ Transportation Equity

Building a More Equitable Transportation System Through Strengthening Transit, Transparency in Planning, Using Smart Growth Principles, & Green Jobs Creation for Local Workers (Write burke@weact.org)

❖ Food Justice

Working to Ensure Good Nutrition and a Healthy Food Environment for Communities of Color and Low income (Write james@weact.org)

❖ Government Accountability

Building Community Power Through Organizing to Impact Policy & Systems Change (Write anhthu@weact.org)



WE ACT's Staff Celebrate Earth Day in Harlem

Take a Look at WE ACT's Community Members in Action



About the Harlem Community Voices Newsletter



We're on the Web!
Visit us at:
www.weact.org

WE ACT for Environmental Justice

WE ACT for Environmental Justice
P.O. Box 1846
New York, NY 10027
Phone: (347) 465-8492
Fax: (212) 961-1015
E-Mail: charles@weact.org

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.

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

**Name
Street
City, State Zip**

Harlem Community Voices

**Volume 1, Issue 1
June__, 2009**