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WE ACT For Environmental Justice

Join We Act for Environmental Justice, New York City Council members, researchers, scientists, advocates and tenants for a 2 day event discussing Indoor Air Pollution and its link to Asthma rates. This Summit will provide opportunities to share knowledge and develop a policy platform to sustain, preserve and create healthy housing for low and moderate income New Yorkers that is safe, affordable and energy efficient.

What: We Act For Environmental Justice, Healthy Homes Summit

When: November 21st, and 22nd

Where: Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy, 66 West 12th Street. New York, NY, 10011

For further details or questions, please contact Stanley Fritz, the Director of Communications, 212-961-1000 Ext 320 @**Weact4Ej** #**HHsummit2014**

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For Immediate Release

New York City Healthy Homes Summit Takes on Indoor Toxins

New York, November 21st, 2014. United States EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy headlines WE ACT for Environmental Justice's, New City Healthy Homes Summit. This two day event features panel discussions, workshops and a plenary style session that features; Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, New York City Public Advocate Letitia James, Cecil House, General Manager of the New York City Housing Authority, Deputy Commissioner Daniel Kass from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. And chairs for all relevant City Council Committees, including New York City Council Housing and Buildings Committee Chair, Jumaane Williams.

McCarthy who was appointed to the EPA by President Obama in 2013 faces a Republican Party that has been empowered with majorities in the House and Senate. Despite this, remains focused on addressing climate issues. WE ACT'S summit will spotlight the connection between respiratory issues such as asthma and indoor pollutants like mold and other toxins. Indoor health hazards directly contribute to the high asthma prevalence in NYC and the average person spends 90% of their time indoors where the level of pollutants may be 2 to 5 times higher than outdoor pollutant levels. According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the number of mold complaints in New York City has increased significantly in recent years. In 1999, there were an estimated 861 reports (a rate of 4.10 per 10,000 units) filed with DOHMH; by 2004, the number of reports had grown to 16,452 (a rate of 78.28 per 10,000 units).

WE ACT aims to engage, educate and convene over 200 people on the connection between health, housing and justice. They plan to do this by bringing together researchers, scientist, tenants, advocates, elected officials and others that work at the intersection health and affordable housing issues. This will also serve as the launch of the WE ACT for Healthy Homes Campaign. The Campaign's goal is to continue WE ACT's long history of working with residents to identify key opportunities to address disparities related to indoor environments. The WE ACT for Healthy Homes Campaign will continue the over 10 years of community-based participatory research and engagement around healthy homes issues through coalition building, policy development and advocacy. The Campaign will join ranks with the great work of many other organizations that have been leaders on quality housing issues.

According to the Executive Director of WE ACT, Peggy Shepard, "As Mayor de Blasio and the City Council continue their work to increase the number of affordable units for low and moderate income families, they must also do the necessary work to assure that these same families will live in homes free of allergen such as molds and toxins." According to the Department of Health website, in New York more than 1.1 million adults have asthma. The Summit will be hosted at Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy. 66 West 12th Street, New York, New York, 10011

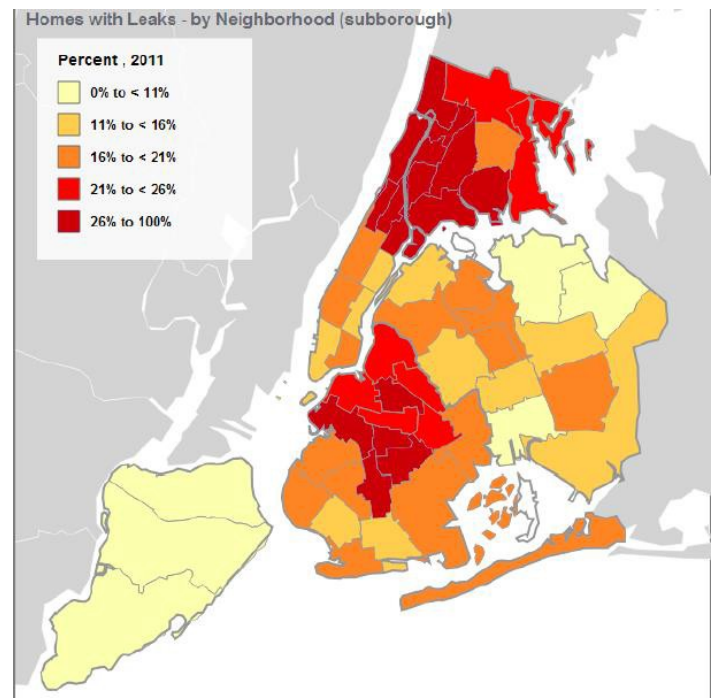
R_x for Asthma: Healthy, Affordable Housing

Asthma is an environmental disease characterized by chronic lung inflammation and episodes of airway constriction. Nationally, about 1 in 11 children have asthma, but in some low-income areas of New York City, the childhood asthma rate is 1 in 4.ⁱ Indoor health hazards directly contribute to the high asthma prevalence in NYC, and the average person spends 90% of their time indoors.ⁱⁱ Indoor levels of pollutants may be 2 to 5 times higher than outdoor pollutant levels.ⁱⁱⁱ The coalition has a prescription to address asthma and asthma disparities: healthy, affordable housing.

Poor Housing Conditions Lead to Increased Asthma Attacks

Housing deficiencies, such as wall holes or cracks, and water leaks, may predispose homes to infestations of cockroaches, rodents or mold,^{iv} which are common triggers for asthma attacks and other respiratory problems.^v

- 3x more households in high poverty areas report three or more maintenance deficiencies compared to households classified as low poverty.^{vii}
- 28.7% of high poverty homes have water leaks; compared to only 14.7% of low poverty homes in NYC.^{vii}
- Mold growth conditions in residential housing have been cited by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, (DOHMH), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) as being a significant environmental exposure factor associated with the allergic responses that provoke asthma attacks.^{vi}
- NYC DOHMH recognizes that rodent and cockroach infestations are significant allergens, and that homes in



disrepair are nearly twice as

Likely to have an occupant with asthma, as the disrepair tends to lead to vermin infestation.^{vii}

Social Impact of Asthma

Asthma disproportionately affects communities of color and low-income neighborhoods.^{viii}

- Children living in high poverty endure 4x more hospitalizations for asthma than children living in low poverty.^{vii}
- For children aged 12 and younger with asthma, 18% are Black and 17% Hispanic compared to the 5% that are White.^x
- Each year, students and workers with asthma missed approximately 10.5 million school days and 14.2 million work days respectively.^x

Economic Impact of Asthma

“For many patients, a prescription for housing or food is the most powerful one that a physician could write, with health effects far exceeding those of most medications.”^{ix}

- New York State Department of Health estimates the annual cost of asthma in the state to be \$1.3 billion in direct medical costs and lost productivity. Hospitalizations account for \$660 million of those costs.^x
- Mothers of asthmatic children are more than twice as likely as mothers of children with other disabilities to be unemployed.^{xi}
- For a child without asthma, medical expenses average \$618 a year; for a child with asthma they average \$1,042.^{xii}

Our Prescription: The Asthma-Free Housing Act of 2014

The Asthma-Free Housing Act of 2014, Intro 385, which would:

- Prioritize prevention measures in homes of susceptible persons – those with diagnosed asthma, COPD, or lung cancer.
- Require Landlords to inspect for Indoor Allergen Hazards and correct them and their causes using approved methods.
- Require HPD to inspect for Indoor Allergen Hazards and their causes, and issue appropriate violations.
- In homes of persons susceptible, require HPD to correct violations for Indoor Allergen Hazards where Landlords fail to do so promptly.
- Create a system for physician referrals for housing inspections by the City for patients with asthma.
- Codify safe and effective work practices for remediation of mold hazards.

The Coalition for Asthma Free Housing



ⁱ Columbia study explores asthma triggers, neighborhood disparities, [Columbia Spectator, 2010](#)

ⁱⁱ Indoor Air, [EPA, 2011](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Questions About Your Community: Indoor Air, [EPA, 2013](#)

^{iv} New York City Environmental & Health Data Portal, [Office of the Mayor, 2013](#)

^v Asthma, [CCCEH, 2014](#)

^{vi} New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, "Protocols for Mold Inspection, Mold Clean-up and Occupant and Worker Protection"

^{vii} NYC Vital Signs, NYCDOHMH Dec. 2005 (Vol. 4 No. 3)

^{viii} Preventing and Treating Childhood Asthma in NYC, [NYCDOHMH, 2012](#)

^{ix} Housing as Health Care — New York's Boundary-Crossing Experiment, [NEJM, 2013](#)

^x The Prevalence and Cost of Asthma in New York State, [Office of the State Comptroller, 2014](#)

^{xi} The Economic Costs of Childhood Disability, [Future of Children, 2012](#)

^{xii} Out-of-pocket medication costs and use of medications and health care services among children with asthma, [JAMA, 2012](#)



Mission:

West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT for Environmental Justice) is a Northern Manhattan community-based organization whose mission is to build healthy communities by assuring that people of color and/or low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices.

WE ACT believes that residents who are directly impacted by environmental health issues need to be involved in **ALL** levels of the environmental and political decision making process.

We work on a number of projects to secure our three organizational priorities:

Reduce exposure to toxics

- Solid Waste, pests & pesticide management
- Healthy Indoor environments
- Harmful Chemicals

Advance climate change preparedness & resiliency

- Clean air
- Sea level rise

Increase community access to green resources

- Nutritious food
- Sustainable land use
- Open & green space
- Transportation equity

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