



ON THE CUTTING EDGE: WHE ACT PROGRAMS

WHE ACT TODAY: A Force For Environmental Justice

WHE ACT, a vigorous advocate for and a significant monitor of the Northern Manhattan environment, is a non-profit, incorporated, community-based organization that was staffed in October 1994. WHE ACT's mission is to inform, educate, train and mobilize the predominately African American and Latino residents of Northern Manhattan on issues that impact their quality of life: air, water and indoor pollution; toxins; land use and open space; waterfront development and usage; sanitation; transportation; historic preservation; regulatory enforcement; and citizen participation in public policy making.

WHE ACT SEEKS TO BUILD A MORE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY THROUGH:

- strong advocacy and planning
- multi-ethnic coalition building
- community organizing training
- youth leadership development
- monitoring and reporting on environmental enforcement
- constituency building & development of citizen task forces
- organizing informed public participation in policy making
- collaborating on environmental education and public health research
- developing a lead "safe house"
- creating a green business
- creating a Community Environmental Center and training institute

Committed to the Principles of Environmental Justice, WHE ACT is an active participant in the national Environmental Justice Movement, and has provided effective leadership in the development of the New York City and the Northeast Region Environmental Justice alliances.

WHE ACT Activities and Accomplishments

Mobilized the community around the North River plant and diesel bus depots resulting in an informed constituency in West Harlem that recognizes the link between pollution and health.

Used litigation to continue forcing government to be more responsive to community environmental concerns. Litigation has been an important tool for achieving authority to enforce existing consent orders on the fix-up of North River, hiring independent engineers to review compliance, garnering attention to the siting and danger of additional bus depots, securing important data and negotiating concessions.

Addressed the need for education, training and technical expertise by producing community conferences, briefings for civic and elected leaders, holding candidates' forums on environmental justice, conducting toxic tours, actively lecturing to raise public and media awareness, and developing youth leadership in the two-year-old, 23-person Earth Crew. Many of these activities were carried out in collaboration with community-based institutions such as City College of New York, Columbia University School of Public Health, Harlem Hospital and the Harlem Center for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

Developed media relations that have achieved ongoing print coverage of quality of life issues, and positioned WHE ACT as a sought-after source for information and opinion on northern Manhattan issues and environmental justice perspectives.

Worked with civic and mainstream environmental groups on litigation, legislative initiatives, transportation campaigns, and recycling projects. A founding board member of the two-year-old New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, WHE ACT continues to work on developing a northeast environmental justice network.

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

WHE ACT continues to serve as an advocate on environmental issues as well as on planning and zoning issues that impact the community. WHE ACT has testified at hearings before the New York City Council and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. WHE ACT also has testified at Congressional hearings and at many other national fora. WHE ACT operates a Speakers' Bureau to accommodate the heavy demand from around the country for our speakers at schools, universities, panels, churches and civic groups.

NORTH RIVER SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT WATCHDOG

WHE ACT has retained an engineering consultant to assist in monitoring the operation of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant and to monitor the NYC Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) compliance with our lawsuit settlement. The settlement mandates that DEP send WHE ACT and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) — the institutional plaintiffs — data on the plant's operation and progress toward its \$55 million remediation. WHE ACT commissioned an engineering consultant firm, Calderon Grant, Inc., to prepare a report on the impact of the hook-up of Donald Trump's Riverside South development project to the North River plant. WHE ACT and NRDC issued the report to the Deputy Mayor's Office to voice opposition to the hook-up. Watchdog activities will be expanded to ensure that the City's 5-year plan, to reduce the plant's odors and emissions, is met.

HEALTH SURVEYS

WHE ACT is working with the Harlem Center for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion to develop two health surveys. The first is a household health survey that seeks to illuminate the state of indoor air pollution as well as overall ambient air pollution impacts on residents in West Harlem. The second study will examine the impact of diesel exhaust emissions from nearby bus depots on the pulmonary functions of 7th graders in community schools.

EARTH CREW YOUTH PROGRAM

WHE ACT's youth program is designed to help young people develop an awareness of the surrounding environment, empower them to make positive changes in their environment, and foster a greater sense of civic responsibility for the environment that we live in. Earth Crew is composed of 23 youths between the ages of 13 and 17 who are Latino and African-American and predominantly live within Harlem and Washington Heights.

LEAD POISONING PREVENTION PROGRAM

WHE ACT cosponsors a lead poisoning prevention program in northern Manhattan that is staffed by a community outreach organizer. The program works to inform community residents about the sources and dangers of lead poisoning.

WHE ACT NEWSPAPER

A bilingual, bimonthly tabloid newspaper will focus on a series of environmental issues impacting the community. Through in-depth reports, the paper will serve as a tool for educating the community about issues including planning and zoning, recycling, and water quality. Coverage will include environmental legislative initiatives and resources guides.

WEST HARLEM

ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

WHE ACT proposes to establish an Environmental Center in a neighborhood landmark brownstone. This center will serve as home for WHE ACT and its programs. The center also will provide a space for community conferences and leadership training seminars relating to issues of environment and community mobilization. The restoration of the four-floor brownstone will incorporate environmentally sound design and construction principles.

COMMUNITY FORUMS

WHE ACT will host a series of community forums on issues such as energy conservation, recycling and waste reduction and green business development. These fora will serve to engage the community in a continuing dialogue about environmental issues thereby heightening their awareness of environmental quality and overall quality of life issues.

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES LIBRARY

WHE ACT, as part of its campaign to educate and inform the community, will establish an environmental resource library. It will house environmental periodicals, texts, and a computer service which will allow the user to access the latest information available on environmental issues and T.R.I. (Toxic Release Inventory) data.

AWARDS

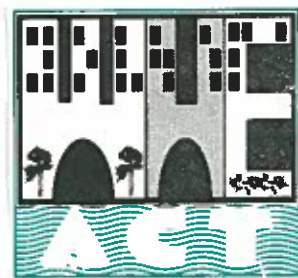
WHE ACT's important work has been recognized over the years. Co-founders Vernice Miller and Peggy Shepard have accepted prestigious awards on behalf of WHE ACT and they have been singled out for their leadership and work with WHE ACT.

- 1994 Vernice Miller selected by Ms. Magazine as one of 50 *Noted Feminist Activists* for environmental advocacy.
- 1993-95 Vernice Miller and Peggy Shepard were selected to participate in the *New York City Mega-Cities Urban Leadership Project*.
- 1993 WHE ACT received the *Earthling Award for Environmental Justice*, City Club of New York.
- 1993 Peggy Shepard was the New York State recipient of the *Environmental Women of Action Award* from Tambrands, Inc.
- 1993 Peggy Shepard selected one of the *People Who Make A Difference*, from National Wildlife Magazine.
- 1992 Vernice Miller selected an *Environmental Leader* by the Amway Corporation and Ebony Magazine.
- 1991 WHE ACT received *Life of The City Award*, from New York Woman Magazine.
- 1990 WHE ACT received *New Yorker for New York Award*, from the Citizens Committee of NY.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIPS & AFFILIATIONS

WHE ACT is represented on the following boards and organization

Board of Directors,	Council On The Environment New York League of Conservation Voters New York Earth Day Washington Office on Environmental Justice
Co-Founder & Steering Committee,	New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Northeast Environmental Justice Network
Member,	State Land Aquisition Advisory Board, Region I Pure Water Alliance West Harlem/North River Environmental Benefits Program Advisory Committee
Chair,	Vernice Miller, Environmental Working Group of the Northern Manhattan Empowerment Zone
Co-Chair,	Vernice Miller, Environmental Justice Committee, President's Council on Sustainable Development



STAFF

Executive Director: **Peggy M. Shepard**
 Program Director: **Cecil D. Corbin-Mark**
 Communication Director: **Cleon Edwards**
 Community Outreach Coordinator: **Carmen Perez**
 EarthCrew Coordinator: **Caroline Jenkins**
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WHE ACT HISTORY: Organizing For Community Empowerment

West Harlem Environmental Action (WHE ACT) was founded in March 1988 by Vernice Miller, Peggy Shepard and Chuck Sutton to address ongoing West Harlem community struggles around the poor management of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant and the construction of the sixth bus depot across from an intermediate school and a large housing development — a densely populated and heavily trafficked area. WHE ACT evolved into an environmental justice organization committed to empowering the community to become a vocal, informed and proactive force that determines and implements its vision of what its environment can and should be.

The North River plant's problem proved to be a rallying point with residents who complained about the foul odors emanating from it and about suffering from respiratory problems since it began operating in April 1986. Using strong community mobilization tactics and a key civil disobedience strategy, "The Sewage Seven" — then West Harlem District Leaders Shepard and Sutton, State Senator David Paterson, former Councilmember Hilton Clark and three others — were arrested for holding up traffic at 7 a.m. on the West Side Highway in front of the North River plant on Martin Luther King Day, January 15, 1988. Gas masked, placard carrying community residents held up traffic across from the plant on Riverside Drive to dramatize the unbearable situation.

The Metro Section



THREE KEY OBJECTIVES

Three months later, WHE ACT formed with three key objectives: to force the City of New York to fix the North River Plant, to participate in determining future siting and planning decisions in West Harlem, and to affect the public policy agenda by positioning environmental justice as a major political issue. The organization has had success in meeting these objectives.

First, the campaign around the North River plant picked up momentum when a key elected official began to respond to community concerns about the plant's operation. WHE ACT encouraged then Manhattan Borough President David N. Dinkins to hire noted environmentalist Barry Commoner to research and submit a study of the operation of the North River plant. The resulting document armed residents with facts and figures critical to fight this complex problem and gain greater media credibility.

WHE ACT met with numerous City and State officials through the years in an effort to exact a plan of action for correcting the plant's operational flaws. However, it took a lawsuit to make the City respond.

On December 30, 1993, WHE ACT reached a settlement of its lawsuit against the City for operating the North River plant as a public and private nuisance. The settlement, negotiated by WHE ACT's pro bono legal counsel Mark Silberman and Alan Birnbaum of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, as well as Eric Goldstein, of the Natural Resources Defense Council which was a co-plaintiff, called for a \$1.1 million fund which has been established to address community concerns related to health, environment and service delivery.

WHE ACT, in consultation with other plaintiffs in the lawsuit, controls the fund and is using it to further institutionalize a West Harlem planning and advocacy organization. Most importantly, the settlement gives plaintiffs leverage to ensure that the City completes its \$55 million fix-up of the North River plant. If the City fails to comply, WHE ACT can bring suit to enforce compliance with the City-State consent order and other agreements aimed at fixing and maintaining North River.