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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & POLICY NEWSLETTER

Introducing WE ACT's Washington D.C. Office

Since July 2012, the WE ACT staff in the DC office have been working to build our presence on Capitol Hill and in the DC Metro region. The goal of the WE ACT-DC office is to further our mission to “build healthy communities” by seeking ways to address local environmental challenges in Northern Manhattan with federal policy solutions. Our agenda is grounded in our key indicators of a healthy community: clean air, toxic chemicals in consumer products, climate change and adaptation, developing the NY & NJ harbor area, and equitable transportation. One of our major non-policy related goals is to build the capacity of environmental justice constituencies to be better informed and engaged in the federal policy process, and develop relationships with new stakeholders with similar missions. While we cannot represent a voice for all environmental justice groups, we hope that we can elevate those individual voices in the policy realm, and become a valued and sought-after, expert EJ resource to legislators and other DC-based organizations to provide a expertise and support on issues when needed.

WE ACT sincerely thanks the Cedar Tree Foundation for the generous support that made the Washington D.C. office a reality.



WE ACT's 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.

Upcoming Events

- ◆ January 2013- Webinar:
How sequestration effects EJ communities
- ◆ April 2013- Environmental Justice Climate Change Leadership Event
- ◆ April 2013- Recognition of Earth Day
- ◆ May 2013- Webinar: Foundations and Funding

On the Hill

DC Staff have spent the last couple of months introducing Congressional staffers to WE ACT and educating legislative staff on environmental justice and our environmental priorities. WE ACT staff have met with all of the minority caucuses (Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Asian and Pacific Islander American Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus); members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Conference; attended Senate hearings, held meetings in over 30 legislative offices, and with several ally organizations. Both Democrats and Republican offices have been open to engaging with WE ACT staff and hearing the environmental justice perspective on many issues. If there are issues or concerns that resonate in your local work that you would like to discuss or find out more information about, please contact the DC staff office.

PM 2.5 or 'Soot': Why Advocacy Is Important

Particle pollution called Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM 2.5) refers to a mixture of extremely small particles (tinier than a width of human hair) that can be composed of acids, organic chemicals, metals, and soil or dust particles that can cause detrimental health effects on those with respiratory and other cardiovascular conditions. There are many sources of PM2.5, including diesel exhaust, coal-fired power plants, wood-burning, and sometimes agricultural practices. Multiple studies suggest that Non-Hispanic blacks, especially those living in urban areas, may be at increased sensitivity of asthma outcomes from PM2.5 exposure and other adverse health effects. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed revising the standards for PM2.5 through what is called the "Soot Rule". These new standards must be adopted by the EPA by December 14th. Why is this important? The sources of PM2.5 vary from community to community. However, diesel buses, manufacturing, industry, and cars are the predominant sources. Health groups, environmental groups and other associations are supporting the most stringent standards: an annual standard of 11 micrograms per cubic meter and a daily standard of 27 micrograms per cubic meter. For the first time, the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change (EJLFCC) submitted technical comments and testified at the EPA's public hearing held in Philadelphia on the soot rule. Even though we were the only EJ group in the hearing room, the EPA and many others underscored the importance of our voices being heard on this important ruling and encouraged us to continue to engage on Clean Air issues.

Fine Particulate Matter and Health

What is PM2.5?

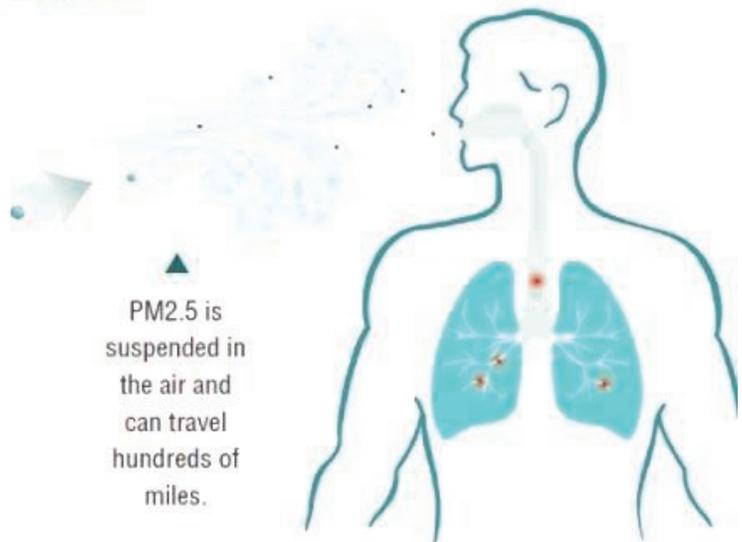


← 2.5 μm →

PM2.5 is a solid or liquid particle less than 2.5 micrometers (2.5 μm) in diameter, less than $\frac{1}{30}$ th the width of one human hair.



width of average human hair



PM2.5 is suspended in the air and can travel hundreds of miles.

US Climate Action Network Grants WE ACT \$10,500

WE ACT was awarded funding from the US Climate Action (US CAN) Network to expand the range and depth of voices engaged in action on climate and energy related initiatives. This intensive campaign, entitled “Raising the voices of constituencies of color for Clean Air, Healthier Communities,” is focused on informing minority caucuses about the “soot” rule and health impacts, mobilize new activists and constituencies, and develop a policy agenda for the new administration. In order to build Congressional support, WE ACT spearheaded the creation of two “Dear Colleague” letters from the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Congressman Rangel and Congressman Grijalva, and other House Members to show their support and encourage the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to adopt the strongest standards for “soot” or Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM2.5) (further explained on pg. 2). Letters to support the soot rule were also mailed to EPA’s regional offices from Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change (EJLFCC) forum members, and some were hand delivered to EPA Headquarters in DC. Additionally, five members of the EJLCC traveled to DC on November 8th & 9th to share local stories and clean air challenges with the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Nancy Sutley, and Assistant Administrator of the EPA’s Office of Air and Radiation, Gina McCarthy. Our allies with the Sierra Club, Ms. Leslie Fields and EarthJustice, Ms. Stephanie Maddin, attended the EPA meeting as well. Meeting participants shared their thoughts on the following issues: PM 2.5 (the ‘soot rule’), Ozone, the Urban Air Toxics Report, Toxic Chemical Exposures, cumulative impacts, climate change and Adaptation were discussed. A special thanks to EJ Forum members Cecil D. Corbin-Mark, Ms. Donele Wilkins, Mr. Jose T. Bravos, Dr. Cecilia Martinez and Dr. Nicky Sheats for participating.



NYSTEIA Influences Federal Administration’s Civil Rights Guidance



Across the board, federal agencies are revising guidance documents for civil rights law (Title VI – Civil Rights Act, 1964) and Environmental Justice - and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has been out in front. The New York State Transportation Equity Alliance (NYSTEIA), which was founded by WE ACT, participated actively in the revision process.

In the fall of 2011, the Federal Transit Administration revised its guidance documents for Title VI and Environmental Justice. When the public hearings for these circulars did not include New York State – the state that accounts for around one third of all transit trips in the country – NYSTEIA secured a meeting with FTA officials to hear from New York. NYSTEIA then submitted its own comments to the docket for further consideration.

Since the circulars were released in the summer, we are already seeing the effects of NYSTEIA’s advocacy. In the MTA’s public comment period for the upcoming fare hike, it has met with Environmental Justice and other Social Justice community organizations in the MTA service area to weigh in on the fare hike proposals, per the new circulars. Additionally, we look forward to EJ Communities now participating at the early stages of transportation planning.

For more details on the new guidance, check out <http://nysteia.net>



Your Voice: Opportunities for Engagement



It's appropriation time:

In the midst of the fiscal cliff, budgets that support low-income, minority populations, as well as programs that support environmental justice work, and sustaining public health are on the chopping board. WE ACT will be creating a list of 'fiscal priorities' and a carbon-tax platform to present to the Office of Budget and Management and other Congressional leaders. If you have specific funding questions or want to be engaged in this conversation, please contact the office.

Soot Rule Campaign:

WE ACT is encouraging all supporters to call their Representative (Find your rep at <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>) and encourage them to sign-on to a letter of support that is circulating through the House of Representatives that will be sent to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and encourage them to adopt the most stringent standards. Contact the DC office for specific talking points to use during your phone call or email.

Federal Agencies Plan for Adaptation:

In mid-February, all Federal agencies are required to submit progress reports on how their agencies have considered environmental justice concerns in how they will address adaptation to climate change. This is another opportunity for the EJ community to comment on these plans. WE ACT will be coordinating comments. If you would like to participate, please contact the office.

EPA's Urban Toxics Air Report:

The EPA is required to provide Congress with an update on the science and status of the public health risks associated with exposure to air toxics in urban areas. Air toxics can be defined as those that are known or suspected to cause cancer and other serious health effects. This report—that has already been significantly delayed—should be released before the end of 2012. WE ACT will be convening a group to work with EPA's Air Toxic Program to create guidance and methods to address the cumulative impacts on communities of color, as well as providing comments on this report.

National Climate Assessment:

The National Climate Assessment is conducted every 4 years commissioned by the United States Global Research Program to create a synthesis document that can be used to communicate the impacts of climate change. For the first time, the National Climate Assessment will have a section addressing environmental justice. The assessment will be available for review in 2013. WE ACT will be coordinating collective comments on this document. An overview of the National Climate Assessment process can be found at <http://www.globalchange.gov/what-we-do/assessment>.

Ozone:

In 2013, there will be an opportunity to weigh in and support a stronger ozone standard. Even though ozone is a secondary pollutant (i.e. it is created from the reaction of sun and other air pollutant particles), it is just as bad for public health and a concern for people who are already suffering from respiratory and cardiovascular related diseases. We also want to support the EPA in issuing the new Tier 3 Clean Fuel standards for gasoline fuel that would clean up one of the biggest sources of ozone components. Putting this cleaner fuel in place will help remove the equivalent of pollution from 33 million cars overnight . thus will help cut ozone nationwide immediately. We will be asking for help generating technical comments in early 2013.

Highlights

American Public Health Association Meeting

The 140th annual meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) was held in San Francisco, California October 27-31st. Executive Director Peggy Shepard presented a talk entitled, “Working against the clock: Protecting children’s health, safety and their futures”. WE ACT’s Environmental Health Director Ogonnaya Dotson-Newman provided insight for engaging EJ issues in future conference planning. Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change (EJLFCC) member, Dr. Nicky Sheats, presented a talk entitled, “Addressing the social determinants of vulnerability to climate change through the lens of environmental justice”, specifically addressing the National Climate Assessment. WE ACT’s Federal Policy Analyst Dr. Jalonne L. White-Newsome moderated a session on water infrastructure, presented a poster on climate change and extreme heat and was a speaker in an impromptu rally to encourage policy makers to consider the health impacts of climate change on the public.

A resource for EJ advocates: Associated Public Health Labs

Working in collaboration with other arms of the nation’s public health system, public health laboratories provide clinical diagnostic testing, disease surveillance, environmental and radiological testing, emergency response support, applied research, laboratory training and other essential services to the communities they serve. Every US state and territory, as well as the District of Columbia, has a central public health laboratory that performs testing and other laboratory services. Some of the labs actually conduct testing on consumer products for toxic chemicals as well. Please reach out to your local lab to see how they can possibly provide analytical services to support your advocacy work. They have made an effort to engage the public and non-profit groups about how they can help with our work. If you need more information, please see www.aphl.org. APHL has posted a report on meeting community needs:

http://www.aphl.org/AboutAPHL/publications/Documents/EH_2012Sept_Meeting-Community-Health-Needs-Through-Environmental-Health-Labs.pdf

Environmental Health and Toxics: School supplies aren’t safe

WE ACT participated in co-releasing the 2012 Back to School Guide to PVC-free School Supplies and Hidden Hazards: Toxic Chemicals Inside Children’s Vinyl Back-to-School Supplies. A national news conference was held on Sunday, August 26th in front of a Manhattan K-Mart Store with US Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) to release the report. Phthalates, including DEHP [Di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate], were found in almost every single children’s vinyl school product that was tested. This study amplifies the need to get phthalates/vinyl out of schools, and for state and federal reform, particularly the passage of the Safe Chemicals Act.





Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change

The Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change (EJLFCC) was formally organized in 2008 with the goals of *mobilizing and facilitating a national working group of environmental justice advocates who will interact with identified scientists/academics and representatives of mainstream environmental groups to catalyze and inform state and federal, political and legislative action that will result in the development of just policies and mechanisms that equitably reduce carbon emissions in all communities.*

Since its inception, EJLFCC has organized a major conference on climate justice, provided key position papers and education on supporting a carbon tax and engaged in a conversation with federal agency representatives around integrating adaptation, with a specific focus on EJ communities, into their policies and procedures. As the policy world changes, it is our hope that climate change legislation is on the horizon. Until then, the 45 members of the EJLFCC will continue to engage in related policy challenges that have a direct impact on climate change and the health of our communities—such as federal clean air rules related to particulate matter and ozone, the National Climate Assessment and urban air toxics.

Please contact the DC office if you know of organizations working on environmental justice issues and that might be interested in joining in on the work of the EJLFCC. We want to expand our reach and have the opportunity to elevate issues that can be moved forward at a national level. A new website, dedicated to the EJLFCC, is coming soon!

States where there are currently **no** EJLFCC members

Oregon	Indiana
Idaho	Ohio
Nevada	Tennessee
Wyoming	Mississippi
Montana	Arkansas
N. & S. Dakota	Virginia
Nebraska	South Carolina
Kansas	Florida
Colorado	Connecticut
Arizona	Massachusetts
Oklahoma	Maine
Kansas	Vermont
Wisconsin	New Hampshire
Iowa	



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