

IN A WE ACT MINUTE

The News Bulletin of

West Harlem Environmental ACTION, Inc.

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“Green” Environmental Justice Center Coming to Northern Manhattan

The Capital Campaign to support the construction and programming of the WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York was launched at WE ACT's Earth Day Celebration on April 21st, and has already shown great gains. The Center – currently an abandoned Harlem brownstone in the historic Hamilton Heights District of West Harlem – will be fully renovated into a state-of-the-art green building and will allow WE ACT to greatly expand its operational and programming capabilities by serving as the organization's headquarters.

The physical structure of the Center will address energy efficiency, incorporate replicable environmental techniques, utilize environmentally responsible building materials and employ sustainable construction practices. Specific features include a garden roof that will provide open space; an electromagnetic elevator that

reduces energy consumption; an atrium watered by roof runoff instead of tap water; non-toxic paint and carpeting; and modular storage and organizing systems built from sustainable materials. These are techniques that can be replicated in other homes and workplaces,

and WE ACT will offer tours showcasing the facility's green features to the public in an effort to encourage others to utilize sustainable designs techniques in their



*Capital Campaign Honorary Chair
Charles B. Rangel*

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Clearing the Air in New York City

On Monday, May 9th, 2005 Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed into legislation a series of laws that will significantly clean up emissions from city-owned vehicles and encourage more use of alternative fueled vehicles. WE ACT staff were involved at several key points in hearings and at press conferences emphasizing the hazardous effects of excess diesel exhaust on communities in Northern Manhattan. Although the laws apply to all city vehicles, the focus is on cleaning up or replacing diesel-fueled trucks and buses. This is a breath of fresh air for New



*New York City School busses are
getting a much needed overhaul*

York City's communities of color, which live with disproportionate exposures to diesel exhaust.

Intro. 414-A requires all future city bus purchases to be the lowest pollution-emitting light or medium duty vehicles available that meet the requirements for the City's intended use. The bill also calls for a 20% increase in fuel economy for all new vehicles purchased over the next 10 years.

Intro. 415-A requires the City's current fleet of diesel vehicles to use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel in addition to either retrofitting those

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WE ACT'S Green Building (Cont'd)

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own construction and renovation projects. Brochures and seminars documenting the process of developing the building and its components will be available upon request.

In addition to housing WE ACT's offices, the Center's four stories - encompassing 6,210 square feet - will provide countless resources for local residents, including community conference rooms equipped with telecommunications, videoconferencing, and computer equipment; an environmental resource library with hard-to-find books, journals, periodicals, environmental and environmental health publications; and multi-media materials such as video and audiotapes, documentary films, slide shows, and archival records. In addition, an entire floor will be dedicated to the environmental leadership development and education of youth.

With its extensive library and meeting space, the Center will serve as a hub for environmental researchers from across the country and around the world, but the focus will be on engaging and educating the local community where environmental resources have been lacking, especially in relation to the scope of the environmental dangers residents face.

To turn this concept into a reality, WE ACT has assembled a stellar design team comprised of the Harlem-

based firm AQ Crusor Architects and the award-winning international firm ARUP, with Tishman Construction Corporation providing project management. The final blueprints for the building are expected to be complete before the end of this year, with construction to begin soon thereafter.

The Honorable Charles Rangel - 15th District's representative to Congress for 17 terms - is serving as the Chair of WE ACT's Honorary Capital Campaign. With significant contributions recently secured by New York City Councilman Robert Jackson and Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, both members of the Committee, WE ACT has already raised nearly \$1.5 million towards the completion of the green building. As the project moves forward, look for updates in future editions of IN A WE ACT MINUTE. For any questions on the building's construction please contact Brendan Babish by e-mail at Brendan@weact.org.



The abandoned Brownstone WE ACT has purchased and will be renovating.

WE ACT's Capital Campaign Honorary and Leadership Committee Members

Honorary Chair

Charles B. Rangel, United States Representative, 15th CD

Members

George Dalley, Counsel to Congressman Charles B. Rangel

Paul J. Elston, NY League of Conservative Voters & NYLCV Environmental Fund Chair (1989-2003)

Herman D. Farrell, New York State Assembly (71st AD)

Ernest Green, Managing Partner, Lehman Brothers

Robert Jackson, New York City Council (7th District)

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Vice President, Board of Directors, Riverkeeper

Gifford Miller, New York City Council Speaker (5th District)

David A. Paterson, New York State Senate (29th District) & State Senate Majority Leader

Bill Perkins, New York City Council (9th District), Deputy Majority Leader

Philip Reed, New York City Council (8th District)

Paul T. Williams, Jr., Bryan Cave LLP

Keith L. T. Wright, New York State Assembly (70th AD) & Assistant Majority Whip

Clearing the Air (Cont'd)

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in use with the best available emission control technology or replacing these vehicles with newer, cleaner burning models to meet current EPA emission standards. This includes all city sanitation trucks.



NYC Garbage trucks are getting overhauled as well.

Intro. 416-A extends these ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel and emission control requirements outlined in 415-A to

vehicles used in fulfilling City solid waste and recycling contracts.

Intro. 417-A calls for all licensed sight-seeing buses to control their emissions by installing the best available emission control technology or replacing existing buses altogether with newer, cleaner burning vehicles.

Intro. 428-A requires that all buses used to transport New York City's public school students protect their passengers from harmful diesel emissions by requiring the use of ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel and the best available emission control technology.

Yolande Cadore, WE ACT's Director of Community Organizing, testified in support of these laws in front of the New York City Council this April. WE ACT's Executive Director Peggy Shepard joined a coalition of environmental and health groups, including the New York League of Conservation Voters and UPROSE, on April 4th at a press conference organized by Inform, Inc, to speak out about the importance of these bills.

The cumulative effect of these laws will offer significant short-term and long-term relief to communities of color in Northern Manhattan. "Their passage are further proof that the residents of Northern Manhattan are speaking out, and their representatives are listening," said Ms. Cadore.

From Community Residents To Environmental Justice Activists

On May 19th, 2005, the graduates and participants of WE ACT's Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training (EHJLT) Class of 2005 gathered along with proud family members for their graduation ceremony at the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. State Office Building. This year's class had 33 graduates who attended all 5 training sessions, and 7 participants who attended 4 sessions. In an elegant ceremony they were all awarded a diploma and lauded by featured speakers Dr. Allan Rosenfield, Dean of Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health, Dr. Virginia Rauh, Associate Professor of Clinical Population & Family Health at Columbia University, and City Councilman Bill Perkins.

The training sessions were held every Thursday for 5 consecutive weeks and ran from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The training was attended by a variety of community residents, ranging from an inquisitive local 4th grader with asthma, to concerned parents and impassioned senior citizens. The majority of participants lived in Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx. A large number also either personally suffer from asthma or have a close family member who does. Each session consisted of guest lecturers discussing health and environmental concerns followed by participants break-

ing up into discussion groups and, with the assistance of WE ACT facilitators, examining that evening's instruction. "Our goal is not to passively lecture the participants," said Swati Prakash, WE ACT's Environmental Health Director, "but to get them actively engaged and involved in these issues because knowledge alone will not solve the environmental problems of Northern Manhattan."

The focus of this year's training was Housing & Health, to correspond with the launch of WE ACT's Healthy Homes Project, a 4-year training and organizing initiative working to expand the capacity of low-income communities of color to improve children's environmental health. A particular concern for residents was to drastically reduce the prevalence of asthma triggers in public and private environments. Much of the training revolved around this principle, with participants learning how to safeguard their homes from asthma triggers and take action against government agencies that excessively pollute their communities.

WE ACT will be launching its 6th training early next year. We are currently conducting a Spanish-language EHJLT course. For more information please contact Swati Prakash by e-mail at swati@weact.org.



Cecil Corbin-Mark addresses this year's graduates



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We're on the Web!
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Support WE ACT's work by making a tax-deductible donation through our website or by contacting:

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Pests Put on Notice: NYC Passes City-Wide Pesticide Legislation

On Monday, May 9th 2005, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed into law two major pesticide bills - Intro 328A and Intro 329A - that will positively affect the health and safety of Northern Manhattan residents, especially those living in public housing.

"I've been talking to residents about these bills for months, bringing awareness to the tremendous impact these bills will have on reducing community exposure to harmful pesticides," said Jamillah Jordan, WE ACT's Housing and Health Campaign Coordinator. "And when I mention pesticides and their effects on children's health, it really gets their attention. Community residents responded passionately to this issue and they worked hard to lobby the support of their neighbors and local Council members. They deserve a lot of the credit for making this such an important issue."

This law will force exterminators to adopt a pest control strategy that emphasizes safer alternatives.

Intro 328A brings New York City into the state-wide Neighbor Notification Law, which requires landscapers to post public notices at least 48 hours in advance of spraying toxic lawn pesticides. This has been a difficult law to pass in other counties (to date, only 7 of the 57 counties outside NYC have passed the law), but received little opposition in New York City. With indiscriminate pesticide use (over one quarter of New York State's pesticide use occurs in New York City) and overcrowding in several communities of color in Northern Manhattan and the Bronx, this law is especially necessary in the city.

Intro 329A requires NYC agencies and contractors to use the least toxic applicable pesticide for exterminations. The law will also phase out, over the next 18 months, the use of pesticides that are known or suspected to cause cancer or developmental disorders. This law will force exterminators to adopt a pest control strategy that emphasizes safer alternatives.

"There are only a few cities, most notably San Francisco and Seattle, that have adopted any similar laws or policies," said Swati Prakash, WE ACT's Environmental Health Director. "New York City is by far the largest municipality to pass legislation which drastically reduces harmful pesticide use. We hope the rest of the country's cities take notice because if these laws can work for us, they can work for anyone."

New York City does not have the legal authority to regulate private pesticide use, but Intro 329A will apply to all public entities, including nearly 100 different agencies, 300,000 employees, thousands of contracts, and a great deal of real estate, including over 28,000 acres of parkland. The law's jurisdiction will also include all NYC public housing, whose inhabitants are currently being disproportionately exposed to asthma-causing toxics. These laws will not solve that disparity but are a major step towards alleviating it.

