

# IN A WE ACT MINUTE

*The News Bulletin of*

West Harlem Environmental ACTION, Inc.

December 2005

Volume 1, Issue 4

## WE ACT Champions School Bus Idling Reduction

As anyone who has spent even a few moments stuck behind a bus can attest, idling causes a great deal of exhaust. With some buses idling for as long as 15 to 20 minutes in front of schools and in residential neighborhoods, our children are breathing in toxic fumes where they live and play. That is why WE ACT was proud to host the recent press conference in which Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and Congressman Charles B. Rangel announced agreements with 5 transportation companies to reduce the air pollution resulting from idling school buses in the New York City Metropolitan area.



*Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and Congressman Charles B. Rangel announce air pollution agreement at WE ACT's Northern Manhattan office.*

Under this agreement, the bus companies have consented to a "no idling" policy that would prohibit any unnecessary idling for any length of time within 1 block of a school. In addition, bus depots will have to establish an operations plan to eliminate excessive idling. The 5 bus companies will monitor this program for 3 years, after which they will report all their findings to the Attorney General's office. If that office determines that a company has failed to make the necessary changes they will be assessed a \$61,000 fine.

Through the reductions mandated by this agreement, the bus

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## WE ACT's Street Team Is Taking Out The Trash

The leaders of the WE ACT Street Team envision the streets of Northern Manhattan free of excess garbage pile up. When garbage is left out to rot on the



*WE ACT's Street Team*

sidewalks it not only produces foul odors but also becomes a breeding ground for rats, roaches and other vermin.

debilitating lung disease that affects 1 in 4 children in Harlem.

For the past 3 months the WE ACT Street Team has been working to combat a variety of environmental hazards in Northern Manhattan, but one of their top priorities is improving local garbage management. Too often in low-income neighborhoods, residents are forced to deal with overflowing public receptacles, late pick-ups by City sanitation workers and an inadequate number of trash cans for residential buildings. To tackle the root causes of these trash problems, the Street Team has been talking with local residents and building superintendents to learn about their experiences and frustrations with garbage maintenance and how it affects the quality of their lives.

After gaining insight into their community's garbage problems, the Street Team took their investigation

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companies will be saving more than 179,000 gallons of diesel fuel each year. But more importantly, air pollution will be cut annually by 32,000 pounds of nitrogen oxides and 800 pounds of particulate matter, the same amount produced by a small power plant. These are the same pollutants that are directly linked to cancer, heart damage, respiratory diseases, asthma and low birth-weight, among others. In 2000, children living in New York City were twice as likely to be hospitalized for asthma as those living in the rest of the country. It is estimated that a quarter of the children in Northern Manhattan have developed asthma. The pollution spewing out of our local school buses is making these children sick.

"For years I have been fighting the blight of air pollution in our communities," Congressman Rangel commented. "A recent Harlem Hospital study found asthma incidents in Northern Manhattan are among the highest in the nation. It impacts our quality of life and, most importantly, our children's health . . . This is a step in the long road we are traveling towards environmental justice."



Representatives of the Attorney General's office began negotiating with New York City bus companies after a meeting with WE

ACT in 2003. "They asked us what the top environmental problems in Northern Manhattan were," said Cecil Corbin-Mark, WE ACT's Director of Programs. "We had a comprehensive list, but at the top was the issue of idling. All these school buses idling were creating thick, toxic clouds of black smoke in our school districts and residential areas. No one should be breathing in those fumes, but especially not children, who are being forced to breathe in toxics every day they go to school."

WE ACT staff are still in close contact with the Attorney General's office and continue to bring emerging environmental issues to their attention. Recently there have been discussions about phasing out the old city school buses and replacing them with new, cleaner running models. Today, with the advances in pollution control technology, the newest diesel trucks and buses no longer produce the dark clouds of toxic fumes that are making our children sick. But since some diesel engines work reliably for decades, it is not uncommon for buses to be on the road for 20 to 30 years. Currently, 60 % of the buses in use are over 10 years old. That is why WE ACT is working to get these buses taken out of circulation and replaced with newer models.

"We also need all new school buses to be strictly monitored," says Mr. Corbin-Mark. "Currently state emissions inspections do not test for the release of fine particulate matter, which is an asthma trigger. If we can add fine particulates to the emissions testing, the residents in Northern Manhattan are going to breathe the difference."

## Construction Set to Begin on West Harlem Waterfront Park

WE ACT is excited to announce that the groundbreaking ceremony for the West Harlem Waterfront Park finally took place on Monday, October 31, 2005 at the site for the new park on 125<sup>th</sup> Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In attendance were Mayor Bloomberg, Congressman Rangel, the Parks Department Commissioner Adrian Benepe, Deputy Mayor Doctoroff and Mr. Jordi Reyes-Montblanc, the Chair of Community Board 9. Both the Congressman and the Chair praised WE ACT's work in making this day possible.

"The West Harlem Piers project is another important step in

the ongoing economic revitalization of Harlem and the Upper West Side," said Congressman Rangel. "In addition to the commercial development and housing that has already transformed our community, the Piers will provide access to green grass and recreation for our residents and their children."



*Charles Rangel speaks at the groundbreaking ceremony*

The revitalization of the Harlem Piers has long been a WE ACT priority. In 1998 WE ACT partnered with Community Board 9 to organize the Harlem-on-the-River project. The goal was to recruit community leaders and residents to assist in drafting a design that would both increase access to the Harlem

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## Street Team (Cont'd)

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to the next level. On September 21st, 2005, Street Team leaders met with 2 district supervisors from New York City's Department of Sanitation (DOS). The Street Team identified numerous goals for this landmark meeting: 1) to establish a collaborative relationship between the DOS and the Street Team; 2) to learn about the various challenges of the DOS and their efforts to be more effective; and 3) to share the investigative findings of the Street Team and announce their recommendations for policy improvement.

When Street Team member, and Harlem resident, Betty Fincher inquired about the best way to have garbage complaints addressed, Supervisor Milagros Medina of the Department of Sanitation informed the team that calling 311 and stating specific problems was the most effective manner of problem resolution. She stated that handling 311 phone calls was of high priority to DOS. She further explained that each supervisor receives a list of 311 complaints in the morning and the majority must be hand-delivered before the end of the day. Supervisor Duncan also mentioned that residents could help improve garbage maintenance by recycling properly and tying up garbage bags.

In addition, the Street Team members expressed 2 of



*The WE ACT Street Team meets with Dept. of Sanitation Supervisor, Milagros Medina*

the recurring complaints from residents: the overwhelming amount of trash produced by the flurry of construction in Northern Manhattan and the subsequent rat outbreaks caused by the disturbance of the neighborhood ecosystem. The Street Team suggested developers be held accountable for controlling the rat outbreaks, while simultaneously advocating that the method of pest control be the least toxic option. The supervisors were very receptive to this idea, but also reiterated that construction companies and owners of vacant lots were already susceptible to heavy fines for not removing garbage or placing garbage on the sidewalk.

The Street Team is looking forward to increased participation from DOS in its efforts to increase public awareness of the garbage problem in New York City. Currently, the Street Team is designing bilingual posters that describe the cycle of garbage disposal in New York City, proper recycling procedures and contact information for sanitation centers. If you would like more information on the WE ACT Street Team, or a schedule of Street Team meetings, please contact WE ACT's Housing and Health Campaign Coordinator Jamillah Jordan at [jamilah@weact.org](mailto:jamilah@weact.org).

## Construction Set to Begin on West Harlem Waterfront Park (Cont'd)

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waterfront and raise interest in Northern Manhattan's neglected neighborhoods. Working with over 200 residents, elected officials, and representatives from the New York City Parks Department, a community vision plan for the piers was developed and submitted to the New York City Economic Development by WE ACT in 1999. In late 2000, EDC scrapped its original plan to build on the site and developed a master plan based on the Harlem-on-the-River community design. Approval for the final West Harlem Waterfront Park plan came in 2003 and applications for the construction were quickly completed. The Army Corps of Engineers approved the project in late October of this year, clearing the way for the groundbreaking on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

Construction on the \$18.7 million project is set to begin later this month, with the Park's completion expected in early 2007. If you would like further information on

the construction of the West Harlem Waterfront Park, or a copy of WE ACT's acclaimed publication "Harlem on the River: Making a Community Vision Real" chronicling our work on the West Harlem Piers, please contact Helen Chin, WE ACT's Waterfront Park Project Manager, at [Helen@weact.org](mailto:Helen@weact.org).



*Breaking ground at the Harlem Piers*



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## Towards A Culture of Ethics in Research: WE ACT's Contribution

Common household health hazards such as mold, pesticides, and lead are contributing factors to significant illnesses like asthma, low-birth weight and lead poisoning. While these conditions – and the hazards that trigger them – exist in homes of all income levels, research has shown that they are far more prevalent in low-income housing. Additionally, these toxics have a greater effect on the developing bodies of children than adults. That is why research on children who have been exposed to household toxics is so vital to combating these illnesses. However, researchers have a duty not to further facilitate exposure to hazardous materials in their subjects during the course of carrying out their research. In the past, researchers have not adhered to this principal. That is why Peggy Shepard, WE ACT's Executive Director, joined the *National Academies' Committee on Ethical Issues in Housing-Related Health Hazard Research Involving Children, Youth and Families*.

The Committee was asked to review all the challenges and ethical issues involved in using children as the subjects of research on housing-related health hazards. The need for this sort of review sprang from the case of *Grimes v. Kennedy Krieger Institute*, in which local researchers encouraged Baltimore landlords to rent lead-contaminated homes to 108 families with young children. The researchers were looking to discover what the minimum amount of lead clean up would be necessary to protect children from lead poisoning. The children involved in the research were drawn from 4 groups of apartments and homes, each receiving varying levels of lead cleanup. The families who moved into the

heavily contaminated homes were never advised of the high levels of lead in their apartment. As their children's health deteriorated, the parents who were misled into moving into these lead-contaminated apartments sued the funders of the study. The Maryland Court of Appeals ruled that researchers who work with children who have been exposed to household health hazards have a duty to not only warn their research participants about possible health hazards involved in the study, but also to improve their living conditions and/or their illnesses derived from the toxic materials they are studying.

In response to this ruling, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine put together a committee to map and document the ethical considerations researchers have towards the children used in their studies. Ms. Shepard was drafted for inclusion on the board due to WE ACT's extensive experience working on environmental health issues in low-income communities. In the Committee's recently published report, *Ethical Considerations for Research on Housing-Related Health Hazards Involving Children*, Ms. Shepard co-authored the chapter on Community Involvement and assisted in the editing of the document. This exhaustive report will be an invaluable resource for researchers to reference while working with children who have been exposed to housing-related hazards.

*Ethical Considerations for Research on Housing-Related Health Hazards Involving Children* can be purchased on-line at: <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11450.html>.



Peggy Shepard and the Report she co-authored and co-edited

