



## WE ACT – Dedicated to Empowering Communities to Fight for Environmental Justice

### Calendar of Events:

- ❖ **Garbage, Pests and Pesticides:** Every 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday.
- ❖ **Mother Clara Hale Task Force:** Last Thursday of every month.
- ❖ **Faith Leaders:** Quarterly. Next meeting: December 3
- ❖ **CARE:** Final meeting: September 29

Please confirm meeting times and locations with Charles Callaway (347-465-8492), [charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org).

### Campaign Highlights:

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## Local Residents Take a Stand Against Landlord's Unfair Practices and Encourage Others to Follow

3333 Broadway Residents suspect that the building has recently been sold, yet again. But the question is: to whom? If the building has been sold by Urban American Management, the company that purchased the building in 2007, then there has been no notification to residents. The changing of hands between different owners of the building is not unfamiliar to residents and only adds to the on-going issues they encounter.

There is a fear among tenants that the provision requiring that 3333 Broadway function as a low-rent building for a period 75 years, which allows for many of the building's apartments to be used for Section 8 housing, is currently being ignored and may eventually be repealed completely.

This provision is contingent on the presence of a public school located there. When first built, the building contained three public schools; however, two of these have been converted into charter schools. If the remaining public school is similarly transformed into a charter school, this might be an opportunity for the owners of 3333 Broadway to remove the provision providing for low-rent housing availabilities and would cause many current tenants to move out.

Maintenance of the current apartments designated for Section 8 residents are virtually impossible to get. Alicia Barksdale, who has lived in the building for approximately 35 and is the current Tenant Association President, stated that the tenants who have moved into recently remodeled apartments are not charged for maintenance while older tenants are so charged. For instance, older tenants are charged \$25 for a smoke alarm even though they are given away free at the fire department.

***“The changing of hands between different owners of the building is not unfamiliar to residents”***

Moreover, there are a significant number of tenants who hold Section 8 vouchers providing for larger apartments, such as those for two or three bedrooms.

However, many tenants claim that they remain in smaller apartments while they are on waitlists to be moved even though there are plenty of newly remodeled apartments that are available in the sizes required. Further, some residents allege that the building owner accepts Section 8 vouchers for the larger apartments and collects the extra subsidy the vouchers provide.

*Continued on Page 2.*

### About WE ACT

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.) is a non-profit, community-based, environmental justice organization dedicated to building community power to fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color. WE ACT accomplishes this mission through community organizing, education and training, advocacy and research, and public policy development.

## WE ACT Leads the Fight for Justice in Transportation Spending

**“Communities of color and low-income, the elderly, disabled, and young children are disproportionately burdened by the inadequacies of our transportation system.”**

WE ACT recently formed the New York State Transportation Equity Alliance (NYSTEIA); the coalition aims to address environmental justice and equity concerns tied to city, state, and federal transportation policy. Our coalition members include Empire State Future, Tri-State Transportation Campaign and United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park (UPROSE), and our coalition continues to expand.

In collaboration with our partners, WE ACT has been reaching out to groups throughout the state all summer long to build support for our vision of a more equitable transportation policy. We now have partners (25 groups) stretching from Eastern Long Island to New York City and Upstate New York. With WE ACT's leadership, we hope to expand even more in the coming weeks and months. As Congress debates a \$500 billion transportation bill, NYSTEIA has been busy advocating for many environmental, civil rights, economic, and public health goals.

WE ACT and NYSTEIA will continue to advocate, educate and organize for these communities that have traditionally been left out of the transportation planning process. Throughout the summer WE ACT has been building relationships and sharing its equity agenda with key members of Congress. NYSTEIA met with all 5 members of the New York delegation to the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the key committee working on this legislation, as well as other key Congress people, such as Representative Nydia Velazquez and Representative Jose Serrano. As the transportation bill moves forward in Congress, WE ACT and NYSTEIA will continue to advocate for transformative transportation policy that will truly improve health, mobility, and economic opportunities for all New Yorkers.

For more information regarding NYSTEIA please contact: James Burke (burke@weact.org, 347-465-8488).

Photo by Railfan Subway Blog

## Local Residents Take a Stand, *Cont'd from Page 1*

Tenants also allege the building's rent processing office has been unreliable. In the past, the building had operated a rent collection office on site, but the new owners discontinued this practice. Now residents have to mail in their rent checks unless they have a court order allowing them to drop off at the office. Some tenants claim that the new system creates opportunities for the office to claim non-receipt of checks and then issue late fines or eviction notices for these infractions.

The building's residents are assertively using the resources available to them to resolve their housing issues, including voting. During the last election, a reported 100% of tenants voted. With around 4,000 tenants, the building is of primary political importance and attention.

Ms. Barksdale is taking an active role in helping tenants keep their homes; she advises them to contact local elected officials and political candidates. She and other tenant leaders have organized a **rally on Saturday, September 26, 2009**, to further spur tenants to action.

Ms. Barksdale says of the rally: "We are trying to open [tenants'] eyes to other housing options besides those available here, to let them know they need to get out and vote, and to make them aware of what's going on. Standing in the busy lobby at 3333 Broadway, she adds, "Their voices need to be heard."



3333 Broadway, the Riverside Park Community, is located at Broadway and West 135<sup>th</sup> Street

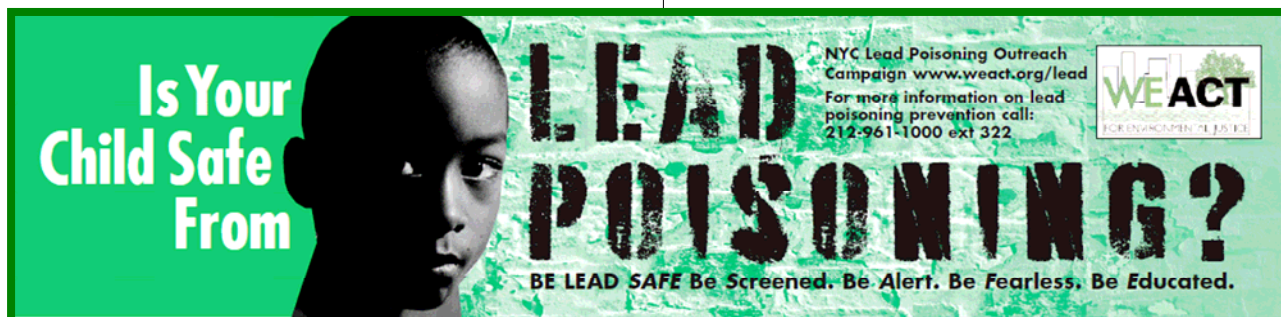
## Lead Poisoning Remains A Problem in Low-Income, Communities of Color in New York City

One of the toxins that have long-term, dangerous effects on people, especially children, may be in your very own home. A common source of lead in our community is from lead-based paint and dust. Lead-based paint is pervasive in buildings and homes built before 1978, which constitute over 89% of Northern Manhattan's building stock.

Lead poisoning particularly affects children's development and can possibly be fatal. Because most children in these communities live in multi-family dwellings, and there is greater difficulty in protecting children against lead paint in two-family houses, these children's health and development continue to be threatened.

In each case, the families had landlords that did not comply with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules. Both families from the South Bronx described repairs at their apartments, just before their children fell ill, that were on their face violations of EPA rules on fixing lead paint.

Although lead exposure is pervasive, help is available. All three families took advantage of the resources at Lead Clinic at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx for treatment for their children, and all have reported their children's blood lead levels are declining. Even with this help, the prognosis for their children is



The exposure could be prevented except for the landlord's refusal to comply with Local Law 1, which is the city law designed to keep children safe from lead paint. Local Law 1 requires building owners of units where children under 6 years of age live to report such residence to the City as well as inspect the premises for evidence of lead paint exposure and remediate appropriately.

Recently members of WE ACT, as part of the New York City Lead Outreach Campaign, surveyed three families with children whose blood tests confirmed they suffer from lead poisoning.

Two of the families said they never received the annual notice from their landlords that their apartments may (and in fact did) have lead paint due to the age of the building. The other never received such notice, either – but under Local Law 1, their landlord didn't have to give annual notices.

guarded. One child already displays delays from normal developmental milestones, possibly caused by lead poisoning. The other children show no symptoms of permanent illness; however, illness from lead poisoning sometimes does not appear immediately.

Because of the experiences of these families and others like them, WE ACT has undertaken this HUD-funded public education campaign. As a community, we can work together to prevent similar tragedies from repeating themselves.

If you have questions regarding lead poisoning, its health and developmental impacts, or how to ensure your landlord's repairs are compliant with the law, please contact us. Ana Parks (ana@weact.org, 347-465-8481) and Limas Forte (limas@weact.org, 347-465-8491) will gladly arrange for a brief training for you, your tenant association, or your building management professionals.

## Engagement Changes Residents' View of the Political Process – Community Members' Share Their Perspectives

On Tuesday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, members of WE ACT and the Mother Clara Hale Task Force attended the Joint Hearing on MTA and Gubernatorial Nominee for Chair & CEO held at the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. State Office Building. In attendance was Senator Bill Perkins, Chair of the Committee on Corporations, Authorities, and Commissions, Senator Martin Malave Dilan, Chair of Transportation, and Senator Carl Kruger, Chair of Finance.

During this hearing, three members offered public testimony regarding the reconstruction of the Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot.

Task Force members Millicent Reddick and Merle Carroll, and WE ACT legal intern Lauren Glesby, each testified on the efforts of the community partnership with the Task Force and the importance of keeping open communication. This relationship between the MTA and the Task Force on this project will be two years long come January 2010.



Senator Perkins (left) and Jay Walder at the Senate Confirmation hearing on September 8, 2009.

The Task Force continues to make reasonable demands of the bus depot reconstruction with respect to Green building measures (i.e. Green roof), environmental protection (i.e. air quality), and culturally relevant and community-representative art. The hearing was just one of the many steps this group has taken to ensure that these demands are met by the MTA.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, Jay Walder was approved by the state Senate as the new MTA Chairman. Hopefully, Walder will improve the community's relationship with the MTA, which will foster a safer and healthier community.

## Mother Clara Hale Task Force Members Alerts New MTA Leadership to Health and Environmental Issues Associated with Depot Rebuild

### **Mr. Jacob Morris**

(Member, Mother Clara Hale Community Task Force)

Working on the Charrette with the Bus Depot Task Force was a profoundly gratifying learning experience for me. First of all, it really helps to know that you are working on something that is pretty major in its importance to the community. It's real, it's big, and it costs tens and tens of millions of dollars. So if we can have real input into how it is built, and what it looks like, then we know that what we're doing makes a difference.

As a Public Historian, and knowing the history of the neighborhood and of Harlem, I was initially motivated, and continue to be inspired by the proposal that we developed to place a beautiful block long Mural on the side of the building/Bus Depot that would tell the story of the great African-American contribution to Transportation, Labor, and Civil Rights History in the United States, through the artistic depiction of great milestones in that history. Where better than the Heart of Harlem for such an inspiring Mural to be located?

Many other issues arose in the course of planning the Charrette, which came to our attention while participating in the task force discussions. Like for example, where would the Charrette be held? Would it be in the immediate neighborhood, or up at City College relatively far away from the location, which would substantially decrease and inhibit community participation. We stayed strong and were able to credibly present an outstanding location near the Depot as our choice.

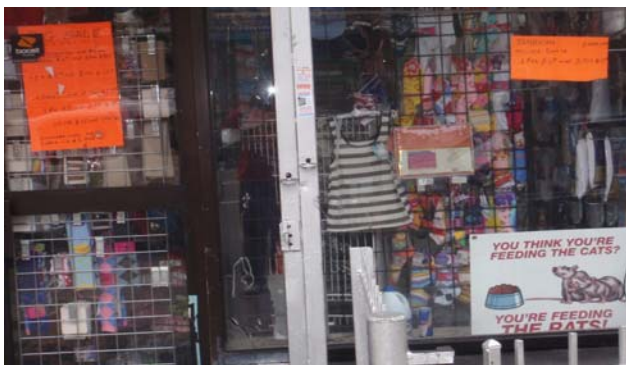
Subsequently, and especially after the Charrette itself, the MTA representatives have come to respect our input much more and have come to view us as actual partners in the planning of the Bus Depot. This is gratifying, but it took fortitude to get to this point. In regards to the Charrette itself, it was not pre-ordained that I would become a section leader or presenter.

***"It really helps to know that you are working on something that is pretty major in the community"***

## Garbage, Pests & Pesticides Pilot Study

All summer, the Street Team and W ACT staff, including our excellent interns Ashley Sanville and Meg Brown, have been meeting to assess the pest and garbage conditions on Northern Manhattan streets and in some buildings. We decided that some streets in our community are particularly problematic with persistent litter problems – which creates prime habitat for rats outdoors. We settled on a protocol for a study we are doing to test a solution to this problem.

The pilot project will run the stretch along both the north and south sides of 145 Street. We hope this simple set of actions aimed at reducing litter and pest problems along **145<sup>th</sup> Street between Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell Avenues**. This block is a busy commercial street that provides access to the Bronx and major highways for buses, cars and trucks; it also has heavy pedestrian traffic.



### Specific Solution Set for Outdoor Intervention

- 1) Placing a covered garbage can in front of businesses, such as yours, that offer food for sale in order to make proper disposal of potential litter items more convenient,
- 2) Business Owners will empty the garbage can at least twice a day, and
- 3) Posting a small sign warning street users not to leave food out for cats and pigeons.

### Specific Solution Set for Indoor Intervention

- 1) Establish tenant patrols to ensure garbage pick ups from refuse rooms occur according to schedule and notify building management if it does not,
- 2) Ensure refuse rooms/areas are maintained and garbage bags are properly tied, etc., and
- 3) Assess individual apartments and common areas for problems associated with pest access.

This summer, we collected information about conditions that encourage pests. We have spoken with residents of one major residential building on the block and the tenant association has agreed to participate in our pilot. We have also engaged local business owners and city officials. We found overwhelming support and cooperation for our efforts.

Thank you Harlem community. Together, we will be able to effect a wise and effective way to deal with our waste and pests. Please contact Charles Callaway ([charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org), 347-465-8492) with questions or concerns.

## Faith Leaders Discuss Segregation of Health Disparities

On Thursday, September 17, the Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice reconvened their 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the year, after a long, and much deserved, summer hiatus. Taking time from their busy schedules, the group met at Interchurch Center at West 120<sup>th</sup> Street where, through invocations from diverse belief systems, the members reaffirmed their faith and their devotion to justice, protection of human health and environmental stewardship.

The program opened with an inspiring presentation from Charmaine Ruddock (Project Director of the Family Health Institute at Bronx Health REACH) about the need for federal and *local* reform to address the breathtaking health and health care disparities pervasive in our system, which is particularly egregious in New York City. Ms. Ruddock talked about the *de facto* segregation and an unofficial “separate but *unequal*” service available to the poor – especially people of color – and wealthy and/or white communities. Faith Leaders resoundingly supported Ms. Ruddock’s efforts, offering their (and their constituents’) labor in her struggle.

Paul DeVries from New York Divinity School (Climate Change Working Group) talked about the passage of the climate change legislation known as the Waxman-Markey bill. He reaffirmed the Faith Leaders’ opposition to the bill’s centerpiece (a cap and trade scheme) as a license to dump on poor and minority communities. Kerry Birmbach (Food Justice Working Group) talked about the City’s consideration of the FRESH initiative, a suite of proposed actions aimed at increasing availability of healthy foods including fresh fruits and vegetables in communities of color and low income.

Join the Faith Leaders at their next quarterly meeting on December 3, 2009 to learn more about how you can become an environmental steward in your faith. You can learn more about Bronx Health REACH at [www.institute2000.org](http://www.institute2000.org) or email them at [Bronxhealthreach@institute2000.org](mailto:Bronxhealthreach@institute2000.org). If you have any questions or would like information regarding Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice, please contact Charles Callaway ([charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org), 347-465-8492).

## ***Northern Manhattan Residents Take the Initiative to Rank Toxic Exposure Risks in the Community ... Next a Plan to Reduce Them***

On Monday September 14, as part of our ongoing Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) efforts, WE ACT hosted a meeting with Northern Manhattan community members (including residents, community leaders, public officials, and researchers) to discuss toxic exposures within our community and to rank the risk they pose to our health. The meeting was the result of over 18 months of community discussions around the health (both physical and psychological) impacts of the Northern Manhattan environment with regard to indoor air quality, outdoor air quality, pest and pesticides, built environment and land use, solid waste access to healthy food, stress, lead poisoning, and environmental health services in New York City and State.



The Northern Manhattan CARE Collaborative is an inclusive group of community members and stakeholders in Northern Manhattan (East Harlem, Central Harlem, West Harlem and Washington Heights/Inwood) who are working to identify **toxic exposures** in the community in order to develop strategies for reducing the risk posed by environmental hazards. The CARE Collaborative is a community-driven project, chartered by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and coordinated by WE ACT for Environmental Justice, which will culminate in a strategic plan for harm reduction in September 2009.

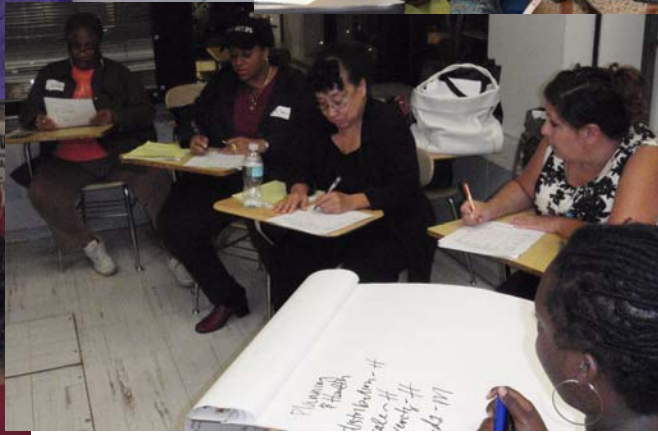
The CARE Collaborative identifies the environmental, health, economic and social concerns of the community through **open meetings** and **community surveys**. Based on the information gathered from surveys and community meetings, the Collaborative will create profiles of specific environmental health issues and their suspected causes, then develop strategies for reducing the risk posed by hazards in the community. Collaborative meetings are lead by a professional facilitator, and our steering committee composed of community members ensures continuity of vision and mission between meetings.

At the meeting on Monday, long-time East Harlem resident Mrs. Emma Jackson and West Harlem resident Mrs. Sarah Martin about their personal efforts to engage local residents in efforts to mitigate exposures and their associated risks. Mrs. Jackson spoke about efforts to increase supermarket service to East Harlem neighborhoods in order to address food-related health impacts while Mrs. Martin spoke about the Morningside Sanitation Coalition's work in reducing solid waste-related hazards.

Following Mrs. Jackson and Mrs. Martin's inspiring presentations, residents were asked to break out into small groups to discuss environmental issues that the Northern Manhattan community faces, and to rank the health risks associated with them. Meeting attendees assigned "High Risk" ranks to all of the identified environmental issues.

On September 29, WE ACT will hold a follow up meeting to prioritize the above-mentioned risk and begin to develop solutions to them. The campaign will culminate in a report detailing environment risks and community-identified priorities for how and in what order to deal with the risks. WE ACT will submit the report to the EPA and work with the agency to develop a plan for implementation of the solution. Please contact Ogonnaya Dotson-Newman to learn more about the CARE Collaborative and how you can help – [ogonnaya@weact.org](mailto:ogonnaya@weact.org), (347) 465-8483.

## ***WE ACT and Harlem – A Community in Action***





***We're on the Web!***

*Visit us at:*

[www.weact.org](http://www.weact.org)

## **WE ACT for Environmental Justice**

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## **About the Harlem Community Voices Newsletter**

We publish this newsletter to keep you informed about WE ACT's organizing campaigns and our progress toward a more healthy, sustainable and just environment. We are working for you, so please let contact us if you have any concerns or issues you want to address in the community.

We also always look forward to hearing your comments on the work we do.

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***Please contact us if you are interested in getting involved with any of our Campaigns!***

**Name**  
**Street**  
**City, State Zip**

***Harlem Community Voices***

**Volume 1, Issue 2**  
**September 2009**