



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

### Calendar of Events:

- ❖ **Garbage, Pests and Pesticides:** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month.
- ❖ **Mother Clara Hale Task Force:** Last Thursday of each month.
- ❖ **Faith Leaders:** Quarterly. Next meeting: February

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

### Campaign Highlights:

Climate Actions Uptown, Continued	2
Acting Against Discrimination in Transportation Services	2
Harlem's Trash Problem is Getting Worse	3
Harlem's Trash Problem is Getting Worse, Continued	4
NYSTEA Article, Continued	4
A Permit to Pollute the Air: A Look at the North River Waste Treatment Plant 5	
Faith Leaders and Their Important Work in Environmental Justice	6
Celebrating our Community	7

## Climate Actions Uptown – Harlem's Youth Use Technology to Issue Unified Call for Climate Justice

They formed a 3, a 5, a zero. They at last held their flags in front of Shepard Hall with their 350 CCNY sign. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, over 30 students represented CCNY in a worldwide campaign to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> to 350 parts per million in Earth's atmosphere. "We got a lot of attention," said Evette Rivas, student. On the other hand, "Not that many people showed up and there was confusion," said Letticia Rivera, student.

Charles Callaway, community organizer of West Harlem

Environmental Action used his strong vocal ability to position the students for the various photos. Scott Silverman, project coordinator of the CCNY chapter of the New York Public Interest Research Group, signed up students for the October 24<sup>th</sup> Times Square rally. Asantewaa Harris of Community Vision Counsel, who works in the Morales/Shakur Center participated and lent the 350 group (with the permission of other students) the mostly Latin American flags that belong to the center. The students wove those flags to show support and our relationship to less

**By: Shannon Ayala, Environmental Blogger**

represented countries that are expected to experience the more severe effects of climate change. Students of the CCNY chapter of WE ACT learned about this climate justice issue last year at WE ACT's conference, "Advancing Climate Justice." Other climate justice areas include Bangladesh, the coasts of Africa and the indigenous peoples of Alaska. Climate justice is also part of the more commonly known environmental justice issues of peoples of Black Mesa (Arizona), Appalachia in West Virginia and communities of color and lesser income. "The very first victims will be the people living closest to the edge, people who have already begun to suffer from drought, from flood, from the spirit of disease," says 350.org founder, Bill McKibben on a YouTube speech. "We will not stand by and let that happen."

The 350 campaign was aimed towards influencing Obama and other National Leaders that will converge in Copenhagen this December to put a climate treaty into effect in 2012. Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, alludes in his speech to "our foes," or the fossil fuel-energy industry that lobbies with billions of dollars to counter the renewable energy movement.

*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.

## In Harlem, WE ACT Against Discrimination in Transportation Services

WE ACT, along with organizations around the country, recently joined together to form the Transit Riders for Public Transportation (TRPT). TRPT is a national campaign working to bring environmental justice and civil rights priorities to the upcoming federal surface transportation act. This legislation provides an important opportunity for groups organizing in low-income, working class communities of color with an environmental justice perspective to shape national and local policy.

In addition to the important transportation-specific reforms included in the TRPT platform, WE ACT and our partners are aggressively pushing for a restoration of civil rights language in the transportation bill.

### **Climate Actions Uptown, Continued from Page 1**

He says, "We can't match them in money but they can't match us in numbers, in spirit and dedication."

With over 4,000 rallies registered at 350.org for October 24<sup>th</sup>, videos and images can be seen on [www.350.org](http://www.350.org) from Mexico, Amsterdam, Bangladesh, Zanzibar... Some had hundreds of people. Media coverage is thus far questionable. The New York Times posted it in their science section, featuring a photo of students from NYPIRG from Hunter College and the College of Staten Island.

Students that organized the event at City College worked out of NYPIRG, WE ACT @ CCNY and Slow Food CCNY. The latter two groups brought attention to 350 CCNY with Food50 CCNY. They gave out free cookies baked at 350 degrees and 400 degrees to symbolize with burnt cookies that we are nearly at 400 ppm of CO<sub>2</sub>. Students working out of NYPIRG asked students from other groups such as Habitat for Humanity to come out

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits racial discrimination by programs that receive federal funds. However, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Alexander v. Sandoval* that individual citizens cannot bring private lawsuits under Title VI for actions (called a "private right of action"), taken by agencies that receive federal funding, that have discriminatory *effects*. Instead, these actions can only be brought into court if it can be proved that the program's activities were meant to purposefully (or "intentionally") discriminate, the standards for which are virtually impossible to prove.

*Cont'd on page 4*

at 1PM and support the rally. One such NYPIRG member, Hagar Salem, chalked all of the black boards in Shepard Hall after 8PM on Wednesday night.

350 Harlem represented nearly 80 people at the UrbanGoGreen Expo on 142<sup>nd</sup> Street. It was organized by the student-chapter of West Harlem Environmental Action in a pursuit that reunited the students with the organization and again with Asantewaa Harris. In a gymnasium, ex-armory filled with tables of new green products, in a halt to business, all of the tables were deserted as everybody came together to represent Harlem.

Evette Rivas, who participated in 350 CCNY represents a new generation. She is a freshman that experienced environmental clubs in high school. If Leticia Rivera was right, that there weren't enough people, then the new freshman marching in might bring something bigger to the student demographic of this movement.

## Is Harlem's Garbage Problem is Getting Worse? Residents and Businesses Join Forces to Take out the Trash

**The Photovoice Project.** Students from Columbia University, along with WE ACT, conducted a field project involving garbage, pests, and pesticides, where business owners and managers whose businesses are on corners between 145th and 135th in Harlem were asked to take photographs of waste management issues they see on their corner, particularly surrounding the public garbage baskets. One of the purposes of this project was to investigate and construct everyday experiences and meanings of public health issues and to use these findings for potential application to public health practice. This project also involved the efforts of Building 2730, the 135th Street Block Association, and Dr. Robert Corrigan, Rodentologist NYCDOHMH.

The project considered different sources of garbage, pests, and pesticides, including commercial businesses, landlords and management companies, residents, city government, and tourists. Community members expressed concerns about exposures to pesticides, child safety, community pride, health issues, and the feeling of neglect caused by the local government, commercial businesses, and landlords and management companies.

---

***"This is the first time I have worked directly with a community organization and I feel fortunate to be working with WE ACT which has an important presence in the community... We have been by the businesses several times now, and it is interesting to see how our relationships with these community members grow."***

***- Abigail Caflin,  
Columbia University Student***

**Participants.** Two of the first businesses to participate in the program by taking pictures of the area around their businesses are Harlem Deli Supermarket located at 2320 7th Ave. and Make My Cake located at 2380 7th Ave. Other businesses that Columbia and WE ACT reached out to include Harlem Wing & Waffle, Sunset Deli & Grocery, Associated Supermarket, 7th Ave Pharmacy, M & S Deli, and WM Cleaners located at 1600 142nd St, among others.



*Photovoice participants and community members gathered to discuss photos and garbage, pests, and pesticides issues in the community on November 18<sup>th</sup>.*

**Information Collected from The Photovoice Project.** Results of the project included the pictures, community partnership formation, and development of personal connections to the issue. The results have been used to create suggestions for improvement in scheduling, communication, task delegation, and priority setting.

**Presentation of The Photovoice Project.** After the picture-taking part of the project was completed, WE ACT and the Columbia students held a session with the community members and

*Continued on page 4.*

## Residents and Businesses Pick up the Trash, *Continued from Page 3*

facilitated discussion about interpretations of the pictures. This presentation was made at the Northern Manhattan Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) Collaborative Business Roundtable on Wednesday, November 18, 2009. The Roundtable provided an opportunity to engage local businesses in the Photovoice Program that identified environmental health priority issues for residents of Northern Manhattan.

**Future Plans.** The Columbia students and WE ACT will be distributing materials related to this project to local and regional elected officers and community leaders, as well as promote continued community member involvement. These organizations will promote practical solutions to some of the issues uncovered during the project such as eco-bins, integrated pest management, and intergenerational education.

***“Working with WE ACT in the past few weeks has been a very eye opening and rewarding experience. For me, engaging businesses in local waste management and other related environmental health issues is a new way of thinking about how to tackle important community and public health issues... I hope that our efforts to reach out to local businesses through this project is a start to continued work with these essential community stakeholders.”***

***- Carolina Bravo,  
Columbia University Student***

## ***In Harlem, WE ACT Against Discrimination in Transportation Services, *Continued from Page 2****

Without the ability to bring a private right of action in the transportation bill, individuals are severely restricted in their ability to challenge potential racially discriminatory effects that may result in agency implementation of the bill. Therefore, a private right of action should be established in the Federal Surface Authorization Act so individuals may ensure that Department of Transportation actions with respect to the bill would not disproportionate burden the health, environmental protection, and transportation services for communities of color and low-income.

Congressional leaders from key committees

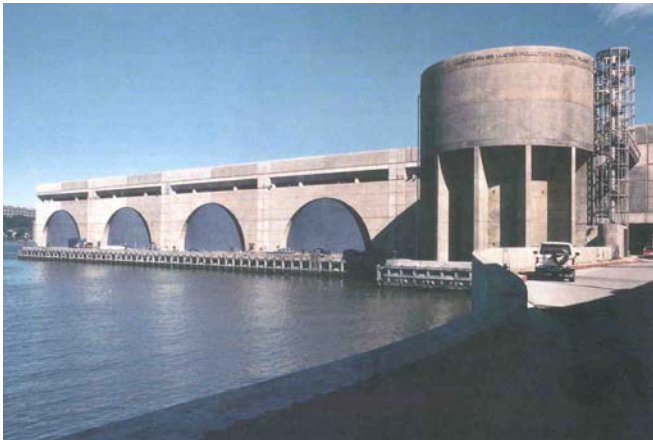
such as Transportation and Infrastructure as well as the Judiciary Committees – both of which have jurisdiction over transportation and civil rights matters – agree that enforcing civil rights and environmental justice within the transportation context is important. In the coming months, the coalition will continue to work with leaders from the House of Representatives to advance civil rights issues.

*If you would like more information about transportation equity or how civil rights provisions relate to the transportation reauthorization process, please contact: James Burke: [burke@weact.org](mailto:burke@weact.org), 347-465-8488.*



## ***A Permit to Pollute the Air? A Look at How We Can Impact Operation of the North River Wastewater Plant***

Do you ever smell odors from the Sewage Treatment Plant at 145<sup>th</sup> Street? Do you wonder who is responsible for its operation? North River is run by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. However, the State Agency, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) controls the permitting process by which it operates. Such a permit program is required under Title V of the federal Clean Air Act of 1990. The purpose of this program is to prevent and control air pollution in order to ensure protection of the environment, air quality, public health and welfare and enjoyment while promoting industrial development of the state.



A Title V Permit is a facility-based operating permit program that combines all regulated emission sources at a facility into a single comprehensive permit. This permit establishes emissions limits of air pollutants that are meant to achieve the best system of emission reduction and must be issued for each major stationary source (facility), including North River.

The North River plant is one of NYC's wastewater treatment facilities that is responsible for removing most pollutants from used water before it is discharged into local waterways. The plant, located on the Hudson River west of the West Side Highway from 137th Street to 145th Street, treats about 125 million gallons of wastewater daily during dry weather, and can handle up to 340

million gallons daily during wet weather. The plant's Title V Permit is now up for review by the DEC. The public can help the DEC make decisions with regard to the Title V permit (or any other action) by:

- Reviewing specific environmental permit applications on the DEC's database and directing questions to the division (e.g., Air, Water, etc) managing that permit program;
- Viewing notices of important meetings, hearings and document reviews through the Environmental Notice Bulletin, an official publication of the DEC that is published every Wednesday online at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/enb/enb.html>;
- Communicating with different environmental justice contacts, such as the Environmental Justice Hotline, provided on the DEC's website;
- Viewing online DEC proposed rules and regulations that are open for comment; and
- Providing input into the approval process for important projects undergoing the State Environmental Quality Review process, which is typically done at the local level.

The public can get involved in the Title V issue process by:

- Contacting one of over 300 Environmental Conservation Police Officers at 1-877-457-5680 to report odors or dark smoke issues;
- Reporting pollution or Environmental Conservation Law violations anonymously by calling the DEC's TIPP Line at 1-800-TIPP DEC (1-800-847-7332) or sending an email to [r5dsptch@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:r5dsptch@gw.dec.state.ny.us);
- Expressing public opinions on DEC policies by sending an email to the commissioner at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/407.html> or to the Webmaster at [dpaweb@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:dpaweb@gw.dec.state.ny.us), who will direct comments to the appropriate person;
- Attending DEC-sponsored events open to the public provided on the DEC's website; and
- Getting information, such as department records, by sending a letter or downloading a form to send to the Records Access Officer of the DEC.

## ***Faith Leaders Light New Path to Advance Environmental Justice***

**By: Stephen Tickner**

In the fall of 2007, a group of thirty-five faith leaders gathered over breakfast at a local cafe in the Bronx to discuss environmental justice. Together they shared personal stories of how the environmental conditions of their neighborhoods were affecting them and their communities. Through this conversation, Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice was launched.

Now in its second year, this city-wide interfaith group is co-chaired by WE ACT For Environmental Justice and NY Faith & Justice. It was obvious to the leaders that there was a huge need for such a group.

“At the second meeting we posed a question,” Lisa Sharon Harper, Executive Director of NY Faith & Justice said. “Do you think God is calling this group to move forward? People started applauding saying ‘finally’ and one Pentecostal preacher in the back yelled out a resounding ‘Yes’! The response was electric!”

Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice continues to meet over breakfast once a quarter in Manhattan and draws faith leaders and advocates from all over New York City.

The next Faith Leaders meeting will be held on **Thursday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>**.

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

***“The Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice is made up of much a different community. It constitutes a wonderful flavor of faith leaders. We have no less than 40 at our quarterly meeting – which tell us that the information that we present is making an impact in our community. Almost all the people who have attended keep on coming back.***

***The small working groups that tackle Climate Change, Food Justice and Toxic Hazard have the ability to have a Say in what is happening in their community. A single voice sometimes can be hard to hear but the unified voices of many will be heard – and the faith leaders are doing.”***

**- Charles Callaway,  
WE ACT’s Community Organizer**

One of the key components of Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice are the working groups, three smaller subsets of the larger body that tackle Food Justice, Climate Justice, and Toxic Hazards. They consist of half advocates and half faith leaders.

“The [working groups] craft ways that the whole group can take action and offer education as well as accountability,” Ms. Harper said.

As the second year of Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice is under way, the leaders hope to take what they have learned and craft an exciting and active year.

***“The next step for this group is to take action in the areas of concentration like Food Justice. We have a group of people that could make a difference in their communities and the way government responds to service needs.”***



## ***Take a Look at WE ACT's Community in Action***



***Happy Holidays!!!***



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

*Visit us at:*

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

## **WE ACT for Environmental Justice**

**WE ACT for Environmental Justice**

**P.O. Box 1846**

**New York, NY 10027**

Phone: (347) 465-8492

Fax: (212) 961-1015

E-Mail: [charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org)

## **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.

.....

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

***Harlem Community Voices***

**Volume 1, Issue 3**

**December 2009**