



***Building resilience from within: the intersection  
of research, practice and partnerships in a  
changing climate***

CDC-NIEHS: Extreme Weather, Climate and Health: Putting Science  
Into Practice

Washington DC – January 31, 2013

**Jalonne L. White-Newsome, Ph.D.**

WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Federal Policy Analyst  
Union of Concerned Scientists, Kendall Science Fellow



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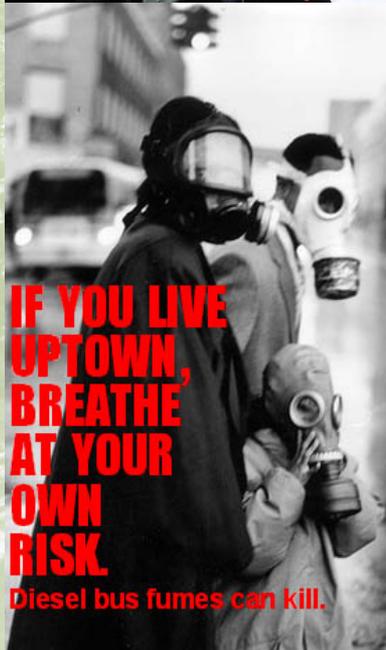


[www.weact.org/youtube](http://www.weact.org/youtube)

# WE ACT for Environmental Justice



A Northern Manhattan community-based organization whose 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.



# WE ACT's - 8 Indicators of healthy community

- Clean Air (Climate Change)
- Affordable and Equitable Transportation
- Waste, Pests & Pesticides Reduction
- Toxic Free Products
- Good Food in Schools
- Sustainable Land Use
- Open & Green Space
- Healthy Indoor Environments

## Members of the "Earth Crew" Engaging in air monitoring



*Earth Crew members (from left to right: Carl Willis, David Betancourt, Latanya Stevens and Felicia Reynolds) keep a close watch as they count the number of diesel buses and trucks rolling down the streets of Northern Manhattan.*

## Launching Campaign, "Breathe at Your Own Risk"



# Key considerations for climate justice

1. No bench-warmers.
2. Weather does not discriminate.
3. Differential response leads to differential impact.
4. Impacts do not happen in a vacuum.
5. Community capacity increases the ability to adapt.

# 1. No Bench Warmers



## Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change

A national working group of over 35 environmental justice advocates and scientists working to develop just policies and mechanisms that equitably reduce carbon emissions in all communities.

Email us at: [EJForumclimatechange@gmail.com](mailto:EJForumclimatechange@gmail.com)

### Advancing Climate Justice: Transforming the Economy, Public Health and Our Environment

*A 20th Anniversary National Climate Justice Conference Organized  
by WE ACT for Environmental Justice*



*The new EPA Chief **Lisa Jackson** makes her first public appearance since being confirmed as the new EPA Administrator at WE ACT's Advancing Climate Justice Conference, January 30, 2009*

### The Environmental Justice Leadership Forum Roundtable on Climate Change

*Topic: Climate Adaptation Plans for Communities*

*When: November 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

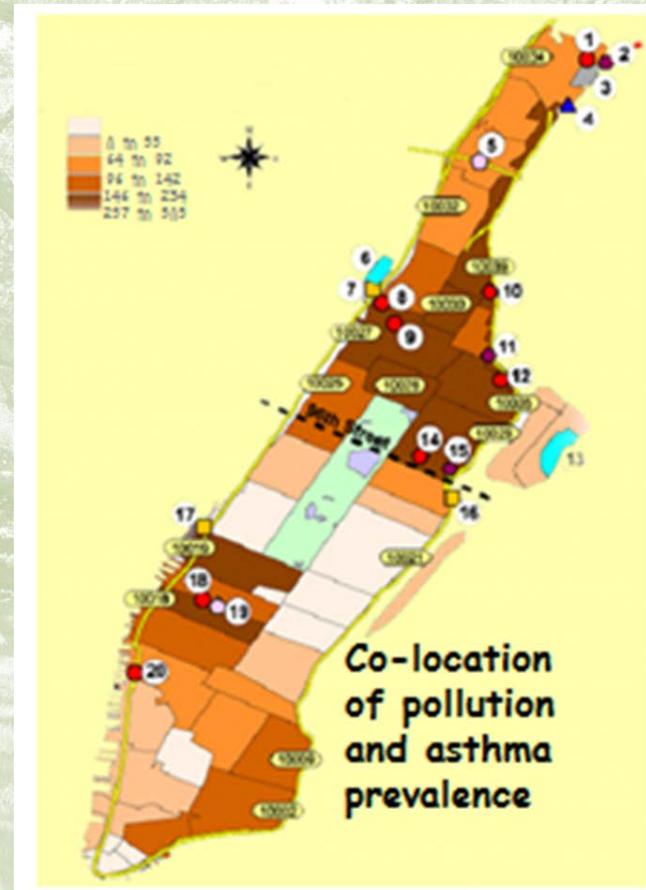
*Where: Arlington, Virginia*



## 2. Weather does not discriminate:

### Manhattan & Hurricane Sandy

- Lower Manhattan vs. Northern Manhattan
  - Weather was equitable
  - Impacts were different



## 2. Differential Response

**Columbia, MS**

vs.

**New York & New Jersey**

### ■ **Organization: Jesus Peoples Against Pollution (JPAP)**

- Media does NOT talk about rural areas
- Government is slow to assist
- Insurances never pay poor citizens, but ask for money
- Left behind, compared to other Gulf states
- Housing and health of community is degrading
- Mold/mildew in homes
- Infrastructure
- Electrical power problems
- Internet communication

### ● **New York Environmental Justice Alliance**

- Organized EJ leaders on Sandy
- Focused on significant maritime industrial communities
- Multiple exposures and impacts related to storm surges
- Communities feel disengaged, at risk, compromised

# 4. Impacts do not happen in a vacuum

## Cumulative impacts on EJ communities

- Air Quality
- Water Integrity
- Containment of solid waste
- Indoor Exposures (heat, cold, mold, ecoli)
- Unaware or risks
- **Baseline Health**
- Transportation
- Utilities (access, no access, unaffordable)
- **Building infrastructure (public housing, schools)**
- **Additional social stressors**
- Delayed recovery, response & resources
- **Access to health care services**
- Priority (urban vs. rural, political capital)
- Media
- **No research specifically on the most highly impacted**
- Many others.....

## 5. How WE ACT builds community capacity?

- Keeping our ear to the ground
- Training
- Community-Driven Research
- Academic Partnerships
- Engaging youth
- Environmental Literacy
- Shaping local, state and national policy
- **Building Coalitions around specific issues**

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**COMMUNITY**

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**RESEARCH**



*Building resilience through...*

# RESEARCH

- Understanding the differential impact related to :
  - Increase in the presence of mold (air)
  - Temporary use of diesel generators (air quality)
  - Disruption of waste sites (solid, landfills, toxics)
  - Flooding: trash, pests (solid waste)
  - Brownouts and Blackouts (psychosocial stressors)
  - Energy burden vs. energy use
  - Built environment: home, school (indoor exposure)
  - Unique challenges in rural communities (consequences of less than rapid responses)





## *Building resilience through...* **RESEARCH**

- Effectively communicating climate change impacts to communities of color and low income
- Effective interventions to address community survival during an unexpected weather event
  - Including non-traditional partners
- Using a health impact assessment to quantify the costs of policies/decisions that drive climate Assessing cumulative impacts
- Quantifying the costs of not preparing our most vulnerable

# Response/Recovery: Research Questions

Issue/Concern	Research question
Inadequate mental and psychological support	What are the health costs /burden associated with additional stressors in EJ communities?
EPA waivers and streamlining processes during clean up and recovery	By granting waivers, are we putting clean-up workers in more harm?
Communities not engaged in the decision making process about recovery and resources	What are the factors that contribute to fostering community resilience before and after a disaster? The use or mis-use of participation
Highly impacted areas from storm surges	What are the health impacts associated with the structural failure of Superfund sites due to storm surges?

*Building resilience through...*



# **PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE**

- Train professionals for the new normal
- Fully utilize established community forums and other communication pathways
- Use best practices from jurisdictions to support resilience and preparedness planning that uses the CERT and community organizing models
  - Use an all-hazards frame to addressing public health challenges
- Align education and outreach with other initiatives

*Building resilience through...*

# **PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE**

- Engage EJ community experts to:
  - Help create emergency plans
  - Spread the message
  - Collect data, design meaningful and useful studies/research
  - Advance climate change as a priority at the local level through a strong, unified voice





*Building resilience through...*

## **COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

- Creating new partnerships
- Elevating environmental literacy where we work, pray and play
- Holding leaders – on every level - accountable
- Advocacy to policy
  - we need the research to talk to policymakers

# Principles of Environmental Justice

*Environmental Justice demands the right to **participate** as equal partners at every level of **decision-making**, including **needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.***

Principle #7, delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC



Special thanks to.....WE ACT Staff

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Dr. Shubhayu Saha, Dr. George Luber (CDC)

Dr. John Balbus (NIH/NIEHS)

My grandparents

## **Dr. Jalonne L. White-Newsome, Federal Policy Analyst**

WE ACT for Environmental Justice

50 F St., NW, Suite 800

Washington, DC 20001

Office: (202) 495-3036

[Email: jalonne@weact.org](mailto:jalonne@weact.org), Twitter: @drj\_ege2

[Website: www.weact.org](http://www.weact.org), Twitter: @weact4ej

## **Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change**

Twitter handle: @ejforum, Website: under development

[ejforumclimatechange@gmail.com](mailto:ejforumclimatechange@gmail.com)