

**Collaborative on Health and the Environment - Northwest (CHE-NW)
Meeting Notes
Good Shepherd Center
Seattle, WA
June 29, 2004**

Participants:

Chetana Acharya, Community Outreach and Education Program, Department of
Egogenetics and Environmental Health, University of Washington
Morgan Barry, Public Health Department – Seattle and King County, Environmental
Health Division
Mary Bartholet, Washington State Nurses Association
Madeline Beery, Office of Environmental Health Assessment, Department of Health
Trudy Bialic, PCC Natural Markets
Nanda Blazej, Cascadia Consulting Group
Marnie Boardman, Washington Department of Health, Environmental Health Tracking
Program
Patricia Butterfield, Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing Program,
University of Washington
Ann Clifton, Mercury Awareness Team
Charlie Cunniff, Environmental Coalition of South Seattle
Carol Dansereau, Farmworker Pesticide Project
Elizabeth Davis, League of Women Voters
Ticiang Diangson, Seattle Public Utilities
Nancy Dickeman, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Sibyl Diver, Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition
Richard Fenske, Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, University of
Washington
Aileen Gagney, American Lung Association of Washington
Richard Gelb, City of Seattle, Office of Sustainability and Environment
Lise Glaser, Cascadia Consulting Group
Sally Goodwin, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility's Environment
Committee and board member, Institute for Children's Environmental Health
Linn Gould, Erda Environmental Services
Jordan Firestone, neurotoxicologist and clinician, University of Washington
Bruce Herbert, Newground Social Investment, board member/Institute for Children's
Environmental Health
Sego Jackson, Snohomish County, Solid Waste Management Division
Darlene Johnson, Dental Amalgam Mercury Syndrome
Maria Mason, Coalition for Environmentally Safe Schools
Tracee Mayfield, Public Health Department - Seattle and King County
Suellen Mele, Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation
Elise Miller, Institute for Children's Environmental Health
Kristin Miller, graduate student in environmental health, University of
Washington/Antioch
Mary Ann Newell, Mercury Awareness Team/Consumers for Dental Choice

Jane Nudelman, Breast Cancer Fund, San Francisco office
John Roberts, affiliated with American Lung Association of Washington, Washington
Physicians for Social Responsibility and League of Women Voters
Janna Rolland, organizational consultant and board member, Institute for Children's
Environmental Health
Roger Rosenblatt, Department of Family Medicine, University of Washington
Fiona Sands, American Lung Association of Washington
Alexandra Scott, King County, Solid Waste Division
Bruce Takata, Seattle Biotech Legacy Foundation
Pam Tazioli, Breast Cancer Fund, Seattle office
Kate Villarreal, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice
Shawn Waliser, Safe Food and Fertilizer
Sarah Westervelt, Basel Action Network
Cheri Zehner, environmental health consultant

Notes

Elise Miller, coordinator of CHE-NW, welcomed the group and reminded participants that this meeting would incorporate suggestions from our last meeting, including a science update, updates on CHE-NW working groups, brief updates regarding organizations' current activities and presentations on a particular theme (in this case, environmental justice). She also apologized that we were not able to have a speaker phone available after all for those who wished to call in to this meeting and promised that one would be available at the next meeting.

1) Science Update

Rich Fenske, PhD, professor of environmental health at the University of Washington, provided an update on research related to pesticide exposures and human health. He first noted that he started research on pesticides 25 years ago using a florescent exposure technique that indicates pesticide residues on the skin. More recently he has worked on epidemiological studies in order to determine if low-level exposures may be related to various health concerns. Along these lines, he mentioned the National Agricultural Health Study on licensed pesticide sprayers that is getting underway. It is supported by the National Cancer Institute, and now federal agencies are starting to join this effort. He also highlighted the new rule for pesticide workers in Washington State regarding cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticides. (Exposure to organophosphate or N-methyl-carbamate pesticides may reduce the activity of cholinesterase, an enzyme that aids in regulation of the nervous system.) Pesticide sprayers and handlers in Washington State are now being tested for pesticide exposures through a blood test. The current numbers indicate that 18% of workers are overexposed and 4% are so overexposed they need to be taken off the work force because of health concerns. Given the research findings on pesticides (including the relatively recent national decision to ban Dursban for private, though not commercial, use), Rich suggested that we really need to reduce exposures across the board – “we know enough and don't need to wait any longer to ‘prove’ the links to health problems.” Rich also said that Carol Dansereau with the Farmworkers Pesticide Project is a great resource on these issues. Maria Victoria Peeler with the

Department of Ecology who helped to put together a video on pesticides (which is coming under fire from industry) was also mentioned as a resource.

2) Brief Intros and Updates

Participants introduced themselves and provided brief updates on current activities.

3) Updates on CHE-NW Working Groups

a) Precautionary Principle

Since Steve Gilbert, PhD, Institute for Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders, who chairs this work group, was unable to attend the meeting, Elise highlighted some of their current activities:

- 1) Continuing to reach out to organizations for endorsements of the precautionary principle white paper – Puget Sound Consumer Coop recently endorsed the paper thanks to Pam Emerson;
- 2) Encouraging the City of Seattle and King County to include health indicators in their comprehensive plans – such as obesity, overweight, asthma, and diabetes, which are in part related to environmental factors. This fits with the ongoing effort to change the name of the “Environment Element” in the City of Seattle comprehensive plan to “Environment and Human Health Element” in order to make those links more explicit;
- 3) Setting up more meetings in August with key City and County officials about incorporating the precautionary principle language into the plans; and 4) Working with others, such as Laurie Valeriano, to bring up the precautionary principle at the state level and persistent bioaccumulative toxics (PBT) panel.

b) Research

Since Kate Davis, PhD, professor at Antioch University, was unable to attend, Kristin Miller, a graduate student at Antioch working with Kate, gave an update on the plans for the research project: “Health and Environment in Washington State: Making the Links.” Kristin noted that the research group this summer will begin to collect data on:

- Environmental conditions that are associated with adverse health outcomes, such as air, water and food quality, the indoor environment and consumer products;
- Human exposures to hazardous agents in the environment, including toxic chemicals, microbiological and physical agents, and residues of contaminants in human tissues, such as the presence of persistent bioaccumulative toxics in breast milk; and
- The incidence and prevalence of adverse health outcomes, such as asthma and other respiratory problems, site-specific cancers, developmental disabilities, and congenital defects.

Information will be broken out by age, gender, location and other relevant variable when possible. Where data on health and environmental quality in Washington State do not exist, inferences will be made from national data and data from other states.

Following data collection, the information will be interpreted, integrated and synthesized in a single reference document that will generate a comprehensive picture of the

relationships between population health and environmental quality in Washington State. The document will contain descriptive text, graphs, tables and figures as appropriate. It will be produced in hard copy and as a PDF file, available free of charge.

This project is the first phase in a two-phase project, with an overall goal of documenting the economic costs of adverse health effects associated with environmental quality in Washington State. The second phase, planned for 2005, will focus on generating the economic information and follows similar recent work conducted in other states, such as Massachusetts, and at a national level.

c) Environmental Justice (to be described in detail later in the agenda)

d) Outreach to health-affected groups

Elise simply noted that though this isn't an "official" work group at this point, one of the central components of the CHE national is collaboration with health-affected groups, such as those dealing with asthma, endometriosis, learning disabilities, Parkinson's, breast cancer and others. She mentioned that, given this, we are planning to highlight some health-affected organizations working on the environmental contributors to the respective health focus of their group at the next CHE-NW meeting.

4) Environmental Justice (EJ) presentations:

a) Ticiang Diangson started by asking us to check in with ourselves regarding the comfort level we experience when we hear the term "race." She then noted that the central interest in having work group on EJ is to develop good ally relationships between different sectors in order to create a safe, healthy commons for EVERYONE. She went on to provide some background on environmental justice concerns. In the late 1980s, Ticiang said that research was published showing that hazardous waste sites impact communities of color far more than white communities. In 1991, environmental justice leaders spoke to the "top 1" environmental groups and told them they were not incorporating justice issues into their work – communities of color were being overlooked even among those groups that should have been considered allies. This need to empower these communities to address environmental justice issues, Ticiang emphasized, was a significant impetus for the establishment Community Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ) in 1992 with the support of Hazel Wolf and the People for Puget Sound. Now CCEJ, along with its partner organizations, continues to work on behalf of communities of color. Ticiang ended by saying her three favorite EJ questions which we all should ask before any action is taken are:

- 1) Who benefits?
- 2) Who is put at risk?; and
- 3) How are decisions being made? (i.e. who is at the table from the start when decisions are being debated and determined?)

b) Chetana Acharya described the outcomes of the first meeting of this work group which was held May 20th in order to figure out how we can better integrate our environmental health and justice work. Participants at the meeting included Chetana Acharya, Nanda

Blazej, Ticiang Diangson, Suellen Mele, Alyssa Sampson (Cross-cultural Health Care Program), Yalonda Sindé (Community Coalition for Environmental Justice).

The group drafted the following goals:

- Create deliberate partnerships across different kinds of groups (cultural, etc.) so that organizations can more effectively advocate for programs, policies and science that meet the needs of all communities. One specific approach could be developing a “Peacekeepers Team” that supported environmental justice and traditional environmental groups in partnering on initiatives.
- Make sure the right players are at the CHE-NW table from the inception of the group.
- Develop a partnership mechanism for CHE-NW that supports equitable leadership.
- Develop a reciprocal, equal information exchange between all kinds of groups.
- Figure out how to incorporate environmental justice into mainstream environmental and environmental health groups (idea: create a “Peacemakers” team to work with different groups)
- Develop an EJ group/CHE-NW workplan.

c) Kate Villarreal, a new community organizer at the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ), described some recent successes and current initiatives of CCEJ. These included:

- Helped to close down the Veteran's Hospital medical waste incinerator.
- Helped move a paint company that was polluting a community into an industrial area.
- Exploring whether the Olympic pipeline, which runs through Seattle and transports gas and diesel fuel, is putting communities of color at risk.
- Working with a South End community's “Clear the Air” committee to determine the source of bleach-like odor and have that source removed.
- Working on concerns related to a redevelopment project which would displace people with the lowest income in the Yesler Terrace public housing community. (This is challenging because those in the public housing community speak 10-14 languages and only 42% speak English).
- Fostering empowerment among EJ youth at Franklin High School
- Partnering on the EJ Needs Assessment project

d) Further discussion:

- Ticiang underscored the need to get people involved at the “twinkle” stage – i.e. at the very beginning of an idea. Partnership needs be stressed more from the get-go and a commitment to nonviolent communication needs to be made.
- Aileen Gagny noted that the Master Home Environmentalist Program goes into communities of color to give trainings so that communities can feel more empowered to make changes in their homes and neighborhoods.
- Elise asked about the obstacles to better communication between those working in communities and others working on environmental health who may not get the EJ concerns. Ticiang responded by saying there was “creative tension” between the

scientific paradigm (more quantitative and disembodied) and the needs assessment from the community's point of view (more qualitative). Chetana added that the proposed “peacekeepers teams” could help with cross-cultural competency and language in terms of expectations, rules and taboos in different cultures. Also, funding is a key obstacle to making broad-scale change – it is still so challenging to find consistent support for EJ efforts.

- Everyone agreed that we need to keep this conversation going throughout our upcoming meetings and not see EJ as a “theme” that we have now “covered”, but, instead, one that has to be integral to every conversation and collaboration.

e) Next Steps

The EJ Work Group will set up another meeting to flesh out the draft goals and steps for implementing those goals (UPDATE: This meeting will be held July 28th Noon - 1:30 p.m. at the American Lung Association office in Seattle).

Next CHE-NW Meeting

Sept. 28, 2004 - Noon - 2:00 p.m. in downtown Seattle