

**Collaborative on Health and the Environment-Washington (CHE-WA)**  
**Environmental Justice Working Group Meeting**  
**April 12, 2006**  
**NOTES**

**Next Meeting:** Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup> from 2:00-3:30 p.m. at the EPA Region 10 office in Seattle (calling in will be an option for those who cannot attend in person)

**Participants:**

- Morgan Barry, Public Health Seattle – King County
- Kevin Burrell, Environmental Coalition of South Seattle
- Ticiang Diangson, Seattle Public Utilities
- Jamie Donatuto, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (by phone)
- Linn Gould, Erda Environmental Services
- Elise Miller, Institute for Children’s Environmental Health (by phone)
- Marianne Seifert, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (by phone)
- Yalonda Sinde, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice
- Melanie Wood, EPA Regional 10

**Notes:**

1) Listening sessions: At the last meeting on April 12<sup>th</sup>, participants proposed that we organize a series of listening sessions with communities to build up to the proposed conference on health disparities and environmental justice (HDEJ). The structure of these listening sessions would be similar to the model Running Grass has used at EPA Region 10. The suggested framing question would be “How do you think your health is being impacted by the environment?”

- Elements of the listening sessions would include a) ground rules; b) language interpreters; c) good facilitators; d) a recorder who can transcribe what is expressed by participants [Suggestion: train students to take hand-written notes for these]; e) good food, organic if possible; f) possible break-out sessions in the second half if themes emerge that people would like to discuss in more depth.
- Use what emerges out of the listening sessions to determine what we will focus on at the conference. [Suggestion: Pick 3 to 5 “stories” that come out of the listening sessions that can serve as case studies of the HDEJ issues, such as the Highway 5 Corridor, the Transit Project, the Port, etc. These could serve as “coalescing” points of discussion for panels, etc. at the conference.]
- Calendar is key. Though it can be challenging to try to avoid every holiday or important event in every community involved, it is important to try. [Suggestion: Hold the listening session at two different times of day so that more people might be able to participate.]

In response to these ideas, Yalonda said that the Seattle listening session that Running Grass organized was not at all well-attended by community groups – mostly agencies attended. For this reason, Yalonda suggested that if we are going to organize listening sessions, we have to build in incentives for people to attend – what are we giving these groups in exchange for their time? Yalonda also mentioned that using the term “environmental justice” rather than specific issues like transportation, gang violence, etc. was going to engage people more easily. She then added

that CCEJ is already doing two forums May 20<sup>th</sup> and June 3<sup>rd</sup> for communities of color regarding the impact of urban growth – an extension of the work she and CCEJ has been doing with the planning groups for two years.

*Suggestion:* We should go to the events already being hosted by community groups and see if we can integrate a “listening” component into those meetings, rather than trying to create new forums – this would be less time and money for everyone. For example, the listening session Running Grass helped to organize in Yakima was actually put on by farmworkers around another meeting they were having so there was strong attendance. This would also work better for tribal groups because each tribal community will approach issues and prioritize concerns differently.

Participants agreed that this could be a good approach as long as there was an appropriate time/way for the actual “listening” to take place.

## 2) Further considerations for whether or not to have a conference on health disparities and environmental justice:

*Discussion:* What would be some goals for the conference?

- a) to answer some academic questions about the links between what these communities are being exposed to and what health diseases and disabilities are prominent;
- b) to share data that would help strengthen the argument for communities so that they can more easily leverage change;
- c) to collectively determine what actions we could take to empower communities (so that they are making decisions rather than others who do not understand their situations).

*Suggestion:* What if we simply focus on one community or issue such as transportation concerns, which CCEJ is already working on? Transportation inequity can be tied to health disparities and environmental justice issues as well as to nutrition (access to healthy food). And these issues, in turn, could all be related to asthma, diabetes and obesity. We could ask people what impact the current problems with transportation has on their health, their lives – collect qualitative data.

Participants generally liked this idea. A concern raised, however, was that transportation inequity was not a priority issue for all the communities we would like to have involved in such a conference, like the Swinomish or other tribal communities. Given this, if we were still planning to do a conference, then we should perhaps return to the ideas from our previous meeting about surfacing 3 to 5 “stories” or “case studies” that emerge from listening sessions.

*Some questions still on the table:*

- a) Do we need to do listening sessions given we already have an idea about the concerns (have there been enough already to inform us in terms of choosing a topic); if so, who will be in charge of organizing these (and determine who, what, where, when and follow-up)?
- b) Do we still want to organize a conference for spring 2007, and if so, what do we need to do next to ensure that it happens successfully and who is taking the leadership on organizing it (need more input from the Health Justice Network)?
- c) What is CHE-WA’s value added to this effort – if it’s just data collection and sharing, who is going to do the additional research needed?