

**Collaborative on Health and the Environment – Northwest (CHE-NW)  
Environmental Justice (EJ) Working Group**

**Meeting Notes**

**Seattle**

**September 30, 2004**

***Next Meeting Date***

Wednesday, December 1st

(time and place to be confirmed soon)

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***In attendance***

*Morgan Barry*, Public Health, Seattle and King County

*Maria Batayola*, King County, Human Resources Division

*Jonathan Betz-Zal*, University Friends Meeting, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

*Stella Chao*, International District Housing Alliance

*Carol Danserea*, Farm Worker Pesticide Project

*Kate Davies*, Antioch University, Center for Creative Change

*Elizabeth Davis*, League of Women Voters

*Ticiang Diangson*, Seattle Public Utilities, Community Services Division

*Tamera Dyer*, Residents Against Cell Towers in Our Neighborhoods

*Richard Gelb*, City of Seattle, Office of Sustainability and Environment

*Young Hong*, Korean Women's Association

*Teresa Mare*, University of Washington (student)

*Suellen Mele*, Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation

*Elise Miller*, Institute for Children's Environmental Health

*Douglas Palenshus*, Washington State Department of Ecology

*Maria Victoria Peeler*, Washington State Department of Ecology

*Julie M. Postma*, University of Washington School of Nursing (student)

*Lua Pritchard*, Korean Women's Association

*John Ruhland*, Residents Against Cell Towers in Our Neighborhoods

*Mary Salazar*, University of Washington School of Nursing

*Sheryl Shapiro*, City of Seattle, Longfellow Creek Project

*Karen Snyder*, University of Washington

*Lisa Younglove*, University of Washington

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***Notes***

**Overview of Goals for The Meeting and Introductions**

Meeting facilitator: Morgan Barry, Education Consultant, Environmental Health Division, Public Health – Seattle and King County.

Morgan reminded the group that this meeting was part 1 of a 2-part dialogue to build consensus on our definition and practice of Environmental Justice (EJ). She noted that

Part 2 of the dialogue will focus on developing our consensus statement for the CHE NW EJ working group. Meeting date to be determined. These two dialogues will inform our work and strengthen our alliances with people working for environmental justice and environmental health in the region.

Morgan then facilitated the introductions (see participants' list above).

### **Overview of CHE-NW**

Elise Miller, MEd, Executive Director, Institute for Children's Environmental Health and coordinator of CHE-NW, provided an overview of CHE-NW's history and mission. Elise told the group that CHE-NW, established in 2003, is a regional network of over 270 researchers, healthcare providers, health-affected groups, environmental health and justice advocates and other concerned citizens committed to addressing environmental health issues linked to chronic health concerns in the Northwest. Our overarching goal is to promote the cross-pollination of ideas and opportunities between different sectors concerned with environmental contributors to chronic health problems in order to create a safe and healthy future for all in the Northwest.

She added that CHE-NW is a regional offshoot of CHE national and meets face-to-face four to five times a year. During these meetings, we highlight emerging science in the environmental health field, share information on our respective activities, incubate new ideas and opportunities, and invite partners to present on a particular environmental health theme.

She then noted that CHE-NW currently has several working groups: 1) the Precautionary Principle Working Group, which focuses on incorporating precautionary language in the comprehensive plans for King County and Seattle; 2) the Health and Environment Links Research Working Group, which is analyzing data on environmental contributors to chronic health problems and on the environmentally attributable health care costs in Washington State; and 3) the Environmental Justice Working Group, which is developing opportunities to create stronger alliances between environmental justice and environmental health and to instill a broader understanding that environmental health and justice are inherently linked. CHE-NW also supports the emergence of other working groups that promote activities for the benefit all organizational efforts whether in research, education and/or advocacy.

In addition, she mentioned that CHE-NW has a listserv where new research, upcoming events and policy/regulatory initiatives related to environmental health issues in the Northwest are posted. Though CHE-NW does not speak on behalf of all members nor take a stance as a coalition on a specific policy or regulatory issue, members are encouraged to share information on their programs and projects to increase collaboration on relevant initiatives. She emphasized that CHE-NW welcomes all individuals and organizations that share CHE's mission and values.

### **Panel**

Facilitator: Yalonda Sinde, Executive Director, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

- 1) Tamara Dyer, Coordinator, REACTION
- 2) Stella Chao, Executive Director, International District Housing Alliance
- 3) Lua Pritchard, Executive Director, Korean Women's Association

### **Brief Overview of EJ History: Yalonda Sinde**

- EJ began to be recognized as concern in the 70's and 80's. Catalyzing event: African American community had been chosen by industry as a toxic waste dump, and the community resisted.
- Researchers became interested: if it can happen in one community, is that true of others? Findings: toxic waste dumps are significantly more often placed in poor communities of color than any other place.
- 1991: first national gathering of people of color for EJ, developed the EJ Principles for those working with and on EJ concerns. These principles were reaffirmed at the 2nd conference in 2003.
- South Park is the "poster child" of EJ and gentrification. Industry is still there, but will the new ("gentrified") residents be more effective in changing that?
- What can agencies do? Build trust, partnerships, take the time it takes to be engaged with the EJ communities.
- Government agencies need to be fair and inclusive.

### **Presentations by Community-Based Organizations**

#### 1) Tamara Dyer, Coordinator, REACTION

REACTION is a volunteer group determined to create a safer environment by lowering the number of cell phone antennae (small towers on the roofs of homes) in our communities, especially poor communities of color.

- Research has shown that cell phones and the antennae that support them expose all of us to low levels of radiation.
- Low levels of radiation have been shown to have health impacts like low intellectual functioning and cancer – why are we asked to live with a known health hazard?
- There are no federal limitations; there is no regulation on these, and research is paid for by the industry.
- There are increasing numbers of antennae in South Seattle.
- Industry targets the poor, seniors and low-English-speaking communities. They pay industry "rent" to put antennae on their roofs – does not tell them of the danger.
- REACTION Goals: providers required by local jurisdiction to demonstrate the need for each cell antennae; external, rather than industry-sourced research on health impact.
- Community needs to be practicing the precautionary principle.

#### 2) Stella Chao, Executive Director, International District Housing Alliance

- A problem and how they solved it: Medical Waste incinerator at Veterans Hospital on Beacon Hill, a community of color. It was being fined for toxic emissions each year. Other local incinerators had been closed down. Wilderness Intercity Leadership Development (WILD) youth and CCEJ went into the communities to build awareness. The youth served as interpreters for senior non-English speakers. IDHA partnered with other agencies, met with government agencies like the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, but they were not cooperative at

first. BUT the community came together and within six months, the incinerator was closed down.

- Worked with EPA and the Washington Department of Health on a fish advisory. Helped them understand that signs are not enough and to get before the community members to demonstrate how to cook fish to lessen the exposure.
- Household hazards waste: WILD youth were trained and went out as educators into people's homes with translated materials and outreach materials to offer alternatives to toxic chemicals for the home.
- IDHA asked the community what their issues are. They said water quality, street safety, and more – that's where our efforts need to be, too.
- Continuing issue: the city is working for EJ on one hand, and continuing to put dumps etc. in poorer neighborhoods.

### 3) Faaluaina (Lua) Pritchard, Executive Director, Korean Women's Association

- The Problem: to decrease the arrests of people who were harvesting fish illegally and helping them know what was toxic. This is an EJ issue because of the population and because in their original countries, seafood could be caught for free; also, people needed to learn about the health hazards, the toxins, in shellfish.
- The Solution: Asian Pacific Islander community leaders/agencies joined to educate communities by:
  - Translating materials and signs
  - Having access to community meetings
  - Training and involving youth, and leaders made it likely for community to accept education from the youth
  - Educating at meal sites
  - Taking people on beach walks, and showing them "beach closure" signs
  - Showing them how to get a license for harvesting
  - Demonstrating what appropriate harvest is
  - Approaching stores about the source of shell fish that they sell
  - Producing youth video tape
- What made this successful?
  - Expected community engagement
  - Made it welcome: "come to this group and keep on coming"
  - Consistently emphasized stability, consistency and commitment

### Themes

Maria Batayola with King County's Human Resources Division summarized the following themes from the discussion at the meeting.

- Need to deal with poverty, race, limited English, immigrant/refugee groups
- Disproportionate impact; how to reframe gentrification, affordable home ownership.
- Value of community (self-defined) leadership, natural infrastructures, mobilization, collaboration, trust, reciprocity.
- Institutional racism vs. personal/internalized racism.
- Cultural competency; language of inclusion.

- Continuing effort; don't start something that's a one-time only effort; takes time to build relationships and organizing connections.
- Partner with all levels of government and kinds of organizations (educational, NGOs, etc.)
- Respect community time and resources.
- Participate in mutual cross-cultural competence.
- Be fair, inclusive, transparent.