Breathe At Your Own Risk

Environmental Justice, Community Health & Asthma

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Who is WE ACT?

- **Mission:** To build community power to fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, policy and protection

- **Strategies:**
  - Community organizing,
  - community-based participatory research,
  - policy advocacy &
  - sustainable development
Racial disparities in health and environmental exposures are not a coincidence.

Public health approach & strategies:
- Eliminate or minimize environmental exposures
- Focus on preventable exposures
- Increase or improve environmentally healthy amenities
Environmental Health & Justice: Environmental Exposures

- Environment: where we live, work play & pray
- Built Environment: Indoors
  - Pesticides and pests
  - Mold
  - Lead
- Built Environment: Outdoors
  - Air Quality
  - Access to greenspace & recreation
  - Access to nutritious food
  - Planning of healthy communities
Environmental Health & Justice: 
Asthma

- **Health Disparities**
  - Prevalence in black children 237% of whites (2001)
  - Mortality rate for people of color 2.5x higher (2000)
  - East Harlem with highest childhood morbidity – 3x citywide average and 6x national average

- **Environmental Links to Asthma Triggers**
  - Indoors: mold & pests
  - Outdoors: diesel, particulate matter & ozone
What are Diesel Emissions?

- Diesel “Soot”
  - Fine Particulate Matter (PM$_{2.5}$)
  - Contributes 10-30% of ambient fine PM in cities
- NOx emissions contribute to ozone formation
- Air toxics/ VOCs can attach to particles & be carried into lungs
What are the Health Effects of Diesel?

- Triggers asthma attacks
- Acute respiratory effects
- Associated with increased risk of lung cancer
- Fine Particulate Matter (PM$_{2.5}$)
  - Increase in death rates from heart problems
- NOx $\rightarrow$ Ozone
  - Asthma: exacerbation and possibly causation
- Air Toxics (PAHs)
  - Reduced birthweight & pre-term birth: in utero exposure to PAHs in air pollution
Evaluating Diesel’s Impact

- **World Health Organization:**
  - probable human carcinogen

- **Environmental Protection Agency:**
  - likely carcinogen

- **California Air Resources Board:**
  - Toxic Air Contaminant
  - South Coast Air Quality Management District:
    - 71% of cancer risk from on-road vehicles attributable to diesel
Diesel as an EJ Issue

- Communities of color more likely to host diesel sources – often in close proximity
- Asthmatics more vulnerable to health impacts
- Children are more vulnerable & face high, involuntary exposures
- Life cycle of diesel (oil extraction & refining) has global impacts on communities of color
CASE STUDY

WE ACT'S

Diesel Campaign
Breathe At Your Own Risk: Strategies & Tactics

- Grassroots Organizing
- Media Work
- Legal Action
- Policy & Government Accountability
- Civil Rights Complaint
- Strategic Alliances
- Community-Based Research
Breathe At Your Own Risk: Background & History

- 1988 WE ACT begins organizing
- 1996 collaborates with Columbia
- 1997 begins media campaign
- 2000 files Civil Rights complaint
- 2003 holds community protests in response to opening of new East Harlem Depot
Asthma Hospitalizations Rates by ZIP Code
Children Aged 0-4, Manhattan, 2000

Legend
Asthma Hospitalization Rates for Children 0-4 Years Old by Manhattan ZIP Codes (Rate Per 10,000)
- 0 to 55
- 64 to 92
- 96 to 142
- 146 to 234
- 257 to 605

Southern Manhattan Facilities
MapID Facility Name
16 91st Street Marine Waste Transfer Station
17 59th Street Marine Waste Transfer Station
18 41st Street MTA Bus Depot
19 42nd Street Port Authority Bus Terminal
20 Hudson MTA Bus Depot (Scheduled to Close)

Northern Manhattan Facilities
MapID Facility Name
1 Kingsbridge MTA Bus Depot
2* DOS Garbage Truck Depot (Two Large Depots; One Services Residents of the Upper East Side)
3 MTA Train Yards
4 Department of Transportation / Division of Highways Diesel Truck Depot
5 George Washington Bridge Port Authority Bus Terminal
6 North River Sewage Treatment Plant / Riverbank State Park
7 135th Street Marine Waste Transfer Station
8 Manhattanville MTA Bus Depot
9 Amsterdam MTA Bus Depot
10 Mother Clara Hale MTA Bus Depot (Scheduled to Expand)
11 DOS Garbage Truck Depot
12 126th Street MTA Bus Depot
13 Wards Island Sewage Treatment Plant
14 100th Street Bus Depot (Currently Expanding)
15 DOS Garbage Truck Parking Lot (Out Door Parking Lot)

Average Pediatric Asthma Rates:
- Northern Manhattan: 245 Per 10,000 Children
- New York City: 177 Per 10,000 Children
- Manhattan: 173 Per 10,000 Children

Source: NYC Department of Health SPARCS 2000 data on Asthma Admission Rates for children ages 0 to 4 years.
Map prepared by West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT) with the Columbia Center for Children’s Environmental Health (CCECH), using ESRI ArcView® GIS v3.1.1. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the WEACT GIS Mapping Specialist, Carlos M. Jusino, at (212) 961-1000, ext. 307.
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February 19, 2000
Release 3.00 – Alpha
Why Work on Diesel?

- Extent of local diesel emissions & health impacts
- WE ACT involved in issues of air quality & asthma
- In 1988 MTA started building the 6th bus depot in Northern Manhattan
- Approached a physician at Harlem Hospital to assess actual burden of asthma
- Made connections with researchers at Columbia University School of Public Health
135th Street Marine Transfer Station
135th Street Marine Transfer Station
Manhattanville
MTA Bus Depot
Breathe at Your Own Risk: Earth Crew Conducting 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.
April/May 1998

West Harlem Environmental Action
WE ACT for Environmental Justice. A Decade of ACTivism & ACTION.

Special Issue: Children’s Environmental Health

ALL CHOKED UP:

Diesel Exhaust Exposure Among Adolescents in Harlem

by Joanna Yarkura, MPH and Mary Northridge, Ph.D.

In 1998 concern was raised by members of the Harlem community when the Manhattanville bus depot was constructed on 138th Street, directly across from Intermediate School 43 in West Harlem. It was the sixth bus depot operated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) constructed in a Northern Manhattan neighborhood - a seventh depot is located on 59th Street.

In 1994, WE ACT approached investigators at the Harlem Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to request their assistance in determining what impact diesel exhaust might have on the community’s health, especially on the respiratory health of its youth, a heavily exposed and vulnerable population. As a result, a study was designed in order to determine the background exposure levels to diesel exhaust and to measure baseline lung function of school aged Harlem youth.

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Breathe at Your Own Risk: 1997 Media Campaign Launch
Governor and head of MTA blitzed with postcards

1999 Governor asks MTA to commit to:
- All new public bus facilities housing alternative fuel buses
- Conversion of 5 depots to CNG, including Manhattanville

Increased public awareness

Alliance with Transit Workers Union & NRDC
Civil Rights Complaint
Background

- 1998 Walnut Depot in the Bronx abruptly closed after building sold to NY Post
- 202 buses sent overnight to No. Manhattan
  - NO community consultation, and
  - NO capacity or plan to accommodate those buses
  - Buses parked on street & in adjacent lots
- Northern Manhattan depots house 1400 buses, nearly one-third of the entire NYCT fleet.
- Nearly half of routes housed uptown have no local stops.
Garbage Truck Depot Behind Homes in East Harlem
Garbage Truck Depot Behind Homes in East Harlem
New Bus Depot Construction in East Harlem
Fall 2000, WE ACT files Title VI civil rights complaint with DOT
- In response to MTA parking lot addition to the Kingsbridge depot
- Citing past studies and knowledge of health impacts
- Including a GIS mapping and demographic analysis

In 2001, MTA requests a dismissal & WE ACT responds
September 7th 2003

- **Downtown Depot Closed**
  - Only 1 of 2 downtown depots
  - In an industrial area, away from homes
  - 200 buses sent elsewhere
  - Leaving only one depot south of 99th street

- **Uptown Depot Opened**
  - 5th of now 6 uptown depots
  - In a densely populated residential community
  - 116 diesel-fueled articulated buses garaged
  - NO emissions controls on the building
September 7th Community Protest
100th Street Bus Depot – Completed
Breathe At Your Own Risk: Campaign Outcomes

- Resident Oversight Council created
  - comprised of leaders from 6 depots in Northern Manhattan
- MTA agrees to meet with ROC to address depot-specific problems
- Organizing continues to ensure Manhattanville depot converted to CNG
- WE ACT increases State legislature advocacy to increase accountability and transparency of MTA
Conclusion: The Battle Continues

- Ongoing Struggles with the MTA:
  - Poor relationship with community
  - Decisions are made without much public involvement (Announce & Ignore)
  - State legislation introduced to decrease lack of accountability & transparency

- DOT denies Civil Rights Complaint

- WE ACT continues to train & organize community leaders

- WE ACT/Columbia continues to monitor air quality around depots
For More Information

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References


References


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