

**The EPA and Environmentalism in Chicago:
Recommendations for a Community Based Approach**

Submitted by
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August 26, 1997

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a means of implementing a community-based environmental protection approach, members of the Greater Chicago Initiative Team have conducted informational community outreach interviews with environmental and public health organizations in Chicago. During the summer of 1997, the Chicago Team hosted a Society for Applied Anthropology intern to continue the outreach effort, and to provide technical assistance to the team and the Chicago environmental community.

The intern's activities over the course of the summer included the completion of a directory of Chicago area environmental organizations, informational interviews with a wide range of environmental and community based organizations, and the provision of EPA contact names and materials to a number of environmental organizations.

The goals of the community outreach interviews were to:
assemble a brief history of each organization and its programmatic goals
identify the most pressing environmental and/or public health issues from a range of local perspectives for incorporation into the GCI strategic planning process
develop a social map of the interconnections between environmental organizations in Chicago to

- Environmental issues overlap with ethnic and class tensions in Chicago neighborhoods. Sometimes these tensions emerge as a conflict between “white environmentalists” and “minorities who need jobs.”
- Chicago environmental politics are often depicted by a wide spectrum of informants as a battle between “anti-development” and “development” factions.
- The type of environmental data used by the groups interviewed varies widely according to the purpose of the organization, the technology available, staff size, and the availability of data pertinent to the mission.

II. Recommendations

- Continue the community outreach initiative by contacting ethnic organizations, churches, and health promoter organizations.
- Prepare a packet of materials or a series of presentations on community-based environmental protection for public consumption.
- Create a centralized list of environmental justice, environmental education, Chicago Team, and other grants that have been given to Chicago area organizations in order to promote collaborative project development and grant applications.
- Involve local community based organizations and city-wide organization in the CBEP and Sustainable Development Workgroups.
- Involve community development corporations (CDCs) in discussions about sustainable development and environmentally-friendly development practices.
- Host an informational workshop for Chicago environmental groups and the public on EPA processes and procedures, key environmental laws, and grants programs.

III. Conclusion and Questions for Further Consideration

The GCI community outreach interviews have generated a number of long-term questions for consideration:

- In a community based approach in which the “scientific” and community environmental priorities don’t converge, whose vision will take precedence?
- What is the meaning of sustainable development? How important is the development of consensus to the practice of sustainable development? What role should the EPA play in the struggle for consensus?
- How do we conceptualize environmental problems and solutions on a regional basis?

In the short term, the GCI community outreach effort has increased the visibility of the Chicago Team in the environmental community, and provided a wealth of suggestions and community input about environmental and public health priorities in Chicago neighborhoods. By incorporat-

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II. Methodology

The intern compiled a city-wide list of over 200 environmental organizations, community-based organizations, and public health organizations. Sources for this list included region-wide organization lists available from the USEPA, resource guides and articles about environmental issues in Chicago newspapers, social services guides published in Spanish language newspapers and publications, a review of neighborhood activities files in the Chicago Public Library, the Chicago phone book, and suggested contacts from EPA personnel. After compiling the list, a classification system was developed and applied to the list.

In consultation with her supervisor; Mardi Klevs, the Chicago Team Manager; and other members of the Chicago Team, the intern selected at least one organization from each category for an interview. Criteria used for this selection included:

- high visibility in the environmental community
- lack of Chicago Team knowledge about its activities
- an environmental focus related as opposed to a social service focus
- location on the southeast or west side of Chicago, target areas for the work of the GCI
- potential for providing additional contacts in the environmental community
- personal interest on the part of the intern

Interviews were scheduled with the director of each organization, or in some cases, with a program director already known to Chicago Team members.

A semi-structured interview format was used for the site visits and interviews. At the beginning of the interview, the intern provided a brief sketch of the purpose and structure of the Chicago Team and a copy of the *Greater Chicago Team Performance Agreement* for 1998. Organizations were asked to review the work plan and offer suggestions about prioritizing the items listed and to identify areas of convergence between their activities and those of the Chicago Team. Organizations were also asked to distribute the work plan to other environmental organizations to their constituents for input. Instructions were given to direct comments and suggestions to Mardi Klevs, the Chicago Team Manager.

Informants were then asked to provide information in the following areas:

- A brief history of the organization including funding sources
- Current areas of programming and activities
- Identification and analysis of the most pressing environmental and/or public health issues in Chicago, and in the local neighborhood in which the organization works
- List of other environmental or public health organizations with which the organization works.
- Sources of environmental data used in strategic planning or programming
- Previous involvement with the USEPA

Interviews concluded with an offer to provide USEPA educational materials, and/or contact names of individuals within the EPA who administer grant or regulatory programs. Phone interviews were shorter in duration, but followed the same general format. Interview reports were prepared and submitted to John Perrecone for review.

III. Observations

Organizational Characteristics

A social network map was prepared to help identify the programmatic linkages between Chicago environmental organizations (see Appendix 1). Organizations with 7 or more linkages to other environmental groups include the Illinois Environmental Education Advocacy Consortium, SUSTAIN, OpenLands, Sierra Club, Friends of the Chicago River, WASTE, and the Chicago Recycling Coalition. These organizations tend to be the “conveners” of large projects and issues. For example, Sierra Club convenes the Lake Calumet Area Strategy Workshop.

Environmental organizations maintain diverse types of membership bases. For example, IL Sierra Club has a membership of individuals numbering in the thousands, but much of the policy work is done by volunteer experts and a 2 person paid staff. Individual volunteers are asked to write letters, make calls to legislators, and to organize themselves into mini-chapters. WASTE, on the other hand, has approximately 30 members, consisting of community based organizations, churches, and environmental organizations.

Environmental groups often change missions and strategies. WASTE, for instance, grew out of a community-specific concern about an incinerator. WASTE now focusses on brownfields redevelopment, illegal dumping, and environmental education.

City-wide environmental groups feel that they are competing for a limited base of volunteers. Likewise, competition between local environmental groups is fueled by grant programs which do not emphasize collaborative efforts.

Some of the same individuals operate as officers in several organizations, especially on the southeast side of Chicago.

Many environmental organizations see themselves as public educators and advocates for environmental issues in which government agencies have little or no jurisdiction.

Environmental Issues Identified

The “environment” and “environmental problems” are conceptualized differently in each Chicago neighborhood. “Environmental concerns” elicited from interviews include personal safety, garbage pick up, graffiti, asthma, lead poisoning, toxins in schools, environmental risks stemming from imported food and goods, gangs, greenspace, illegal dumping, noxious odors, mysterious fogs spewing out of smokestacks, brownfields redevelopment, air pollution, communicable diseases, lead poisoning, unsafe water, prostitution, drug dealing, handicap accessibility, fish contamination, food contamination, animal rights, soil contamination.

Community based organizations tend to conceptualize environmental issues as quality of life issues, citing safe housing, health issues, violence, and jobs as primary concerns. City-wide environmental organizations were more likely to talk about air, water, and soil contamination, or species preservation as key issues. Community based organizations recognize ambient contamination as a quality of life issue, but they tend to say that day-to-day survival needs are more important. The exceptions to this pattern seem to be community-based umbrella or coalition organizations which maintain a geographic focus. Several of the brownfields projects (CANDO, WCMC, Friends of the Chicago River) have advisory committees on which USEPA, IEPA, and DOE personnel participate as volunteers. These advisory committees could serve as the basis for improving communication between these agencies.

Brownfields redevelopment in Chicago faces several challenges including lack of money for environmental cleanup and assessments, and a reluctance on the part of municipalities to actively identify brownfields sites for fear of negative publicity.

One of the difficulties with the pollution prevention initiatives is the reluctance of businesses to participate in a program staffed by state or federal personnel. Nonprofit organizations may be able to improve participation rates in pollution prevention programs by providing technical assistance. The North Business Industrial Council already provides these services, and CANDO is interested in becoming involved. Pollution prevention is also made more difficult by a lack of finances for capital improvements.

Neighborhood Dynamics

The Southeast side of Chicago consists of a number of insular, and well-defined neighborhoods, each with their own identity and history. (Locally identified neighborhoods in the southeast side include The Bush, South Deering, Slag Valley, East Side, South Chicago, and Hegewisch.) While the USEPA seeks to address environmental issues from a regional perspective, local residents are not necessarily concerned about pollution or contamination in other neighborhoods.

Individual determinations of environmental risk are dynamic. A VISTA volunteer in one of the southern neighborhoods told me that an increasing number of residents choose to drink bottled water for fear of water contamination. According to this volunteer, a resi-

IV. Recommendations

Continue Community Outreach Efforts

- Consider networking with Metropolitan Sponsors before its inaugural event this October. Metropolitan Sponsors is a city wide movement of community based organizations (CBOs) and churches from across the city. Its purpose is to provide CBOs with a city-wide base of support for quality of life and community development issues.
- Contact ethnic organizations not normally considered to be part of the environmental network. These organizations operate small environmental-related programs that go unnoticed. Suggested organizations include: Chicago Urban League, the Resurrection Project, Casa Guatemala, Operation PUSH, NAACP, Casa Aztlan, Comite Latino, Latino Institute, and Latinos United.
- Contact churches in target areas. Many local churches sponsor community based organizations that have environmental concerns and or programs. Churches also build environmental coalitions. For example, the “sacred space park” is a greenspace initiative spearheaded by the Green and Clean Task Force of Claretian Associates. *Comunidades de bases* are another form of geographically-based social organization nested within the Catholic Church that could be used as conduits into the community.
- CAPS meetings are already well established in some neighborhoods and could be used as conduits to distribute information or to obtain information about environmental concerns and solutions.
- Use health promoter organizations as sources of information and as a means of distributing information.
- Radio and student environmental programs operated out of universities, and neighborhood based community organizations should also be included in outreach efforts.
- Ask Chicago Team members, and the other popular granting departments like Environmental Education and Environmental Justice to keep a log of calls tracking the success of the outreach initiatives in Chicago.

Improve Information Flow between Environmental Organizations and EPA Programs

- Rewrite the Chicago Team Work Plan in a fact-sheet format and translate it into Spanish.
- Prepare a packet of materials or a series of presentations on community-based environmental protection for local community based organizations and city wide environmental organizations. Presentations could be given at schools, at beat meetings, and at churches.

- Create a centralized list of EJ, EE, Chicago Team, and other grants that have been given to Chicago area organizations. This list could be used by environmental organizations to research the types of grants available and to explore opportunities for collaborative project development and grant applications.
- When conditions of USEPA grants change, convey the information quickly to grantees
- Develop a mechanism to regularly obtain copies of the numerous reports that nongovernmental organizations publish on environmental issues in the Chicago area. The Sierra Club and the American Lung Association produce many such reports.
- Use the Greater Chicago Initiative Web Page to promote collaboration between Chicago environmental groups.

Investigate Opportunities for CBEP Research

- Utilize information services such as the Metropolitan Chicago Information Service, and PRAG researchers to obtain information about environmental beliefs and practices in Chicago.
- Where possible, identify opportunities for applied sociocultural research on environmental issues in Chicago. For example, the methylparathion situation provides an opportunity to examine how crisis intervention on the part of the EPA affects subsequent individual environmental practices.

Assume a Catalytic Role in the Chicago Environmental Community

- Involve local community based organizations and city-wide organization in the CBEP and Sustainable Development Workgroups.
- Foster collaboration between community based organizations and city-wide or coalition-based initiatives by providing information about complementary programs and encouraging collaborative grant proposals.
- Involve community development corporations (CDCs) in discussions about sustainable development and environmentally-friendly development practices. A large number of CDCs operate in areas of Chicago where environmental concerns are a priority.
- Host an informational workshop for Chicago environmental groups and the public on EPA processes and procedures, key environmental laws, and grants programs. Many groups have only a limited understanding of the jurisdictional issues and procedures of the USEPA. Many know only of the enforcement and compliance aspects of the agency's work.

- Involve federal Americorps and VISTA volunteers in CBEP initiatives in Chicago. Several of the CBOs interviewed, such as the Juan Diego Community Center, already use Americorps and VISTA volunteers.
- Continue to sponsor workshops and conferences like the endocrine disruptor conference. Expand the invitation list to include more local organizations and health related organizations.

V. Questions for Further Consideration

- Citizen's concerns about the environment and public health arise out of local knowledge systems, long-term experience, and cultural beliefs that are persistent. "Scientific" risk calculations do not necessarily give rise to the same environmental priorities as those identified by a community. In a community based approach, in which the "scientific" and the community priorities don't converge, whose version of environmental priorities will take precedence? Does CBEP entail listening to and incorporating all of the suggestions and concerns from within a diverse community? Whose voice should be given the most weight? How will these decisions be made?
- How important is it to educate the public about the limits of scientific approaches to environmental protection? Some environmentalists point out that human and ecologi-

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Organizations Interviewed

- I West Central Municipal Conference
- I Westside Alliance for a Safe and Toxic-free Environment
- I West Side Health Authority
- I Wild Onion Alliance

P = phone interview

I = site visit and interview

18 phone interviews with duration of 15 minutes to 1 hour.

27 site visit interviews with duration of 45 minutes to 2 hours.

Total interviewed: 45

Appendix 2: Organizations by Programmatic Focus

Toxic Free Schools

Westside Alliance for a Safe and Toxic-free Environment
Safer Pest Control Project

Utility Deregulation/ Energy Saving Devices/Pollution Prevention

Environmental Law and Policy Center
IL Clean Break
Sierra Club

Lead Abatement

Bethel New Life
Neighborhood Housing Services
Claretian Associates
West Side Health Authority
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Hispanic Health Alliance
LEAD

Urban Agriculture

Heifer Project International
The Resource Center

Conservation/Greenspace

Lake Calumet Strategy Group
Calumet Ecological Park Association
Sierra Club
OpenLands
Gaylord Donnelly Foundation
Southeast Environmental Task Force
Chicago Legal Clinic

Greencorps
The Resource Center
Westside Alliance for a Safe and Toxic Free Environment
Neighbor Space

Recycling

The Resource Center
The Storehouse
University Recycling facilities
West Central Municipal Conference
Environmental Law and Policy Center
Chicago Recycling Coalition

Community Profiling/ User Perception Studies

CANDO as part of the Brownfields Redevelopment Institute
Friends of the Chicago River—Chicago River Demonstration Project

Alternative Energy

Center for Neighborhood Technology
Wild Onion Alliance
IL Solar Energy Association

Environmental Information Dissemination

Metropolitan Chicago Information Center
National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago
Citizens Information Center
Friends of the Parks
EcoWatch

Technology Contacts for Environmental Groups

Darrick Pasnek at PRAG/Loyola
Chicago Association of Neighborhood Development Organizations

Urban Sprawl/Air Quality

American Planning Association
American Lung Association
Business and Professional People for the Public Interest
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Chicagoland Bicycle Federation
Environmental Law and Policy Center
IL Public Interest Research Group
Sierra Club

Brownfields

Clean Sites

West Central Municipal Conference

Chicago Alliance of Neighborhood Development Organizations

Westside Alliance for a Safe and Toxic Free Environment

Illegal Dumping

Westside Alliance for a Safe and Toxic Free Environment

SUSTAIN

Appendix 3: Contacts and Referrals Made

A. USEPA Spanish and English educational materials on asthma, lead, illegal dumping, and/or methylparathion sent to the following organizations:

Our Lady of Tepeyac St. Kevins Church
Centro Comunitario Juan Diego Westside Health Authority
Bethel New Life Hispanic Health Alliance, Chicago Department of Public Health

B. USEPA brownfields materials sent to the following organizations:

CANDO

C. USEPA Environmental Justice materials requested by:

Friends of the Parks UNO

D. Sent community-based environmental protection and/or sustainable development materials taken from the EPA homepage to:

OpenLands WASTE

E. Referrals to Suzanne Saric in Environmental Education

Caretakers of the Environment Friends of the Parks
WASTE

F. Referrals to Carole Braverman in International Programs

Caretakers of the Environment UNO

G. Inter-organization referrals:

- Referred Caretakers of the Environment to IEEAC, the Eco-Citizenship Program at the Chicago Academy of Sciences, and IL Eco-Watch Program.
- Referred St. Kevin's Church to LEAD for more information on lead poisoning.
- Arranged for Amy Nerbun to make a wetlands presentation at St. Kevin's Church.
- Referred ELPC to IL Solar Energy Association.
- Referred Multiple Chemical Sensitivities to Conscious Choice Magazine.
- Referred Friends of the Parks to Andre Guinther of the National Park Service, PRAG,
- Referred Christine Kosmos of the Chicago Department of Public Health to Tom Yeates, the SEEP working on lead issues.
- Referred Elissa Speizman to Irma Trantor, Executive Director of Friends of the Parks, regarding an inquiry about co-sponsoring Earth Day.
- Referred Westside Health Authority to Pat Easley regarding job training.
- Referred UNO to the Ecological Citizenship Program at Chicago Academy of Sciences.
- Contacted Phillipa Cannon regarding ELPC request for information about CEO's who have spent jail time for polluting.
- Referred ELPC to George Cerniak and Steve Rothblatt in the Air Division at USEPA.
- Greg Carlson of USEPA will provide alternative remediation plans for the Van Vlissingen Prairie to CEPA.

- Referred Westside Health Authority to Tom Yeates, SEEP working on lead issues.
- Mick Hans added SCDCOM and the Great Lakes Center for Occupation and Environmental Safety and Health to the public notice mailing list.
- Referred IL-EcoWatch to the Chicagoland Environmental Network.
- Referred CEPA to the Landmarks Preservation Council of IL.
- Pablo Valentin will send the Chicago Department of Public Health report on mercury use to Our Lady of Tepeyac.
- Sent Wild Onion Alliance information on renewable energy resources.
- Referred Rebecca Riley at the MacArthur Foundation to Suzanne Saric (EE), Marga-

Appendix 4: Resource Guide to Chicago Area Social Science Environmental Researchers

Isabel Abrams

Caretakers of the Environment, International

2216 Schiller Avenue

Wilmette, IL 60091

847-251-8935

Wrote *The Nature of Chicago*, a book about urban ecology

Susan Charnley

Office of Information and Resource Management

USEPA

Washington, DC

Anthropologist; AAAS fellow who is doing a fellowship on how environmentalists use environmental information.

Sue Ann Curtis

EID Division, Bldg 900

Argonne National Lab

Argonne, IL 60439

630-252-6427

Dr. Alan Hirsch
Neurology
845 N. Michigan Ave
Chicago, IL 60605
312-649-5829
Rush Presbyterian/ St. Luke's Medical Center
effects of odors on health

John C. Hudson
Professor of Geography
Northwestern University
Environmental Sciences Program
1810 Hinman Avenue
Evanston, IL 60208-1310
847-491-2855
people-environmental interactions

Jim Landing
Department of Geography
University of Illinois
2135 West Cortez
Chicago, IL 60622
312-996-3118
Associated with the Lake Calumet Study Committee; research on wetland endangered bird species, and history of community areas in the Lake Calumet area.

Gary Langer, Director of Policy Studies
Roosevelt University
430 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60605
312-341-3767
teaches courses on environmental sociology and environmental history

Lynn Lawson
MCS: Health & Environment
1404 Judson Ave
Evanston, IL 60201
847-866-9630
Wrote *Staying Well in the Toxic World*

Larry McClellan
Governor's State University
Regional Leadership Center
University Park, IL 60466
708-534-3086

Wrote a report about organizing on the southeast side of Chicago; Creating a Thorn Creek Ecosystem Partnership through the IL DNR. GSU has commissioned a study on how the university can be useful to environmental initiatives in the Lake Calumet region. Worked on a recently released report called “the Metropolis and Natural Areas of Chicago” published by GSU, which points to the need to include NW Indiana in environmental planning for the area.

James McDonald

Northeastern Illinois University
Anthropology Department
550 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625
773-794-2773

Co-founder of Uptown Recycling Center; applied research on sustainable communities; biological anthropologist specializing in human evolution and skeletal identification; involved in wetlands restoration in Gompers Park.

Mike McMahon

West Central Municipal Conference
1127 S. Mannheim Rd., Suite 102
Westchester, IL 60154
708-450-0100

Master’s thesis on national brownfields redevelopment policy

Betsy Mendelsohn

History Department
University of Chicago

Graduate research on legal environmental history in Chicago, especially land and water issues at the turn of the century.
Etb2@midway.uchicago.edu

Greg Mikkelsen

Summer Director
University of Chicago Environmental Center (UCEC)
5706 S. University, #002A
Chicago, IL 60637
773-702-0405

Ph.D. research on the history of the discipline of ecology.

Peter Miller

Northwestern University
Sociology Department
1810 Chicago Ave
Evanston, IL 60208
847-491-5835

Dr. Peter Orrs

Great Lakes Center for Occupational and Environmental Safety and Health
School of Public Health
UIC MC922
2121 W. Taylor St.
Chicago, IL 60612-7260
312-996-5804
asthma research, lead research

Dr. Susan Russell

Department of Anthropology
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
815-753-7035
fisheries, indigenous notions of resource mgmt., consulting for cross-cultural training

Jim Schwab, Research Division

American Planning Association
122 S. Michigan
Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60603
312-431-9100
Working on a self diagnostic manual on sustainable development which could be used by municipal planning departments. He has written a book on environmental justice issues.

Ted Steck

Director of Environmental Studies Program
University of Chicago
5801 S. Ellis
Chicago, IL 60637
773-702-1329
Works with the University of Chicago Environmental Center

Dr. Helen Schwartzman

Anthropology Department
Northwestern University
1810 Hinman Ave
Evanston, IL 60208
847-869-3427
organizational analysis, medical anthropology

Vinton Thompson

Roosevelt University
430 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60605
312-341-3676

Biologist; studies sugar cane pests and biological controls in tropical Americas.

Kelly Tzuzmous

Professor of Public Administration
Roosevelt University
430 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60605
312-341-3744

Political Science; Environmental policy development regarding brownfields, wetlands, Superfund, and the Great Lakes system.
630-279-6031

Alaka Wali

Field Museum of Natural History
1300 South Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, IL 60605

Anthropologist; environmental and quality of life issues in Harlem
wali@fmnh.org

Dee Wernett

Argonne National Lab
9700 S. Cass Ave.
Argonne, IL 60439
630-252-3280

Sociologist; program evaluation, strategic planning; teaches at National Louis University