



**Achieving
Environmental Justice by
Building Healthy Communities
Since 1988!**

**WE ACT:
A community-
driven agenda for
environmental
justice**

FACT SHEET

MISSION

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.) is a Northern Manhattan community-based organization whose mission is to build healthy communities by assuring that people of color and/or low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices. As a result of our ongoing work to educate and mobilize the more than 630,000 residents of Northern Manhattan on environmental issues affecting their quality of life, WE ACT has become a leader in the nationwide movement for environmental justice, influencing the creation of federal, state and local policies affecting the environment.

HISTORY

One of the first environmental organizations in New York State to be run by people of color, and the first environmental justice organization in New York City, WE ACT was founded and incorporated in 1988 as the result of local community struggles around environmental threats and resulting health disparities created by institutionalized racism and the lack of social and political capital, all dynamics that led to the siting and poor management of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, the siting and operation of 6 out of 7 New York City diesel bus depots in Northern Manhattan, the operation in our community of the only 24-hour Marine Transfer Station in Manhattan, and the use of Northern Manhattan communities as New York City's dumping ground for a host of other polluting facilities.

In 1988 WE ACT sued the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for operating the North River Sewage Treatment Plant as a public and private nuisance. The lawsuit was settled in 1994 for \$1.1 million, and WE ACT hired its first 3 staff members with a grant from the settlement funds. Today, WE ACT has 12 full-time staff members and an annual budget of \$1.6 million.

GOALS

1. **Organize** successful community initiatives to improve environmental health and protection policies and practices.
2. **Advocate** successfully for sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices.
3. **Share skills and knowledge** with key constituencies to improve environmental health and protection policies and practices.
4. **Undertake participatory research** whenever possible, and other research as needed, to inform the organization's work.
5. **Develop the organizational depth, capacity and resources** to function successfully, reliably and sustainably in the areas designated by goals 1 through 4.

RECOGNITION

In 2003, WE ACT's Executive Director Peggy Shepard received the **10th Annual Heinz Award for the Environment** (an award that carries with it one of the largest financial gifts in the nation) for her activism on urban environmental issues. In 2007, she received the **Calver Award** from the **American Public Health Association** in recognition of her innovative environmental health work, and in 2008 she received the **Jane Jacobs Medal** for Lifetime Achievement from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 2005, WE ACT received a **Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award** from the US Environmental Protection Agency for our work in securing passage at the City Council of New York City's new lead poisoning prevention legislation (Local Law 1 of 2004).



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WE ACT:
8 Clear Indicators;
14 Cutting-Edge
Projects

INDICATORS & CURRENT PROJECTS

WE ACT is conducting a variety of projects designed to achieve our mission of building a healthy Northern Manhattan community. Each project falls within the purview of one of our **8 indicators** of a healthy community.

1) CLEAN AIR QUALITY

- i. **Climate Justice Campaign:** Working to address climate change and to infuse dialogue about challenges and solutions to the crisis with an environmental justice perspective.
- ii. **Community Stressors and Susceptibility to Air Pollution in Urban Asthma:** Examining the impacts of chronic stress on individual susceptibility to the health effects of traffic-related air pollution.
- iii. **Community Outreach Education Core:** Conducting research and advocacy in Northern Manhattan on the disproportionate impacts of environmental pollution.
- iv. **Community Outreach and Translation Core:** Conducting research and advocacy in Northern Manhattan on children's environmental health.
- v. **Clean Heat Initiative (CHI):** A demonstration project whose mission is to improve air quality, reduce global warming pollution and bring about sustainable development in Harlem, New York City.

2) AFFORDABLE, EQUITABLE TRANSIT

- vi. **New York State Transportation Equity Alliance (NYSTEA):** Pursuing policy, support and funding for sustainable and affordable public transportation in all communities in New York State.

3) WASTE, PESTS & PESTICIDES REDUCTION

- vii. **Northern Manhattan Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) Collaborative:** Using collaborative problem-solving techniques to address the problems of inappropriate garbage disposal and rampant rodent and roach infestation in Northern Manhattan.

4) TOXIC FREE PRODUCTS

- viii. **Safer Chemicals Healthy Families Campaign:** Reforming the Toxic Substances Control Act in the interest of the environment and the health of low-income and environmental justice communities across the country.
- ix. **Ethnic Personal Care Products Campaign:** Identifying and preventing dangerous exposure to harmful chemicals in ethnic beauty products.

5) ACCESS TO GOOD FOOD IN SCHOOLS

- x. **Northern Manhattan Food Justice Initiative:** Working to ensure that every child in Northern Manhattan has access to healthy, affordable food.

6) SUSTAINABLE LAND USE & EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

- xi. **Mother Clara Hale Community Taskforce:** Creating a community vision for the rebuilding of the Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot.

7) ACCESS TO OPEN & GREEN SPACE

- xii. **West Harlem Piers Park Project:** Working to increase access to the Harlem waterfront and raise interest in one of Northern Manhattan's neglected neighborhoods.

8) HEALTHY INDOOR ENVIRONMENTS

- xiii. **Building Community Capacity to Reduce Lead Poisoning Hazards:** Expanding scientific knowledge on best practices/methods for the identification of lead poisoning hazards in the home, and building community capacity to detect and report lead poisoning hazards from multiple sources in Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx.