

Approaches to Environmental Justice

Best Practices in Community Organizing and Collaboration

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I. Introduction

Environmental justice is defined as the “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (EPA.gov). As a movement, environmental justice has been closely associated with the plight of minority and low-income communities, and the attempts of such communities to combat big industry productions that threaten the health of both the natural environment and community members themselves. Proponents of environmental justice stress “community participation in the decision-making process and equal access to relief mechanisms regarding pollution” (Getches and Pellow 4). To this extent, environmental justice necessitates community interest and motivation. This paper shows that successful advocacy for environmental justice occurs when communities stand united: when they are able to work as a group to negotiate with large corporations and lawmakers to rectify environmental injustices.

This paper examines specific cases, conducted on three documented instances of environmental injustice to explore the ways in which communities organized to promote environmental equity. The first case deals with environmental justice in an urban area; the second looks at environmental threats in a rural community, and the final shows how communities can organize effectively to initiate restoration. Each case was selected for its importance to the fields of environmental sustainability, natural preservation, social justice, domestic poverty or human health. Evaluations of each are based on a set of established criteria (see Section III). Based on evaluations of these case studies, recommendations are proposed for the implementation of successful environmental justice advocacy groups. By evaluating what aspects of each effort were effective and which were not, it will be possible for communities

interested in organizing to advocate for environmental justice to avoid inefficiencies and promote their cause in the most effective manner.

II. Brief History of the Environmental Justice Movement

In contrast to other types of health risks, environmental hazards are difficult to avoid if they are present in a home or work environment. There is “virtually nothing that individuals can do to protect themselves,” because the hazards can manifest themselves in the “air, food, and water necessary for survival” (White 61). Disturbingly, studies of environmental hazard distribution indicate that non-white and low-income individuals are disproportionately exposed to environmental toxins when compared to general population exposure (White 68). In a survey conducted by Harvey White, 87 percent of the studies he examined showed racial disparities, while 74 percent of those surveyed showed income disparities (62). In short, “if you are African American, Native American, Latino, or poor, you are likely to be at risk from environmental hazards more frequently” (White 63).

The environmental justice movement began as a response to these disparities.

The landmark event that brought the environmental justice movement to the national level was the 1982 construction of a PCB landfill in Warren County, North Carolina. Polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) is an organic compound synthesized for use as a coolant in industrial transformers, but it was banned from commercial use in the 1970s because of its toxic effects on humans and animals. In humans, PCB exposure can result in skin rashes, liver damage and, eventually, cancer. PCB is an oil contaminant that had been sprayed illegally along the highways of North Carolina, and the landfill was constructed to dump the contaminated soil from along those highways (NC WMD 1). The landfill was constructed in Shocco Township, a community of approximately 1,300 whose residents were nearly seventy percent non-white and

twenty percent of whom lived below the federal poverty line (NC WMD 1). The outcry from members of the community as well as state representatives led to the formation of a “working group,” whose aim it was to keep the government on track in detoxifying the landfill. The local and national attention this case received helped to spark a transition from what had been previously isolated “environmental equity concerns” into what is now known as the environmental justice movement (MDE History 1).

What pre-existing conditions allowed this case to occur? Dorceta Taylor argues that “American environmentalism has been profoundly shaped by a unique set of social, political and economic factors arising from the period of conquest and subsequent industrialization” (87-88). Environmental injustice was facilitated by American history and its white-centric methods of discrimination and exploitation. Taylor also posits that, more recently, the environmental justice movement has gained national attention because of its recognition of discriminatory practices. Community resistance to industrial toxic waste sites began as early as the 1960’s, with the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. However, long before any institutional resistance, residential areas organized to drive out developers and industrial corporations (Taylor 100). The problem, in Taylor’s opinion, was that the communities that could afford to resist environmental injustice were mainly white and middle class. This led industry to follow the “path of least resistance;” to go where they knew they would not be challenged. Such a place, in Taylor’s view, was usually a low-income, non-white community (Taylor 100). Thus organized community efforts that became the grassroots movement of environmental justice were generally in impoverished minority communities, because such communities were the ones most heavily affected.

III. Criteria for Evaluation

Case studies are detailed in Section IV. Each study looks at a specific environmental justice organization and its role in the community. Though the organizations are different, the case studies will focus on similar aspects of each. Accounting for the definition of environmental justice detailed in Section I, the following aspects of each organization are detailed for each study:

1. Community History
2. Organization's Mission and Goals
3. Community Activity
4. Comparison of Activities to Goals
5. Organization's Challenges

Community history gives each study context; a mission statement or set of goals established by the organization provides the foundation for a comparison between the organization's intent and its actual activity. Examining challenges and struggles within each organization provides a framework on which to build recommendations for improvement (see Section V).

IV. Case Studies

A. New York City Environmental Justice Activism: Community-Based Environmental Planning *Community History*

As one of the country's oldest cities and an historical Mecca for immigrants, New York has a long history of environmental inequality, especially in poor and minority communities. West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT) was founded in March of 1988 as a response to these historical injustices, and today it holds itself responsible for the education of Northern

Manhattan's African-American and Latino residents on "issues that impact their quality of life" (weact.org). The organization was founded by Vernice Miller-Travis, Peggy Shepard and Chuck Sutton, and was one of the first environmental organizations in New York State to be run by African-Americans (weact.org). Though WE ACT serves communities outside West Harlem, its main obligation is to West Harlem residents. It organized in response to the management of the North River sewage treatment plant, located on 137th Street in West Harlem, along the Hudson River (Sze 81).

The North River Sewage Treatment Plant, first proposed in the 1960's, was poorly planned and surrounded in controversy from its inception (weact.org). Originally proposed to treat sewage from one million residents living on New York's West Side, the proposed site was transferred from its original West 70th-72nd Street locale to the 137th Street site because the former site was deemed "incompatible" with the predominantly white West Side community's development plans (Sze 82). Though a small group of individuals in West Harlem vocally and adamantly protested the plant's construction, arguing that the Harlem community was largely uninformed of what was happening in their backyard and of what the negative, stigmatizing impacts would be, the city broke ground in 1972 (Sze 81). In 1979, the EPA determined that the facility would not require an environmental impact statement, meaning that virtually no monitoring of the environmental impact of the plant would be conducted (Sze 81). However, the facility "turned out to have a number of design and construction flaws," which caused the plant to produce 28 percent "higher-than-allowed levels of hydrogen sulfide, which in excessive quantities, deprives human cells of oxygen" (Egbert 1, Sze 83).

WE ACT was formed in response to these alarming findings. In 1988 WE ACT "sued the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in response to water quality

and air pollution violations, claiming the plant to be a public and private nuisance” (weact.org). The lawsuit was settled in 1994 for \$1.1 million, which was placed in the North River Fund, a trust established by WE ACT to “address a range of community, environmental, and public health issues” (Sze 84, weact.org). Additionally, the settlement forced the city to implement a \$55 million program to reduce the odors coming from the plant (Sze 84).

Today, WE ACT continues to use community organizing and legal advocacy to “improve environmental health, protection and policy” for West Harlem and for other “communities of color” (weact.org). It remains active in and beyond West Harlem and is currently working on more than a dozen sustainable development initiatives, public policy reform proposals, EJ rallies and other community projects (weact.org).

Organization’s Mission and Goals

A self-described “community-based organization to spearhead an organizing and legal campaign,” WE ACT was founded with three main objectives (weact.org). Designed to be a “community watchdog,” the group hoped to “force the city to fix the North River sewage treatment plant, participate in future siting and planning decisions in West Harlem, and affect the public policy agenda by positioning environmental justice as a major political issue” (Sze 83-84). The mission of West Harlem Environmental Action is to “fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color” (weact.org). It is dedicated to promoting community power through “community organizing, education and training, advocacy and research and public policy development” (weact.org). WE ACT commits itself to serving the 600,000 residents of Northern Manhattan, and considers itself a “leader in the nationwide movement for environmental justice” (weact.org).

Community Activity

WE ACT has developed numerous programs to further their goals for achieving environmental justice. They continue to use legal advocacy to press for environmental health and political goals, but they have also made conscious efforts to involve community members through rallies and education programs (Sze 84). To this extent, WE ACT developed an Environmental Health and Community-Based Research program to act as a “bridge between community residents and the scientific community” (weact.org). The focus of the program is on community health concerns, most specifically asthma, lead poisoning prevention, and children’s environmental health. To date, the program has worked with the NYC Coalition to End Lead Poisoning to campaign for stricter lead poisoning prevention bills. It has also worked with Latino and African American parents, teaching them to “testify at hearings, meet with their council members, participate in negotiating sessions, and brief the media” (weact.org). This program oversees eight different environmental health projects, examples of which include:

- Environmental Health and Leadership Training
- Developing a Community-Based Ethical Review Model
- Northern Manhattan Food Justice Initiative
- Rosa Parks School Bus Initiative¹

Each of these programs seeks to empower community members through job and leadership training, adult education and awareness courses, and opportunities to voice opinions to city officials about environmental health concerns.

WE ACT’s involvement extends beyond the realm of healthcare to government accountability, sustainable development, movement building and youth leadership development (weact.org). WE ACT monitors government activity and helps keep community members

¹ All program information taken from the WE ACT online resources page, available at <http://weact.org/Programs/EnvironmentalHealthCBPR/tabid/189/Default.aspx>.

informed on relevant policy issues. Through its Community-Based Participatory Research, it also teaches North Manhattan residents to track government policy development and to interact with government officials to advocate for their community (Shepard et. al. 139). A good example of this type of involvement is seen in their 1988 partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), to campaign against diesel bus fumes in West Harlem.

In the 1980s a disproportionate number of diesel buses were garaged in northern Manhattan, and WE ACT's campaign began when plans were developed to build yet another diesel bus garage in West Harlem, across the street from a middle school and a subsidized housing unit (Sze 99). At that time African Americans and Latinos were five times more likely than the general population to be hospitalized for asthma in New York, and low-income children were 3.5 times more likely to be hospitalized for asthma than their non-poor peers (Sze 97). WE ACT recognized the correlation between the recorded asthma statistics and the transit authority's busing practices and decided to act (Shepard 51). Their extensive ad campaigns ran throughout Harlem, in English and Spanish, "on the very buses and at the bus shelters that were the source of the controversy" (Sze 100). The campaign paid off with extensive media coverage and the 2000 decision by the governor of New York that required the Manhattan Transit Authority (MTA) to make all new bus depots natural gas, as opposed to diesel, facilities. The decision also led to the MTA's plan to convert existing bus depots, particularly one located in West Harlem, to be converted from diesel to natural gas over a five-year period (Sze 101).

After twenty years of advocacy and organizing, WE ACT has tailored its services to the community in which it exists to serve. It employs a full time staff of fifteen, which includes community organizers, project managers, a legal advisor and even a geographic information system (GIS) mapping specialist, who collects data and projects it over satellite images to

effectively show population statistics, such as asthma rates, and their distribution areas (Cahill 1).

Comparison of Goals and Activities

WE ACT lives up to the broad challenges of its mission statement. Committed to promoting environmental equality in minority communities, WE ACT uses its many programs to reach West Harlem residents and address a range of social and environmental issues. Its mission statement to “fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color” is expansive, but the array of programs it organizes is equally broad, and very capable of working to achieve environmental justice goals (weact.org). Less successful non-profit organizations have created lofty mission statements and failed to implement successful programs to fulfill those missions; this is not the case at WE ACT. Each aspect of its mission is covered by a range of programs and campaigns to support environmental equality for its constituents.

Organization's Challenges

As an organization, WE ACT has a strong internal structure that allows it to minister to its constituents efficiently and effectively. The pervasive nature of WE ACT programs, the range of issues that it has chosen to address, helps to ensure that it reaches as much of the West Harlem community as possible. While community member participation, getting residents involved and caring, can be a struggle at times, the greatest challenges WE ACT currently faces are those that face its community, and its thorough network of programs allows it to face these challenges in a way that produces change for the better (Sze 100).

B. Mercer County, MO vs. Amoco Waste-Tech: Economic Salvation, but at What Cost?

Community History

Mercer County, MO is a small county of 454.18 square miles, located on the northern border of Missouri, adjacent to Iowa. With only 3,584 residents in 2006, the county averages 8.3 people per square mile, and is 98 percent white. Nearly 13 percent of the population lives below the federal poverty line, and the median household income is \$32,318 (State & County Quickfacts). The population of Mercer County has been shrinking since the farm crisis of the 1980's; Mercer County is predominantly farmland, with "no industry to speak of" (Girdner and Smith 69). In 1990 the population was assessed at 3,700, down 20 percent from the 1980's. From 1990 to 2006 it shrank another four percent, dropping to its current level (Girdner and Smith 69).

Mercer County is also plagued by poor financial practices. Because the county is too small to employ its own auditor, the Missouri state auditor audits the county's finances once every four years. The most recent audit, conducted in September 2005, found that the county is poorly managed financially (McCaskill 4). Most importantly, the County Clerk and the County Treasurer do not reconcile their accounting, so discrepancies in accounts occur, and actual account balances are often misreported (McCaskill 2). Additionally, the Mercer County Health Center is plagued with financial difficulties. Credit card bills for the center were not paid on time and the center was not in communication with the County Clerk, which led to financial discrepancies and misreporting of the amount of federal assistance used by both parties, and the amount of medicine, particularly vaccines, dispensed by the center (McCaskill 2). Poor financial reporting is indicative of the county's lackluster management overall, and is important to consider in examining the county's efforts to deal with a proposed hazardous waste disposal site.

Amoco purchased the independent firm Chemical Treatment Services, Inc. in 1988 and renamed it Amoco Waste-Tech (Girdner and Smith 143). Prior to its attempts to build a hazardous waste facility in Mercer County, Waste-Tech had consulted with counties in Ohio, Illinois, Mississippi, Utah, Oklahoma, Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, and three other counties in Missouri over a six-year period, but had retracted proposals in these areas due to community opposition. Waste Tech had also attempted to negotiate with several Indian nations, particularly in Alaska, Arizona and Nevada. All rejected Waste-Tech's proposals based on potential environmental and health concerns (Girdner and Smith 68).

Amoco Waste-Tech first applied to build a hazardous materials waste facility in 1990, at a time when Mercer County boasted virtually no economy and a shrinking population (Girdner and Smith 69). From the outset, county residents came into conflict with county officials over the corporate proposal. The Mercer County Commissioner's office and the county's Industrial Development Board favored Waste-Tech's proposal, which promised to bring an estimated \$4 million into the county's economy, as well as to provide 25 to 30 full time positions and the opportunity to sub-contract additional tasks and projects to local individuals and small businesses (Girdner and Smith 70). Jerrold Taylor, the Mercer County Industrial Development Board president, was in favor of a "complete waste management park" because he believed such a project to be "the industry of the future" and he hoped that Mercer County would be "in on the ground floor" (Girdner and Smith 69).

In response to this official enthusiasm for the Waste-Tech proposal, a grassroots community organization called Citizens for a Clean Environment (CCE) formed (Girdner and Smith 71). Spearheaded by Rod Jermanovich, a Mercer County farmer, CCE responded quickly to the word that Amoco Waste-Tech wished to build a facility in Mercer County. Jermanovich

and his local colleagues organized protests, waved banners and helped collect signatures for petitions to make their community's voice heard. CCE generated significant media coverage, not all of which was positive. Citing the positive economic benefits of a hazardous waste facility, many community members opposed the actions of the CCE as inhibitory. Divisions arose in the community, but, despite opposition, CCE continued to protest against Waste-Tech's proposed facility (Girdner and Smith 73).

Over the next three years, Amoco Waste-Tech continued its efforts to build a hazardous waste facility in Mercer County, and CCE continued its efforts to prevent such a facility from being built. Neighboring Grundy County became involved, as did the Native Americans for a Clean Environment (NACE), when it was discovered that the proposed Waste-Tech site would lie on property that housed ancient Native American burial grounds (Girdner and Smith 84-87). Both CCE and its partners fought through extensive legal and political battles, employing legal advisors and whatever other means necessary to achieve their goal of stopping Amoco Waste-Tech. Their efforts were rewarded in January 1993, when Amoco Waste-Tech withdrew its application for a permit to develop a hazardous waste facility in Mercer County. The facility was never built, and Mercer County remains largely as it did prior to Waste-Tech's initial proposal (Girdner and Smith 92-93).

Organization's Mission and Goals

Like WE ACT in West Harlem, CCE was founded in response to a community environmental threat. The goal of Citizens for a Clean Environment was to bring the Amoco Waste-Tech issue to the forefront; to generate media attention and use the case as an influencing political tool. President Jermanovich wanted to make the Waste-Tech case "such a critical issue that it alone could decide a politician's political future" (Girdner and Smith 74). However unlike

WE ACT, when the CCE achieved its desired goal, it did not survive as a community organization. Today, little information is available about the Citizens for a Clean Environment; having achieved its goals, the organization lapsed into inactivity.

Community Activity

At the height of its activity, CCE functioned like a typical grassroots organization. Private citizens with little background in politics or scientific study conducted research into toxic waste and industrial facilities. CCE members traveled to other towns with industrial waste facilities, to see the impact. Most significantly, members used the media and any other means possible to make the voice of their small town heard. They spoke with reporters and wrote letters to their politicians. The CCE board met on a regular basis to discuss strategies, to plan and conduct surveys, and to learn about their legal options (Girdner and Smith 74).

Legal information gathered at these meetings turned out to be the cornerstone of CCE's fight against Amoco Waste-Tech. The board learned as much as it could about zoning laws, and spread this information throughout Mercer County. Informing citizens of zoning laws and generating media attention was enough to put a zoning law on the ballot in November of 1990 (Girdner and Smith 78). Though it lost in 1990, by April 1991 it had passed and a Planning and Zoning Committee, a force whose activity would eventually be enough to discourage Amoco Waste-Tech from seeking building permits, was formed (Girdner and Smith 78-79).

CCE was also wise to partner with other organizations. Highlighting the negative cultural consequences of a waste facility, CCE was able to bring NACE and its neighboring Grundy County on board. For such a small county and community organization, Mercer and CCE were prudent enough to find as many allies and resources as possible to join in their fight against the industrial giant Amoco.

Comparison of Goals and Activities

The goal of CCE and the residents of Mercer County was straightforward: to prevent the construction of a hazardous waste treatment facility in their backyard. To this extent, CCE activities were directly in line with their goal. CCE did not claim to be interested in promoting environmental equality beyond its interest in Amoco Waste-Tech, and it did not branch out to address other environmental issues in the community.

Organization's Challenges

Beyond the challenges with Amoco Waste Tech detailed in the community history, CCE's current status is indicative of a larger problem in Mercer County. The struggling economy and lack of opportunity has perpetuated the county's poverty. While a hazardous waste facility is hardly an ideal resolution to such struggles, such a facility would have generated income and provided county residents with job opportunities. Some residents of Mercer County opposed the CCE and its activity for precisely this reason. The question at the time is still worth considering: What is the cost of economic opportunity for small communities like Mercer County? Mercer County residents decided that the negatives of the Amoco waste facility outweighed the positives, but in many struggling communities that is not the case. 156 such facilities exist nationally; 156 communities owe their subsistence to an industry with known health and environmental risks (Bailey 1). In these cases, the environmental risks and health hazards are still present, but they are seemingly outweighed by job opportunities and positive economic incentives. Or are they? It is possible, even likely, that such communities did not play a role in the decision making process, particularly the most impoverished of these communities that remained uninformed of what was happening around them. Though Mercer County was informed, a challenge for many poor rural communities comes in raising awareness and uniting

on issues like hazardous waste treatment. The Mercer County case highlights the struggle seen in many poor rural communities in the U.S.: the desire to keep a dying town intact without destroying the cultural and environmental factors that shape the community.

C. The Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership: Federal Partnership

Community History

The Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership is a unique collaboration between the Metlakatla Indian Community (MIC), federal staff in Alaska, and federal offices in Washington D.C. (“Towards an EJ Collaborative Model” 23). The Metlakatla Indian Community is made up primarily of Tsimshian Indians whose ancestors, led by the Anglican missionary William Duncan, moved to the Alaskan Coast from British Columbia in 1887. The United States recognized the tribe in 1891 by creating the Annette Islands Reserve, the only federal Indian reservation in Alaska (Metlakatla Indian Community). Located on Annette Island, the town of Metlakatla is named for the Indian community that inhabits the island, and it is the only permanently inhabited area on the island (Ryan 1).

Annette Island remained a relatively undisturbed reservation until the outbreak of World War II, when the United States Air Force used approximately 13,000 of the reserve’s 84,000 acres to build a strategic air base. The base was abandoned after the war ended, and the facility, which included air traffic runways, taxi routes, a hospital, and sewage and electric infrastructure, remained unused until the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) leased the property in 1948. In 1956 control of the property shifted to the U.S. Coast Guard, which made use of the facility until 1977, when all airport activity moved to the nearby town of Ketchikan (EPA Brownfields). In 1995 the government ended much of the timber industry in the region, sending Metlakatla’s

unemployment rate up and leading to increased levels of poverty. Prior to 1995 timber harvest was the foundation of the MIC's economy. When the local timber mill was shut down the same year as fishing season suffered a poor crop, there was a dramatic shift in the Reserve's demographics (Metlakatla Indian Enterprise Community). Unemployment rates at this time went from less than 40 percent to between 50 and 80 percent, and 26.3 percent of families were found to have annual incomes that totaled less than half of the average income for the state of Alaska, placing them below the poverty line (Metlakatla Indian Enterprise Community). These findings were alarming to the MIC, especially in addition to the 1996 EPA assessment of the abandoned federal properties that found "more than 80 [brownfield] sites associated with former federal facilities;" 72 of which have environmental concerns, including "leaking drums, asbestos, lead, pesticides, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), chemical and oil spills, and leaking above- and underground storage tanks" (EPA Brownfields). Brownfield sites are sites designated by the EPA as "abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial properties where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived contamination" (EPA Brownfields).

In response to these findings, the Metlakatla Indian Community (MIC), a grassroots organization of the Metlakatla people located on Annette Island, chose to contact the federal agencies responsible for the environmental damage. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Department of Defense's Formerly Utilized Defense Sites program Community Operating Environment (COE), the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) all agreed to look into the environmental impact of their past actions, and in July 1999, these and several other federal organizations, along with the MIC, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), designed "to ensure cleanup cooperation" ("Towards an EJ Collaborative Model" 4). Today the MOU Work Group consists of representatives from the MIC, COE and the

FAA, and the group functions in roughly three capacities: administrative, environmental and community involvement and outreach (“Towards an EJ Collaborative Model” 6). Funding and leadership challenges in the MOU Work Group led to the 2000 creation of a federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice (EJ Work Group), through the Department of Defense. This group includes representatives from all of the organizations responsible for Annette Island’s cleanup. Together, the EJ Work Group, the MOU Work Group and the MIC coordinate efforts to clean up Annette Island and stimulate the Metlakatla economy (“Towards an EJ Collaborative Model” 6-8).

Organization’s Mission and Goals

The Environmental Protection Agency defines a Superfund as an “environmental program established to address abandoned hazardous waste sites” (Superfund). Rather than pursuing the designation of a Superfund site for Annette Island, in 1999 the MIC, a grassroots organization, decided to form a partnership with federal officials to resolve the environmental issues in their community. Though difficult to define, the partnership can be described as a loose association of three parts that are equally accountable to the MIC and to the environment (“Towards an EJ Collaborative Model” 4). Both the federal Environmental Justice (EJ) Work Group and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Work Group collaborate with the Metlakatla people, and all three groups are responsible for contributing to the cleanup of Annette Island.

Working in conjunction with these two groups, the goal of the MIC is to “clean up contamination of the Annette Island Indian Reserve in southeastern Alaska” and to “plan redevelopment to promote economic growth through tourism and commercial fishing” (Lee 143). Using the Seattle-based independent consulting firm RIDOLFI Inc., the MIC developed a Master

Plan “for mitigation of hazardous waste spills and dumps on Annette Island” (Environmental Services). The details of this plan call for the “remediation of hazardous materials such as asbestos, lead, and petroleum products,” as well as restoration of fish and wildlife habitats (Environmental Services). RIDOLFI also offered “guidelines for cleanup and closure of contaminated sites, water quality regulations, and soil cleanup levels” (Environmental Services).

Additionally, in June 2000 the Environmental Protection Agency set forth a list of desired goals, to be achieved through a “coordinated federal effort to resolve environmental concerns” (Interagency EJ Action Agenda 41). This list included such tasks as:

- [Building] collaborative relationships between tribal and federal officials
- Mitigation of environmental impacts
- Protection of the customary and traditional use of food resources
- Building tribal capacity to manage and conduct environmental programs
- Promote economic growth through the tourism and commercial fishing industries²

Such a list highlighted a major concern of the Metlakatla Indians; in addition to a desire to preserve and restore the environment, the MIC was worried about a sudden spike in poverty and unemployment on Annette Island. Until the government shut down timber operations in 1995, the Metlakatla Indian community on Annette Island relied heavily on a local timber mill for employment. This, coupled with consecutive years of poor fishing, led to elevated levels of poverty and unemployment in the MIC (EPA Brownfields). Facing these realities, the MIC has also made economic development a major goal of the Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership. To this extent the partnership hopes to develop a sustainable forest and salmon harvest, expand tourism opportunities through a museum and artist village, improve the reserve’s basic communication, transportation and sanitation infrastructure, improve local healthcare options,

² Partial list taken from <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/publications/ej/interagency/actionagenda.pdf>.

and develop natural resource laboratories and reserves (Metlakatla Indian Enterprise Community).

Community Activity

From its inception, the Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership has been focused on community involvement. All local meetings, held at least once per month, are announced in advance via local media, and all residents are strongly encouraged to attend. Committee members of the MIC are in regular communication with all other members of the partnership (Metlakatla Indian Enterprise Community).

All of the partnership's activities fall under one of the many plans that the MIC has developed since the partnership's inception. (EPA Brownfields). In 1997 the MIC established a community-based Environmental Restoration Advisory Committee, "to provide guidance and channel community input on all environmental issues facing the community" (EPA Brownfields). Work between this committee and federal officials has resulted in the creation of new jobs, as local residents are hired to assist in federal environmental cleanups at degraded sites (Status Report). Currently, MIC itself is working on three main sites: "the Smuggler Cove Radio Relay site, which is currently being used as a community-owned power utility facility; a former power plant, which is currently abandoned; and the main hangar building at the airport, which is currently being used as a forest products facility" (EPA Brownfields). The partnership, of which the Environmental Restoration Advisory Committee is a part, facilitates coordination between the MIC and federal officials to ensure that these sites are restored in such a way that they will serve a functional, environmentally-friendly purpose for the community residents.

An important aspect of the partnership is that it does not directly serve to orchestrate the cleanup activities itself; rather it exists as an accountability measure, to ensure that the federal

agencies responsible for cleanup are adhering to their goals. The partnership keeps lines of communication open, allowing the needs and concerns of the community to be voiced and considered by the federal agencies working on Annette Island. By coordinating through this partnership, the changes made to Annette Island are beneficial for both the residents living on the reserve and for the environment itself (Metlakatla Indian Enterprise Community).

The collaborative efforts and successes of the Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership are well documented. Since 2002 five federal agencies have provided financial and organizational support for the Reserve cleanup (Status Report). Collaboration on this scale is proving to be cost-efficient; the FAA estimated that, due to collaboration opportunities afforded by the partnership, approximately \$750,000 was saved on cleanup costs between 1999 and 2001 (“Towards an EJ Collaborative Model” 59).

In terms of physical productivity, the partnership has overseen and helped to coordinate each organization’s cleanup effort. A 2006 report published by the U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) found that the partnership has removed over 523,200 pounds of contaminated waste or waste by-products (Metlakatla, Alaska). Additionally, it found that the EPA has provided \$100,000 in funding for the cleanup of underground storage tanks and their properties, and that the Department of Defense Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program helped to fund programs for asbestos cleanup and the scientific study of toxin levels in local seafood (Metlakatla, Alaska).

In 2000 the Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership was designated a Brownfields Showcase Community by the EPA (Metlakatla, Alaska). The Showcase Community program was designed by the EPA to provide “models demonstrating the benefits of collaborative activity on brownfields” (EPA Brownfields). For the Metlakatla Peninsula, this designation has resulted

in opportunities for “protection of natural resources and the strengthening of an economy weakened by underutilized facilities and unknown contamination” (EPA Brownfields).

Comparison of Goals and Activities

Formed to address past environmental injustices, the MIC’s partnership with federal agencies has proved an effective form of community improvement beyond environmental quality. The goals of the Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership have focused on both the environmental and social aspects of life on Annette Island, and the activity of the partnership has reflected those goals. The tremendous amount of waste removed from the island, and the amount of financial support the cleanup activities overseen by the partnership has received attest to the improvement of environmental quality for the inhabitants of the island. Socially, the MIC has used the partnership’s network of federal agencies to help incorporate community members into the cleanup process, creating jobs and rejuvenating the island’s economy; notably, the unemployment rate has fallen to nearly 21 percent, down from prior to the partnership’s inception (alaskanow.com).

Organization’s Challenges

Though the MIC partnership has had a great deal of success, it is not without its challenges. The MOU Work Group, in particular, has struggled with funding and management issues. An EPA evaluation of the partnership interviewed MIC members and found that trust and communication issues ranked at the top of an interviewee-identified list of challenges. Because many of the contaminated sites were used by more than one agency in the partnership, there are often disputes over which agency is responsible for cleanup. Budget allocations and cleanup standards are also highly debated among the partner agencies. Finally, several community members who agreed to be interviewed also identified a lack of communication between the

MOU Work Group and the EJ Work Group, both of whom seemed to work in conjunction with the MIC but not with each other, even though a need for the latter type of collaboration had been expressed by community members (“Towards an EJ Collaborative Model” 68). While most of the evidence on the challenges facing the MIC partnership is anecdotal, it is nonetheless useful in that it expresses the opinion of the community members themselves, and the way in which the partnership is viewed by many of its local constituents.

Though not addressed in any formal reports, the Metlakatla case presents the opportunity to examine an often-controversial area of environmental justice: the extent and effectiveness of federal involvement. The EPA is particularly criticized for its role, or lack thereof, in community restoration in the face of environmental injustice, and in not championing the rights of the environment over political agendas (Bullard 1). Opponents of the EPA argue that the EPA Office of Environmental Justice has become “ineffectual” and a “joke” (Bullard 1). While the EPA has the policy and formal procedures for rectifying environmental injustice in place, all too often those procedures are not implemented or are implemented poorly (Bullard 1). Most opponents of the EPA support grassroots movements, or “not sitting back waiting for government to ride in and save them” (Bullard 1). The Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership is remarkable in that it has been largely successful in joining these two groups: grassroots organization and federal agency. The MIC started out of a population of less than 2,000 and formed a partnership with the EPA and other federal agencies, to hold those agencies accountable for their actions and to ensure that the government provides the resources necessary for environmental justice to be achieved.

V. Recommendations

The three cases studied provide examples of some of the best practices in environmental justice advocacy. They cover a broad range of community issues, but each organized in different way to achieve similar goals. Using Harlem's WE ACT, Mercer County's CCE and Annette Island's Metlakatla Peninsula Cleanup Partnership as guides, developing a list of recommendations for communities interested in organizing and advocating for environmental justice is possible.

Firstly, community awareness is essential. In each case, individuals within the community realized the threat their community faced and acted. Community members must be aware of what is taking place in their neighborhoods and must work with other community members to spread awareness throughout the whole community. Raising the issues, through the use of local media, politicians, or even by going door-to-door, can persuade community members to unite in action against injustice.

This first recommendation leads to a second: individuals must be invested in their community. The initial success of each case study was dependent on the perseverance of a select few individuals committed to ensuring environmental justice was achieved. The best grassroots environmental justice organizations seem to be founded and staffed by individuals who care deeply about the health of their community and the fair treatment of all who live there. The dedication of the organization can in turn inspire dedication by other individual community members. Seeing others invested in their community promotes individuals to invest more of their own resources into the community and EJ advocacy. It is questionable that an organization without this type of community dedication can succeed in achieving long-term environmental justice.

These recommendations raise an important question: what if there is no motivated, informed individual to “raise the red flag” about instances of environmental injustice that might be taking place in a community? Though it can only take one dedicated individual to start a grassroots movement, if that individual is absent in a community, then environmental injustice can go unnoticed. This issue presents an opportunity for a recommendation to the federal government. The government should require corporations seeking to build hazardous facilities, or any other type of industry with potentially negative environmental and health concerns, to fully disclose the plans of their operation and the potential risks. If this were done to the extent that it should be, through individual mailings, media publications, and television and radio announcements, even communities without the initial charismatic leaders could potentially organize successfully to advocate for environmental justice. At the very least, they would be fully aware of what was taking place in their neighborhoods.

A third recommendation for potential EJ advocacy groups is to have a specific goal and a timeline in which to achieve it. Each organization studied was formed in response to a specific instance, and a goal was developed to rectify a specific case of environmental injustice. In the case of Mercer County’s CCE, after their goal was achieved the EJ group became inactive. In Alaska, the MIC continues to work towards its specific goal of overseeing the Annette Island cleanup, but the success of that goal has allowed it to expand its goals to economic development and restoration. WE ACT has experienced this expansion to a much larger extent, but it is important to note that WE ACT started out of the desire to accomplish a singular task. It can be easy for EJ groups to design lofty, theoretical mission statements that simply cannot be put into practice. By focusing on a specific task, and a path to achieving that task, organizations can grow out of their initial actions and successes to achieve even greater goals.

Fourthly, it is important for EJ advocacy groups to learn what resources are available to them. This recommendation is twofold. Firstly, EJ organizations must fundraise and utilize resources efficiently. Financial, political and social support are crucial to the success of any EJ organization, and poor financial or human resource management can easily lead to an organization's downfall. The law and the media are two key elements of successful environmental justice advocacy, and both require sufficient monetary and human resources to be used effectively. Because attorney and publication fees are two of the most common expenses incurred by EJ groups, it is important for fundraising and volunteer campaigns, as well as internal management, to be organized well. Secondly, though the federal government may not always implement environmental justice programs effectively, it does provide opportunities for funding. Both WE ACT and the Metlakatla community receive federal financial assistance in the form of grants, and communities interested in organizing should investigate the process of applying for federal aid for non-profit environmental justice organizations. Additionally, as was the case for the MIC, cooperation can also take place between grassroots organizations and federal agencies like the EPA. Though these partnerships are not common, they have the potential to be successful, as seen in Alaska.

Finally, any community interested in organizing for environmental justice should remember to learn from those that have gone before them. As was the case in Mercer County, communities should visit other neighborhoods, to see how different approaches can yield different results and to determine what might work best for their own circumstances. No two communities are identical, which makes a universal model for EJ advocacy complicated, but the more information that can be gathered from the experiences of others, the more tools a community will have available to them as they organize for justice.

VI. Conclusions

The environmental justice movement encompasses a wide range of community and environmental issues. Because communities and environmental threats can vary so greatly, developing a universal model of successful environmental justice advocacy is difficult.

However, by looking at successful EJ organizations, a set of commonalities can be found, and any community desiring to organize for environmental justice should consider these. The cases of West Harlem, NY, Mercer County, MO, and Metlakatla, AK, all provide insight into what constitutes a successful environmental justice organization. Despite the differences in each of these cases, urban, rural, successful and unsuccessful grassroots and federal partnerships, each was able to achieve their desired goal through effective community organizing. Further studies on other community operations could expand the list of recommendations presented in this paper. For communities interested in fighting environmental injustices, it could also be beneficial to examine cases where communities were unsuccessful in achieving their goals.

Potential EJ organizations should also consider the larger issues facing their community. As was the case in Mercer County and on Annette Island, economic considerations and government involvement can also play a role in the development and the success or failure of an EJ movement.

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