

June 11-12, 2010



Environmental Justice Showcase Kickoff

A Conversation on Environmental Justice with Regional Administrator Karl Brooks

Meeting Summary

On Friday, June 11, 2010, Regional Administrator Karl Brooks heard from various members of the community about the challenges each community faces and ideas for projects for the Environmental Justice (EJ) Showcase. These were some of the topics that participants from the community discussed:



RA Karl Brooks leads the conversation.

Urban Agriculture

- Gardening is an important reuse alternative for many of the vacant properties. There should be more education and resources available for urban agriculture.
- In addition, some people want small farmers' markets to sell their produce. However, we must make sure it is safe to grow food on these properties. There needs to be an assessment of what contaminants are present at the sites, where people want to create gardens, and how to get rid of the contaminants if that is possible.

Urban Water

- Help is needed to phase out septic tanks and create better sewers.

Communication and Outreach

- People want opportunities to work with the environment by possibly creating jobs or programs involving ecology, specifically aimed at young people.
- There isn't enough outreach to people who do not speak English, and there needs to be more publications in other languages. However, there should also be publications that could be understood by people who cannot read, such as posters with pictures, and radio or television spots.
- Communication is a big problem in many situations. There should be a centralized website for communication and networking between communities. We need better lines of communication.

Education and Resources

- Education was also a recurring theme. People want more education to be available about gardening, nutrition/cooking, ecology, health, and many other topics.
- There needs to be a holistic assessment of communities, focused on cumulative impacts from multiple environmental stressors. This assessment should include environmental stressor mapping and a centralized database with this information.

After the conversation, there was an open house with many EPA representatives providing information to participants through interactive displays and individual conversations. The booths were divided into the themes of the EJ Showcase. The EPA representatives also provided publications and contact information to help the participants.



Several EPA programs had informational booths.

EJ Showcase Focus Group 2010

Meeting Summary: On Saturday, June 12, the conversation revolved mainly around three topics: vacant and abandoned properties, urban waters, and healthy communities. Based on previous input from communities, it was determined that these would be the focus areas for the Environmental Justice Showcase. Participants from several communities and other organizations were able to have a conversation regarding problems, priorities, and potential projects.



Discussion included ideas and suggestions from community members.

Areas of Emphasis

Through input from community members and review of environmental and health data, we have arrived at the following three focus areas for Region 7's EJ Showcase project:

1. Vacant and Abandoned Properties: Brownfields, Land Revitalization, and Urban Agriculture
2. Urban Waters: Water where people live, work and play - includes surface water and water conservation
3. Healthy Communities: Healthy Homes, Healthy Schools, and other quality of life concerns

Below is a synopsis of comments and suggestions from community participants:

Vacant and Abandoned Properties

- Urban farming is a priority for many communities.
- Many vacant properties need resources to rehabilitate the property and get a clear title. There also needs to be mapping and planning for neighborhoods with a lot of vacant property.
- Oak Grove wants to create jobs and green space with their abandoned properties.
- Many abandoned properties are eyesores. They also may be dangerous or have pest problems. Even if the property is not being used, it needs to be maintained. One suggestion was to fill the space with native plants.

Urban Waters

- There are problems with keeping gardens watered. One idea is to provide mobile watering carts.
- Brush Creek has problems with pollution from many sources. The area needs more education and better cooperation between Kansas and Missouri.
- There needs to be more education about Combined Sewer Overflows and children playing in standing water, often coming from these sewers.
- There needs to be an increase in the monitoring of water bodies where people fish and swim, and communication of the results of that monitoring. If possible, the community should be able to get involved in the process of monitoring, including education about the process.



Participants write down and prioritize ideas.



Andy Bracker (left), City of Kansas City, Missouri, talks to Marvin Robinson, director of the Quindaro Ruins.

Healthy Communities

- People want more community outreach. This may include going door-to-door, creating a phone bank, holding neighborhood meetings, or distributing a newsletter in the mail. Also, we may need to work with local businesses and churches to connect with the people.
- It is important to communicate with people in their language through such means as TV and radio, so that a wide audience can understand.
- Listen more to young peoples' ideas and encourage them to get involved.
- Asthma is a big problem. Not only does air quality affect asthma, but so does processed food. This ties into urban agriculture and growing healthy food locally.
- There have been infestations of pests such as rats, raccoons, and possums. Communities need to know how to use EPA's Integrated Pest Management system along with money and resources.
- An important priority is to gain community trust. A grass roots campaign would probably be the most effective.

Next Steps

From the Friday and Saturday discussions, it was apparent that people want more education and access to resources. It was important to hear from the communities as they brought critical information and insight to EPA's attention. We will work to address the concerns that were raised through the EJ Showcase project and other avenues. We will work to ensure that key priorities such as education and access to information are stressed in our work. We will look for the opportunity to be more engaged with youth and organizations who serve them. Next steps include working internally and externally to address community concerns and to launch projects that are meaningful and results-oriented.

About the EJ Showcase

The EJ Showcase Communities effort brings together governmental organizations and pools their collective resources and expertise on the best ways to achieve real results in communities.

EPA Region 7 has identified several economically-distressed neighborhoods for its showcase community in the Kansas City metropolitan area. These areas also have risk factors including poor housing conditions and increased exposure to environmental hazards. Region 7 has also identified the following environmental concerns: air quality, vacant and abandoned property, asthma, lead, housing conditions, clean water, storm water and flooding, urban farming, illegal dumping and proper waste disposal, and children's health issues.

Goals and Key Principles

- Identify and address environmental concerns that disproportionately burden disadvantaged populations.
- Test, document, and share approaches that demonstrate environmental/health results (pollution reduction, reduced risk, reduced health impacts) and sustainability.
- Involve communities (demonstrate diverse representation - youth, seniors, academics, business and industry, local government, etc.); identify priority environmental concerns; and educate and inform community members regarding ways to address these concerns.
- Demonstrate the opportunity to show greater environmental and health results through partnership and leveraging.

EPA Representatives

Adopt your Watershed- Mandy Whitsitt
 Air Quality- Amy Bhesania
 Asthma/Indoor Air Program- Greg Crable
 Battleflood Combined Sewer Overflow Project-
 Kerry Herndon
 Blue Skyways- Amy Bhesania
 Brownfields- Susan Klein, Alma Moreno Lahm, Ina
 Square, Susan Thomas, Stanley Walker, and
 Deborah Kennedy
 Chemical Risk Information- Fatima Ndiaye
 Children's Health/Environmental Education-
 LaTonya Sanders
 Community Action for a Renewed Environment-
 Kathleen Fenton
 Emergency Response- Paul Roemerman

Energy Star- Craig Bernstein
 Enforcement Coordination Office/EJ- Althea Moses,
 Mark Hague, Monica Espinosa, Kimberly Lewis,
 Allyssa Massie, Calvin Verner, Madlyn Davis,
 Neal Gilbert, and Michael Minor
 Land Revitalization/Smart Growth- David Doyle
 Lead- Crystal McIntyre, Stephven Richard
 Pesticides- Heather Duncan
 Program Operations and Integration-
 Amanda Halstead
 Sustainable Skylines- Chrissy Wolfersberger
 Urban Agriculture/Urban Water- Amy Shields and
 Damon Frizzell
 Urban Water Initiative- Roberta Vogel-Leutung,
 Craig Thompson, and Jeff Robichaud
 Watersense- Stephanie Lindberg

Guest List

Neighborhood Organizations

Argentine
 Battleflood Heights
 Benton Boulevard Beautification
 Columbus Park
 Ivanhoe
 Marlborough
 Oak Grove
 Oak Park
 Paseo Garden/Troostwood
 Prescott
 Quindaro Ruins
 Rosedale
 Ruskin Heights
 Strawberry Hill
 Washington Wheatley
 Westside

Non-profit Organizations

Afrikan Centered Education
 Collegium Campus
 Alianzas
 American Indian Center
 Asian Chamber of Commerce
 Asthma and Allergy Foundation of
 America
 Big Brothers Big Sisters
 Black Chamber of Commerce
 Black Health Care Coalition
 Blacks in Government

Blue River Watershed Association
 Boys and Girls Clubs
 Bridging the Gap
 Brush Creek Community Partners
 Building A Sustainable Earth
 Community
 Cabot Westside Health Center
 Children's Mercy Hospital
 D.R.E.A.M. Center Partners, Inc.
 El Centro
 Front Porch Alliance
 Green Impact Zone
 Greenworks KC
 Guadalupe Center
 Harvest America
 Heart of America Indian Center
 Heartland All Species Project
 Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
 Hispanic Economic Development
 Kansas City Center for Urban Ag
 Kansas City Chronic Disease
 Coalition
 Kansas City Freedom Schools
 Kansas City KS Community College
 KC Harmony
 Lincoln University Urban Impact
 Center
 Metropolitan Community College
 Metropolitan Energy Center
 Mid-America Regional Council
 Migrant Farmworkers Project
 Northeast Business Association

Pachamama Alliance
 Pediatric Environmental Health
 Specialty Unit
 Project Lead-Safe
 Samuel Rogers Healthcare Center
 The Family Conservancy
 The Whole Person
 United Parents Against Lead
 United Services Community Action
 Agency
 University of Missouri-KC
 Urban League
 Westside CAN Center
 Westside Housing Organization

City, State, and Federal Partners
 City of Kansas City, Kansas
 (Unified Government)
 City of Kansas City, Missouri
 Kansas City, Missouri, Health Dept.
 Kansas Department of Health and
 Environment
 Missouri Department of Natural
 Resources
 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
 U.S. Department of Agriculture
 U.S. Department of Health and
 Human Services
 U.S. Department of Housing and
 Urban Development
 U.S. Department of Labor
 U.S. Department of Transportation