

Bay Area Environmental Health Collaborative

*Environmental Justice Air Quality Coalition ~ Immigrant Power for Environmental Health and Justice
Bay Area Clean Air Task Force ~ Contra Costa Asthma Coalition ~ Ditching Dirty Diesel
Environmental Law and Justice Clinic ~ Regional Asthma Management and Prevention*

Media Advisory – News Conference

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR BEAR BRUNT OF BAY AREA AIR POLLUTION

- WHAT:** Release of *Still Toxic After All These Years: Air Quality and Environmental Justice in the San Francisco Bay Area*, a new scientific report that identifies areas in the region with the highest health risks due to airborne toxics, and **campaign launch for more health-protective air quality measures**
- WHEN:** **Tuesday, February 20, 2007, 10:00 a.m. News Conference**, followed by Q&A
- WHERE:** **Hensley Street @ Richmond Parkway (NE corner), Richmond**
Intersection at industrial corner in North Richmond with views of various pollution sites.
From SF: Take I-80 East towards Bay Bridge/Oakland, to I-580 West towards Point Richmond/San Rafael (about 5 mi.), take Canal Blvd. exit towards Garrard Blvd., Right at Canal Blvd. (Richmond Parkway), continue on Richmond Parkway (1.3 mi.); Right at Hensley Street, NE corner of intersection (on right). Parking on Hensley Street.
From Oakland: Take I-580 West towards SF/Hayward then towards Point Richmond/San Rafael, continue as above.
- WHO:** **Antonio Díaz*, Organizational Director, People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER, San Francisco)
Focus: Impacts on immigrant communities and facilitate conference
**Manuel Pastor*, Ph.D., report co-author, Director, Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community and Professor of Latin American & Latino Studies, UC-Santa Cruz
Focus: Report results demonstrating disparity in air toxics health risks in Bay Area region
**Rubye Sherrod*, community asthma advocate, Contra Costa Asthma Coalition (Contra Costa)
Focus: Asthma burden in Contra Costa County
Health impacts of local air pollution on community residents throughout the Bay Area:
**Dr. Henry Clark*, Executive Director, West County Toxics Coalition (Richmond)
**Tessie Ester*, Hunters View Mothers Committee (Bayview Hunters Point, San Francisco)
**Margaret Gordon*, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (West Oakland)

Note: Chinese (Cantonese) and Spanish speakers will be available.

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Tel: 415.442.6656 Day of Event: 415.531.0147

PHOTO OPS The site provides views of industrial activity and is nearby truck traffic, railyards and other sources of air pollution.

NOTE: The report *Still Toxic After All These Years* characterizes health risks in Bay Area communities from exposure to air toxics, analyzes demographic data from the U.S. Census, and finds that Bay Area residents who live in areas with the highest health risks from air toxics are mostly low-income people of color, including a high percentage of immigrant families. Richmond is among several areas identified as the highest risk in the region. With scientific evidence of disparate exposures, Bay Area community residents, environmental justice and public health advocates are pressing regulators at the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to prioritize high impact areas and limit and reduce the cumulative pollution burden in the region.

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News Release

EMBARGOED until February 20, 2007

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COMMUNITIES OF COLOR BEAR BRUNT OF BAY AREA AIR POLLUTION New Report Confirms Environmental Racism in Region; Community and Environmental Health and Justice Groups Call for New Approach

(Richmond, Calif.) Twenty years after a landmark study demonstrated that race is a critical factor in the presence of toxic waste in communities across the nation, environmental injustice is still alive and well in the San Francisco Bay Area. A new report, *Still Toxic After All These Years: Air Quality and Environmental Justice in the San Francisco Bay Area*, documents what many community residents have known for years: Bay Area residents who live closest to large toxic releases and bear the highest health risks due to air toxics are predominantly people of color.

On February 20, 2007 at a 10:00 a.m. news conference in Richmond (Hensley Street at Richmond Parkway, NE corner), the Bay Area Environmental Health Collaborative (BAEHC) will launch a regional campaign to press the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for a new approach to better protect the health of all communities from the cumulative effects of exposures to air pollution from multiple sources. Presenters include BAEHC community representatives, (Chinese and Spanish speakers available), a report author, and a community asthma advocate.

The report identifies areas with the highest exposures and risks, including: East and West Oakland, East San Jose, San Leandro, and other areas along the I-880 corridor; East Palo Alto, Eastern San Francisco, and Richmond. These areas include neighborhoods with mostly African American, Asian and Latino residents, including a growing number of immigrant families.

“No one should have to breathe more pollution because of the color of their skin,” said **Tessie Ester**, a BAEHC representative with the Hunters View Mothers Committee in San Francisco.

Because air pollution is linked to serious health problems – including asthma, cancer, respiratory and heart disease – disparate exposures by race, ethnicity and nationality are especially disturbing. According to the study, two-thirds of Bay Area residents living within a mile of *large toxic releases* (e.g., from chemical plants and industrial facilities) are people of color, while two-thirds of residents who live more than 2.5 miles away from such releases are white. Similarly, two-thirds of residents in areas with the *highest health risk* (due to exposure to toxic pollution from point sources and mobile sources, e.g., cars, trucks and buses) are people of color. Race does matter when it comes to pollution burden, even when factors such as income and land use are taken into account.

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Language matters too – Asians/Pacific Islanders and Latinos identified by the U.S. Census as “linguistically isolated” are most likely to live near these hazards. This has significant implications given the emerging demographics of Bay Area neighborhoods. “Because of real language, social and cultural differences, immigrant families are less likely to have access to and participate in existing health and environmental programs and services,” says **Antonio Díaz** of ¡PODER!, People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights, based in San Francisco’s Mission District. “Policymakers have an even greater responsibility to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of non-English, monolingual communities.”

The overall impact on residents’ health of the combined exposures to many air pollutants from multiple sources is unknown. Regulators currently rely on a *source-by-source* approach to health risk regulation, rather than a more comprehensive risk evaluation of sources in an affected area. As a result, there is essentially no limit to the total level of pollution – or associated health risk – permitted in any area. BAEHC is calling on regulators to adopt and implement specific measures to evaluate, limit and reduce *cumulative* emissions in areas already burdened by high levels of air pollution and where residents are particularly vulnerable to the hazards of such exposures.

Residents argue action is long overdue. “For years, Richmond residents have lived with pollution from the Chevron refinery, chemical plants and other sources,” says longtime resident **Dr. Henry Clark**. “That’s on top of all the diesel pollution. Enough is enough. We need real measures to protect our health.” West Oakland resident **Margaret Gordon** lives less than a mile from the Port of Oakland: “Every day my family breathes exhaust from thousands of trucks carrying goods to and from the Port, and from ships, trains, and equipment that move those goods. Five grandchildren, my son and I all suffer from asthma. It’s time to put our health first.”

The report findings have important implications for public policy and indicate a need to better protect the health of all residents. According to report co-author and UC-Santa Cruz professor **Manuel Pastor**, “Protecting the health of residents in the highest impact areas, especially those with particular vulnerability, would serve to improve conditions for all Bay Area residents.”

The first study of its kind for the region, *Still Toxic After All These Years* analyzes updated U.S. EPA National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA) data, Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) data and U.S. Census data to characterize health hazards in Bay Area neighborhoods. The authors call on policy makers to adopt a new regulatory approach and develop new strategies to reduce disparities and protect all residents from the cumulative health effects of pollution.

Prepared for BAEHC by authors Manuel Pastor, Rachel Morello-Frosch and James Sadd, the study was recently presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference in San Francisco. It will be available Feb. 17 at http://cjtc.ucsc.edu/pub_reports.html.

The Bay Area Environmental Health Collaborative is a regional partnership of six broad coalitions and numerous organizations working for the adoption of specific measures to protect public health in communities that are heavily impacted by air pollution. BAEHC’s diverse membership includes community representatives, environmental health and justice advocates, and scientific, technical and public health experts. BAEHC’s goal is to assure better health outcomes for Bay Area residents by improving air quality through expanded community capacity and the establishment of measures that reduce the cumulative health effects of air pollution and ensure public access to decision-making processes. BAEHC is supported in part by The San Francisco Foundation. For more information, contact BAEHC Campaign Director Amy S. Cohen, 415.442.6656, or acohen@ggu.edu.

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