

# **Collaborative on Health and the Environment - Washington (CHE-WA)**

## **Environmental Justice (EJ) Working Group Meeting**

### **Notes**

**May 25, 2005**

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#### ***Participants***

- Chetana Acharya, Community Outreach and Education, University of Washington, NIEHS Center for Ecogenetics and Environmental Health
  - Marnie Boardman, Washington State Department of Health, Environmental Public Health Tracking Network
  - Thandie Chikomo, EPA Region 10, Hubert Humphrey Fellow
  - Kate Davies, Antioch University
  - Ticiang Diangson, Seattle Public Utilities
  - Richard Gelb, City of Seattle, Office of Sustainability and Environment
  - Steve Gilbert, Institute for Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders
  - Linn Gould, Erda Environmental Services
  - Elise Miller, Institute for Children's Environmental Health
  - Yalonda Sinde, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice
  - Karen Snyder, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, University of Washington
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#### ***Notes***

1. Review:

Elise reviewed some of the major suggestions that have emerged in the CHE-WA EJ Work Group discussions over the last year, which included:

- Develop a "peacekeepers" team to support and facilitate EJ and traditional environmental groups in communicating cross-culturally and successfully partnering on initiatives
- Create a set of EJ guiding principles to incorporate EJ more integrally on an institutional level, which could be used to conduct progress checks within government, advocacy and educational organizations.
- Educate about EJ issues within organizations and asking some of the "hard questions" that aren't otherwise being asked.
- Use available funding to create a workshop on ideas that emerge from the "reflection pool" of the core EJ Work Group

Then she opened up the discussion for further elaboration of these ideas or other new ideas that might be even more appropriate for this group to take on.

2. New Ideas:

After a rich discussion to new major ideas emerged:

- A. Have the CHE-WA EJ Work Group host follow-up meetings on some of the "hot issues" that were highlighted at the "DNA, Health and Social Justice" forum that Chetana Acharya helped organize the previous Saturday – namely, the use of DNA evidence for racial profiling and the use of genetic testing in the work place. These meetings could

help articulate the relationship between genetics, public health and environmental exposures. Thinking about these topics in tandem is fairly novel.

ACTION: Chetana will draft a one page overview of some of the ideas that we might explore through these follow-up meetings.

Some themes from the Community Genetics Forum (5/21/05) to discuss in future meetings:

- What is the role of genetic information, testing, and knowledge in the environmental health and justice movement? Where and when genetics is helpful or harmful to an environmental justice agenda? There are some specific cases of environmental exposures where genetics may have a role.
- What are the uses of DNA evidence in the legal system? What are the implications for racial minorities? The UW Innocence Project has helped secure the release of over 150 people from prison, after DNA tests unequivocally proved their innocence.
- How does genetics affect medical treatment and what are the implications for multi-racial /multi-ethnic families? There is some movement towards 'race-based' medicines. Additionally, family history has been used in healthcare to determine health risks. There is both support for and resistance against the widespread use of these techniques.

- B. Have the CHE-WA EJ Work Group help the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ) develop tools for measuring EJ in agencies. Yolanda said that CCEJ is about to publish an "EJ Report Card" on how well agencies are doing, but there need to be better measures (e.g., standardized questions to ensure demographic and temporal equity) to evaluate agencies' practices, not just whether they have EJ principles on paper. The group agreed this was an excellent idea, and Kate Davies mentioned that Nanda Blazej, one of her graduate students who has been participating in CHE-WA, could be the intern for this project starting in the fall.

ACTION: Kate will ask Nanda about this opportunity, and Yolanda will follow up with the EJ Work Group on specific next steps.