2009 STATE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT (SEJCA) PROGRAM

In October 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded funding of $160,000 to each of five states to conduct specific projects under the State Environmental Justice Cooperative Agreement (SEJCA) program, which was developed as a pilot by the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ), with input from the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), the Environmental Justice Steering Committee (EJESC), and the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS).

The purpose of the SEJCA pilot is to support state activities that lead to measurable environmental or public health results in vulnerable and underserved communities that are disproportionately burdened by environmental harms and risks by leveraging and making use of the existing resources and assets of state agencies. The program design encourages state governmental entities to work collaboratively with an affected community to understand, promote, and integrate approaches to provide meaningful and measurable improvements to its public health and environmental surroundings. Based on responses to a request for proposals (RFP), the SEJCA pilot program awarded funding to five state environmental agencies to support their proposed efforts to mitigate environmental justice concerns in specific affected communities using strategies that have the potential to be broadened for use in other communities across the state.

The five state projects supported through SEJCA are listed below:

- The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC): The Tribal Participation Protocol Development Project was designed to work with Alaska Native tribal organizations to establish an early notification protocol for the Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) permitting program.
- The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC): The Building Healthy Communities and Schools project worked with community representatives, and local, state, and federal regulatory agencies to coordinate multiple environmental pollution mitigation activities.
- The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA): The East St. Louis Residential Lead Paint Outreach Collaborative project conducted community outreach and training to educate and involve residents in lead abatement from lead-based paint contamination.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP): The Chester Home Asthma Prevention Program (CHAPP) project worked with the Chester Environmental Partnership and the Crozer-Keystone Health System to address asthma triggers, solid waste disposal, and children's environmental health.
- The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC): The Leaders for Environmental Action Pilots (LEAP) project implemented a pilot program using collaborative problem-solving elements to address the environmental and social justice concerns within four selected communities.

PROJECT SUMMARIES

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) initiated the Tribal Participation Protocol Development Project (TPP) in partnership with six tribal communities that make up the Yukon-Koyukuk (Y-K) Subregion of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, which is a consortium of 42 tribal villages in the Athabascan Region of Alaska. These six tribal councils include the Galena Village Council, Huslia Traditional Council, Kaltag Traditional Council, Koyukuk Traditional Council, Nulato Tribal Council, and Ruby Tribal Council. Five of the communities are spread out along a 130-mile segment of the Yukon River, and one community — Huslia — is located on the Koyukuk River, approximately 180 river miles (about 70 direct miles) northeast of the confluence between the two rivers.

These six tribal communities are similar to numerous other Alaskan tribal communities that are spread across vast distances, unconnected by roads. Over the years, these and many other tribal communities have asked to have a stronger role and voice in permitting decisions under the Alaska Pollution Permit Discharge Elimination System (APDES). Tribal communities also have expressed concern related to the protection of Alaska's water from pollution to safeguard fish and other subsistence resources on which rural Native families and villages depend.

Project Successes

Under the SEJCA program, ADEC was able to provide training; create outreach, guidance, and tools to facilitate tribal involvement in the APDES program and develop a communication protocol ultimately signed by the Department's Commissioner and tribal chiefs from six Y-K region villages. Major TPP outputs included: (1) a protocol for early notification of and coordination with tribes, (2) a guidance document on how to use the new protocol, (3) three large training workshops for tribal participants and ADEC staff on how to use the new protocol, and (4) a tool kit posted on the a Tribal Communication webpage that includes the protocol, the above-mentioned guidance, and a brochure and postcard on APDES permitting. The TPP has resulted in significant improvements in the ability of the six participating tribal communities to stay informed of and contribute to permit decisions that have the potential to affect their lives. In addition, this project has led to increased awareness of ADEC Division of Water staff of potential issues concerning Native Alaskans. These positive results and especially posting the tool kit on the Internet have encouraged the staff from other ADEC permitting programs to begin using the project outputs as templates to tailor specific communication tools and protocols for their programs. Perhaps the most visible success of the SEJCA project on ADEC was as a major influence in ADEC's recent appointment of a full-time EJ coordinator who will provide inputs to all EJ-related permits and other documents and direct persons with EJ-related issues to the appropriate ADEC program office.

California Department of Toxic Substances Control

The California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), initially conducted an initiative titled "Building Healthy Communities and Schools in the Cities of Wilmington, Commerce, and Maywood (Identify, Reduce and/or Eliminate)." Two of the three cities, Maywood and Commerce, are near each other, approximately 6 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles. The populations of these cities range from approximately 25,000 to 35,000, and both are more than 90 percent Latino, with 24 to 30 percent of the residents below the poverty line. The City of Wilmington, California, is home to the Port of Los Angeles.

Under the initiative, DTSC worked with residents of each city to connect people who live closest to environmental and public health problems with local, state, and federal regulators (such as DTSC, the Regional Water Quality Control Boards, and air quality and public health agencies). Priority work was focused on environmental and multi-media impacts caused by freeways, rail yards, and industrial facilities in and around schools.

The majority of issues addressed under the SEJCA project involved the color and potential chemical contamination in the tap water of the Maywood community. For more than a decade, community members have dealt with tap water that is frequently brown, bitter tasting, malodorous, and that sometimes contains red particulates. Under its EJ policy, DTSC has a responsibility to work with EJ stakeholders to develop cross-agency approaches to address iron and manganese in Maywood drinking water and to ensure that the community has a safe drinking water supply.

Project Successes

The project has resulted in development of sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships between DTSC staff and the three communities that are based on trust and sharing of knowledge. DTSC's knowledge mostly involves environmental laws and regulations, whereas the community's knowledge mostly involves the locations of activities that need to be investigated because they appear to be placing community residents at risk from exposure to toxic substances. This sharing of knowledge occurred at workshops and other meetings that were scheduled by community leaders and DTSC staff. In addition, DTSC assisted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9 EJ staff in conducting and organizing a bus tour under the SEJCA project. The bus stopped at the locations covered under this grant and community members raised several environmental concerns at all three locations. A major contribution to the growing trust between these cities and DTSC staff is DTSC's pledge to report progress using a scheduled and agreed-upon method (such as a letter, meeting, or telephone call) on each community issue within 100 days. Project outputs included: 1) a series of training programs and workshops for local residents with topics ranging from diesel truck emissions, water sampling, inspections; 2) Water Sampling of multiple Maywood City schools; 3) DTSC collected data from all of the communities to update and ground truth the information from a DTSC database identifying generators, transporters, and treatment, storage, and disposal facilities and voluntary cleanup projects, orphan site work, and corrective action activities. This information was provided in maps at DTSC's website.

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

Project Overview

The City of East St. Louis has a population of about 30,000 with a median household income of about $21,000. About 98 percent of residents are African American. Post-war industrial abandonment led to loss of blue-collar jobs and basic amenities provided by local government. More than half the residents live below the poverty level, and unemployment is around twice the state and national average. Almost two-thirds of the children in school are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch.

East St. Louis has high risk areas where children have shown elevated blood lead levels. Elevated blood lead levels affect children's ability to learn and develop. Most of the lead exposure to children comes from lead paint (dust). Children from lower income families tend to have higher blood lead levels. East St. Louis also has a large aging housing stock. A large percentage of the housing stock is contaminated by lead.

The East St. Louis Residential Lead Paint Outreach Collaborative was formed to establish a collaborative and coordinated effort between the Illinois EPA, East Side Health District, St. Clair County Inter-governmental Grants Department/Community Development and other partners. This outreach and training initiative was designed to leverage ongoing programs at the local level to maximize use of local resources and reduce duplication of efforts.

Project Successes

The East St. Louis Residential Lead Paint Outreach Collaborative provided focused public awareness programs addressing childhood lead poisoning. In addition, the program leveraged partner activities such as lead paint sampling assistance by using an X-ray fluorescence sampling device provided by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), and blood lead sampling for children by the East Side Health District. In addition, the St. Clair County Intergovernmental Grants Department accepted applications from community members to the lead abatement program.

During 2010, in the first year of the project, IEPA provided lead brochures and literature for four workshops on the hazards of lead and the new repair, renovation and painting (RRP) rule in East Peoria, Carterville, O'Fallon and Palatine. Additional project outputs included: 1) Provided brochures, coloring books, and pamphlets about lead hazards to 50 people at a health fair sponsored by Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation at its Belleville Health Clinic; 2) Participated in the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) -EJ National Conference in San Diego and provided a presentation for a partnership session; 3) Visited three middle schools for outreach on lead; and 4) Formed a partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to establish and participate in several lead workshops.

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

Project Overview

This project, titled the Chester Home Asthma Prevention Program (CHAPP), was conducted within the limits of Chester, Pennsylvania, which encompasses a 6-square-mile area in Delaware County in southeastern Pennsylvania. The population is approximately 37,000 and is composed of approximately 75 percent African American, 19 percent Caucasian, and 5 percent Hispanic. The city once had thriving shipbuilding and manufacturing industries. Both industries have seen a steady economic decline since the 1960s. As jobs left the area, poverty rates increased, leaving more than a quarter of the population, and more than a third of the children, below the poverty line. The incidence of asthma in grades kindergarten through 12 in the Chester Upland School District is close to 24 percent.

The main goal of this project was to directly benefit children ages 0 to 17 with asthma in the project area by minimizing the number and severity of their attacks. To achieve this goal, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) entered into partnerships with the Crozer-Keystone Health System (CKHS) and the Chester Environmental Partnership (CEP) to carry out environmental interventions in homes of asthmatic children in the City of Chester, to provide education about indoor asthma triggers, and to engage community members to address solid waste disposal problems which may trigger problems for children when they are outdoors.

The disposal problems in Chester were addressed by the CEP, a group of organizations that are focused on improving the lives of Chester residents. The CEP meets regularly and is composed of representatives from the U.S. EPA, the PA DEP, health institutions, local government, and local businesses and industry. The CEP leveraged assistance from the City of Chester to provide 30-cubic-yard dumpsters at a number of locations and engaged Chester residents to fill the dumpsters with waste that had accumulated in vacant lots.

Project Successes

Three Chester residents successfully completed the peer counseling, train-the-trainer sessions, and proceeded to conduct home visits and at-home interventions for families with asthma concerns. 382 families were contacted by the peer counselors, and a total of 132 children from 69 families enrolled from July 2010 through February 2012. Participants in the CHAPP saw enhanced conditions when it came to severity and control of asthma. For both children above and below the age of 12, there was a statistically significant improvement in ACT pre-and post-test scores, in addition to a statistically significant decrease in visits to the emergency room. The home intervention and education prompted families to make changes to reduce asthma triggers in the home and be more diligent in the necessary medical care. The improvement was especially great for children whose asthma was initially considered “severe” based on the standard for the ACT score. CHAPP’s participants also showed improvements toward the goals involving the number of uses of rescue medications and the amount of school absences caused by asthma. There were substantial decreases in the number school days missed and the frequency of the use of rescue medications. On average, a child missed approximately 5 more days of school before the intervention than after.

The success of the solid waste cleanup program in Chester was evidenced by the large numbers of residents who participated in at least 10 large cleanup events, resulting in filling numerous dumpsters that were removed from the neighborhoods at no charge to the residents.

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

Project Overview

The project involved implementing a new state pilot program called "Leaders in Environmental Action Pilots" (LEAP), which was designed to use collaborative problem-solving approaches to address the environmental and social justice concerns within four selected communities. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) worked with community-based non-profit organizations in each community, including A Place for Hope, representing the Blackmon Road neighborhood near Rock Hill, South Carolina; the Imani Group, Inc., representing the community of Aiken, South Carolina; the Community Development & Improvement Corporation (CDIC), representing residents in Graniteville, Warrenville, and Vaucluse (GWV) in Aiken County, South Carolina; and the Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities (LAMC), representing seven neighborhoods in North Charleston, South Carolina.

Project Successes

The main goal of the SC DHEC LEAP project was to assist in the redevelopment of four communities by building and strengthening collaborative relationships with local non-profit organizations, decision makers, and other stakeholders. The SC DHEC was able to provide significant assistance to all four of the LEAP pilots, and in doing so forged a number of state, federal, academia, and private partnerships that can now continue assisting these community organizations toward their individual goals. The SC DHEC LEAP project directly benefited the SC DHEC staff and the EPA Region 4 staff, because they got to know the issues and people in these communities so well that they are now able to send them information on grants, travel scholarships to conferences, and other opportunities that are tailored to their needs. In addition, the community groups were exposed to insights and knowledge from organizations such as the Department of Transportation, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Small Business Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development Program, and several local colleges, such as the University of South Carolina, Aiken Technical College, Bennet College, and Winthrop College.

Other successes achieved through collaboration with these four organizations are: 1) community-developed priority list of needed improvements, 2) three major community meetings and visioning sessions focused on upcoming Brownfields assessments, 3) testing of local wells for radium levels, and 4) board assessment and board training on building organization capacity and development within participating organizations.