1081173 - R8 SDMS

VB/I70 GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY
Environmental Justice Involvement

Background

The Vasquez Boulevard/Interstate 70 (VB/I70) Superfund Site is located within a highly visible and active environmental justice area. The Site includes the neighborhoods of Elyria/Swansea, Cole, Clayton and south Globeville. These neighborhoods, along with the rest of Globeville, the Sunnyside neighborhood and south Commerce City are part of the larger Northeast Denver Environmental Initiative (NDEI), which is being led by the Region's Environmental Justice (EJ) program. As such, EJ has been working closely with the VB/I-70 site team on issues relating to the Superfund site as well as broader issues impacting these communities. This briefing document will supply demographic data about the communities, environmental impact information beyond the Superfund impact and information about EJ's ongoing activities in these communities.

Demographics

Census data from 2000 indicate that minorities constitute approximately 88% of the population of northeast Denver (the broader NDEI area). The VB/I-70 neighborhoods contain a slightly higher percentage of minorities. Minority populations (defined here to include racial minorities and hispanics) comprise 25.5% of the population of Colorado as a whole. Almost 3 times as many families live at or below the poverty level in the NDEI area (approximately 18%), as compared to Colorado as a whole. In 1999 the poverty threshold for a family of 4 was approximately $17,000 per year.

Environmental Impacts on Communities

Northeast Denver is a highly industrialized area bisected by 3 major highways and a rail corridor. Almost 500 facilities regulated by environmental laws reside in the NDEI project area. Over 5000 diesel tractors are housed, serviced and operated out of the area. Interstate 70 bisected the Elyria/Swansea and Globeville communities and I25 split the Globeville community apart. Much of the industrial activity in the neighborhoods moved into these neighborhoods since the 1980's. EPA's Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) data indicate that northeast Denver receives a disproportionate share of hazardous air pollutants from stationary sources; ten times greater than Denver County, twice that of Adams county and 5 times higher than Colorado as a whole. These communities also receive a disproportionate amount of per capita mobile source pollutants as compared to the Denver metropolitan area. Studies have also found that children in northeast Denver had an average of twice the national blood lead levels, likely caused by the old, sometimes poorly maintained housing stock.

Environmental Justice at the VB/I-70 Site - Northeast Denver Environmental Initiative

The Environmental Justice program has been actively involved with the communities included in the VB/I-70 Superfund Site. The following will highlight some past activities as well as on-going activities whether directly related to the Superfund Site or not.

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Conoco Air Settlement: EJ worked with Conoco, EPA and the State's air enforcement programs to direct $517,000 worth of supplemental environmental projects to community groups working on environmental and health issues in the neighborhoods. The parties collaborated to conduct public meetings to solicit input from residents about the types of projects most in demand for the area. As a result, Conoco funded twenty projects addressing a variety of health and environmental issues identified by the citizens.

Grants: EPA has awarded approximately $920,000 in grants to organizations working in northeast Denver. Including EJ small grants; EJ Pollution Prevention grants, Regional Geographic Initiative grant.

Enforcement Initiative: Between 2000 and 2003, EPA, the State of Colorado and the City of County of Denver inspected 59% of all regulated facilities in northeast Denver. They inspected 99% of all facilities permitted under the Clean Air Act (major, synthetic minor and state permitted minor facilities). EPA and the State are currently pursuing an increased inspection strategy for RCRA facilities in the area.

Interstate 70 Expansion: EJ and the NEPA program are working closely with Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to assist with the consideration of EJ during its Environmental Impact Statement assessing changes to Interstate 70. EJ had developed a strong working relationship with FHWA and CDOT that will allow EPA to influence the direction of the study and expand the process to ensure the participation of the impacted community in highway decisions.

Healthy Air for Northeast Denver: ECEJ is coordinating a regional effort to implement an air toxics reduction program in northeast Denver. The goal of this program is to reduce personal exposure to air toxics in northeast Denver, by implementing a step-by-step targeted approach that addresses multi-media sources. This comprehensive and collaborative approach is being designed and implemented by a diverse team of EPA programs and external partners. While still in its internal coordination stage, the HAND projects expects to actively pursue outside partners in the immediate future.

Xeriscape Project: EJ is coordinating a.program to reduce long-term water usage in the VB/I-70 neighborhoods by the use of water efficient landscaping practices. EJ will coordinate this community based project with Superfund's cleanup activities to ensure the maximum flexibility in implementing water-wise landscaping practices in the yards being remediated. It will also coordinate activities with community and industry groups to find private sources of additional landscaping resources to assist residents in their water-wise landscaping efforts. The project also includes educational for residents on the benefits of water-wise landscaping.

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