

# Project Update



Port Arthur, Texas – Westside Community – January - June 2010

## Community comments frame Port Arthur Westside Showcase Plan

On November 17, 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a new national initiative to address Environmental Justice (EJ) challenges in ten communities across the country. The Westside community of Port Arthur, Texas was selected as an EJ Showcase Community.

The EJ Showcase Community project will use a collaborative community-based approach to improve the community's public health and the environment. On January 19 and March 4, 2010, EPA held public meetings in Port Arthur. EPA used input from these meetings to develop an action plan for the project.

The following is a summary of issues raised during the January 19, 2010, meeting.

### Environmental

#### Emergency Response

The community raised concerns about local area emergency response planning for various emergency situations, including accidental releases, explosions, natural disasters, etc. There was also concern about the current process for providing resident notifications during such events. Residents stated that emergency notification methods should go beyond computer, television or newspaper--particularly for elderly and those who have limited access to those mediums. A concern was expressed that area roadways might experience bottlenecks during future emergency evacuation events.

#### Air

Several general concerns were expressed about local air quality. Residents mentioned odor issues and indicated a need for more air monitoring at community fence lines. Community concerns exist about local industrial facilities' green house emissions, incident

#### EPA's Commitment to Environmental Justice

*"We must take special pains to connect with those who have been historically underrepresented in EPA decision-making, including the disenfranchised in our cities and rural areas, communities of color, native Americans, people disproportionately impacted by pollution, and small businesses, cities, and towns working to meet their environmental responsibilities. Like all Americans, they deserve an EPA with an open mind, a big heart and a willingness to listen...we must be sensitive to the burdens pollution has placed on vulnerable subpopulations, including children, the elderly, the poor and all others who are at particular risk to threats to health and the environment. We must seek their full partnership in the greater aim of identifying and eliminating the sources of pollution in their neighborhoods, schools and homes."*

— EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson

air emissions, and releases to the environment.

#### Water

The community expressed concerns about local drinking water quality (such as taste, clarity, and color). Concern exists about the wastewater being discharged from the fish market operations (Kim's Seafood).



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Shirley Augurson, Associate Director for Environmental Justice, EPA Region 6 Office of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs, leads a breakout session during a meeting with community members in Port Arthur in March.



EPA Region 6 Office of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs Director Jeannine Hale takes notes during a community meeting on the Showcase Community project in Port Arthur in January.



Deborah Ponder, EPA Region 6 Office of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs Deputy Director, with Port Arthur Mayor Deloris "Bobbie" Prince during the March EJ Showcase meeting.

## General Environmental

- The community asked for access to Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) for chemicals or hazardous materials used, stored or produced by local industry.
- The community also asked for access to reports of what local industrial facilities are releasing or emitting to the environment.
- The community is interested in creating buffers between residential areas and plant operations.
- Concern was expressed about negotiations with industry (e.g., pipelines) for easements or right of ways across the residents' properties.
- A resident expressed a desire that future environmental violation fines imposed on local industry be used to benefit the community (e.g., more use of Supplemental Environmental Projects, or SEPs).

## Health

The residents expressed concerns about local health issues. Respiratory ailments, asthma, cancer, and allergies are some specific community health concerns. Some residents believe a long term health effects or epidemiological study is needed for the community.

## Economic Revitalization

The residents want more job opportunities, particularly from local industry. Some commenters were interested in reestablishing a local brownfields to help with Westside redevelopment (such as removal of blight, vacant property reuse, economic rebirth).

## Other Concerns

- The residents believe there are opportunities for improved communications between all parties; between the residents and local industry (e.g., plant incidents, information about local industrial construction projects, plant operations and routine releases); and between the residents and local leaders.
- Some individuals expressed a lack of trust of local government leadership. They do not trust the state environmental department (TCEQ), and they do not trust that EPA and the state are solving community problems.
- Noise level in the community is a concern.
- A concern was raised regarding the need for more developed recreation facilities (e.g., parks, community meeting space, and green space).
- The need for improved local leadership is a concern.
- A concern was expressed about local zoning.
- There was a concern about local government seizure of privately-owned properties.
- Some individuals expressed interest in potential resident relocation away from heavy industry.

## Proposed Showcase Project Activities

The activities listed below are being planned or considered for implementation in the Port Arthur Westside EJ Showcase Community project. EPA will continue to pursue other ways to address the Westside community's concerns. If you have any suggestions or comments, please provide them to EPA by **September 17, 2010**.

### Environmental

#### Emergency Response

- Hold workshops on local emergency response plans
- Participate in local notification exercise
- Provide Citizen Emergency Response Training (CERT)

#### Air

- Inform community about EPA state wide initiative to improve state air permits
- Inform community about area air quality data
- Promote EPA's Healthy School Environments Programs to community schools
- Educate community on asthma triggers

#### Water

- Inform community about area water quality data
- Inform community about local public water system evaluation
- Inform community about evaluation of water permits issued to area plants
- Inform community about area groundwater data evaluation

### General

Inform local leaders of recent state and federal environmental compliance plant inspections to encourage Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs) for community

### Health

- Develop or enhance local lead paint hazard outreach program
- Hold Health Awareness Outreach Events

### Economic Revitalization

- Do site environmental assessments for downtown buildings to help reuse or redevelopment
- Do downtown site inventory
- Inform local leaders of Job Training grant opportunities

### Other

- Hold event for South East Texas Regional Planning Commission and Industry Lighthouse Program

Projects supported with EPA EJ Showcase Community funds (\$100,000):

- Healthy Homes Outreach Project, University of Texas Foundation in collaboration with University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston and Community In Power and Development Association, \$14,799
- After School Environmental Science Lab Project, Tekoa Charter School, \$14,550
- Golden Triangle Empowerment Center Job Training Program, \$14,800
- EPA 'Environmental Profile' outreach document development, \$46,776
- Facilitation services at January 19, 2010, meeting, \$2,951
- Future facilitation services, \$6,120

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## **Comments Requested on Port Arthur Westside Showcase Plan**

EPA wants your comments on the proposed project activities. Send by **September 17, 2010**, to [augurson.shirley@epa.gov](mailto:augurson.shirley@epa.gov) or by mail at  
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You can also provide your comments on the web at  
[www.epa.gov/region6/ej](http://www.epa.gov/region6/ej)