



**Celebrating 20 Years of
Environmental Justice!**

**WE ACT:
A community-
driven agenda for
environmental
justice.**

FACT SHEET

MISSION

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.) is a non-profit, community-based, environmental justice organization dedicated to building community power to fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color.

As a result of our ongoing work to educate and mobilize the more than 600,000 residents of Northern Manhattan on environmental issues affecting their quality of life, WE ACT has become a leader in the nationwide movement for environmental justice, influencing the creation of federal, state and local policies affecting the environment.

HISTORY

One of the first environmental organizations in New York State to be run by people of color, and the first environmental justice organization in New York City, WE ACT was founded and incorporated in 1988 as the result of local community struggles around environmental threats and resulting health disparities created by institutionalized racism and the lack of social and political capital, all dynamics that led to the siting and poor management of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, the siting and operation of 6 out of 7 New York City diesel bus depots in Northern Manhattan, the operation in our community of the only 24-hour Marine Transfer Station in Manhattan, and the use of Northern Manhattan communities as New York City's dumping ground for a host of other polluting facilities.

In 1988 WE ACT sued the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for operating the North River Sewage Treatment Plant as a public and private nuisance. The lawsuit was settled in 1994 for \$1.1 million, and WE ACT hired its first 3 staff members with a grant from the settlement funds. Today, WE ACT has 16 full-time staff members and an annual budget of \$1.3 million.

RECOGNITION

In 2003, WE ACT's Executive Director Peggy Shepard received the **10th Annual Heinz Award for the Environment** (an award that carries with it one of the largest financial gifts in the nation) for her activism on urban environmental issues. In 2007, she received the **Calver Award** from the **American Public Health Association** in recognition of her innovative environmental health work, and in 2008 she received the **Jane Jacobs Medal** for Lifetime Achievement from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 2005, WE ACT received a **Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award** from the US Environmental Protection Agency for our work in securing passage at the City Council of New York City's new lead poisoning prevention legislation (Local Law 1 of 2004). As further evidence of WE ACT's impact, in fall 2006 Mayor Bloomberg appointed Peggy Shepard to the **Mayor's Sustainability Advisory Board** to advise the City on environmentally sound policies and practices and to create an agenda to make New York City an environmental leader, resulting in the creation of PlaNYC 2030. Additionally, WE ACT's Deputy Director/Director Policy Initiatives Cecil Corbin-Mark was appointed to Governor Eliot Spitzer's **Renewable Energy Task Force**, where he and others are working to promote energy efficiency and conservation throughout New York State.



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WE ACT:
4 Dynamic
Program Areas;
17 Cutting-Edge
Projects.

PROGRAM AREAS & CURRENT PROJECTS

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROGRAM

1. **Developing a Community-Based Ethical Review Model** – Educating researchers and community members on the best practices for bolstering human subject protection during research.
2. **Our Housing is Our Health Campaign** – Educating community residents on healthy housing issues and how to advocate for reform on their own behalf.
3. **Northern Manhattan Garbage, Pests & Pesticides Campaign** – Addressing the problems of inappropriate garbage disposal and rampant rodent and roach infestation in Northern Manhattan, and working to bring about a transition from current pesticide use to safer alternatives.
4. **Northern Manhattan Food Justice Initiative** – Investigating the barriers and coming up with solutions to the sustainable food problems of Northern Manhattan.
5. **Rosa Parks School Bus Campaign** – Working to ensure that the indoor air quality of New York City school bus cabins is conducive to positive health conditions for children and bus drivers.
6. **New York City Lead Outreach Campaign** – Ensuring that New York City residents and homeowners – particular those in immigrant communities – are fully aware of the hazards of lead and lead poisoning prevention.
7. **Northern Manhattan CARE Collaborative** – Working to identify toxic exposures in Northern Manhattan across all media, and working to set priorities and develop strategies for risk reduction.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY & GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAM

8. **The MTA Accountability Campaign** – Working with the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and the Northern Manhattan community on the greening of the MTA's facilities in New York City.
9. **The New York Region Transportation Equity Coalition** – Transforming transportation policy at the City, State and Federal levels to better reflect the needs of all people.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

10. **The Campaign for New York's Future** – Working with a coalition of approximately 80 New York City-based groups advocating for a healthier, cleaner, more sustainable New York through the implementation of Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC 2030.
11. **Go Green East Harlem** – Collaboratively working with other organizations to address 6 of the most pressing environmental issues in East Harlem.
12. **West Harlem Waterfront Park Project** – Working with the Northern Manhattan community for the creation and programming of the new West Harlem Waterfront Park.
13. **From Trash to Treasure Campaign** – Working with the Northern Manhattan community to ensure that the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station is developed as a community facility.
14. **Columbia University Expansion Project** – Working to ensure that the expansion of Columbia University's Manhattanville Campus is carried out in a manner that is not detrimental to community residents and business owners, either environmentally or socioeconomically.

MOVEMENT BUILDING PROGRAM

15. **The WE ACT for Climate Justice Project** – Working to address climate change and to infuse dialogue about challenges and solutions to the crisis with an environmental justice perspective.
16. **Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice** – Working with a diverse array of faith leaders committed to making deep impact on issues of environmental justice in New York City through coordinated collective action.
17. **The WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York** – Developing the first environmentally friendly residential brownstone in Northern Manhattan, which will serve as a display of sustainable development techniques, and as WE ACT's new headquarters.