

## WE ACT Receives Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award



On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005, WE ACT for Environmental Justice was recognized for its commitment to protecting children from environmental health hazards.

WE ACT is one of only 15 individuals and organizations across the country to receive the **2005 CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH EXCELLENCE AWARD** from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A special ceremony was held in honor of all of the awardees at the Army and Navy Club in Washington, D.C.

According to William H. Sanders III - Acting Director of the Office of Children's Health Protection at EPA - the Children's Environmental Excellence Awards program recognizes individuals, communities and organizations that are leaders in making the environment healthier for children. "This year's winners exemplify what it means to have a strong commitment to children's environmental health, and EPA is proud to be honoring them for their efforts," said Mr. Sanders.

WE ACT was recognized for its 17 years of working to reduce the environmental health hazards and improve the living conditions of Northern Manhattan's children. More specifically, the award focused on WE ACT's efforts to fashion a better lead poisoning prevention law in New York City. WE ACT's work on this issue began in 1998 with a lawsuit filed against City Council Speaker Peter Valone for passing Local Law 38, which did not sufficiently address the health needs of lead poisoned children. Local Law 38 was voided in 2000 and WE ACT, along with a few other community-based organizations, initiated the drafting of a stricter alternative - Local Law 1. Local Law 1 contained a broader definition of lead hazards, shifted the burden of reporting these lead hazards from the parents to landlords, held landlords responsible for inspection and eradication of lead hazards, and raised the age of concern from 6 to 7. To generate support for Local Law 1, WE ACT trained parents to testify at council meetings, met with council members, and participated in negotiating sessions and media briefings. Due in large part to these efforts, Local Law 1 was passed in early 2004.



*WE ACT's Peggy Shepard accepts the award*

In addition to our efforts to eliminate lead poisoning in North Manhattan, WE ACT has been very successful in other areas of public improvement. Some of our successes over the past few years include the following:

- WE ACT created and implemented an environmental health curriculum that has increased environmental literacy by training over 250 New York City community leaders to understand environmental health issues and to advocate for their concerns to be addressed.
- WE ACT negotiated with EPA Region II to conduct the first assessment of Northern Manhattan's air quality which gathered data that was used to promulgate the national fine particulate standard for PM2.5, which was upheld by the Supreme Court 3 years ago.
- WE ACT initiated and helped implement a pilot study of a group of Harlem schoolchildren. The study found that 75% of the children had visible traces of a substance indicating exposure to dangerous diesel fumes in their bodies. Another study found that the level of diesel pollution in the air was directly related to bus traffic, with the highest levels of air pollution found around the Manhattanville Bus Depot. This data was used to influence the MTA to invest in alternative fuels.
- Nationally, WE ACT has provided consultation and technical assistance to academic institutions and grassroots organizations, which has resulted in stronger community-academic partnerships, organizing tactics, and research ethics.
- On the cutting edge, WE ACT convened the first national conference on the ethics of the Human Genome Project and its implications for the environment and communities of color that was attended by over 400 community advocates and researchers, and submitted policy recommendations to appropriate agencies and policymakers.

“We are proud the hard work and dedication of our staff, volunteers and community residents, which has led to the achievement of this outstanding recognition,” said Peggy Shepard, Executive Director of WE ACT. “To be recognized by EPA is an honor and a privilege for us. Our accomplishments provide tangible proof that hard work and dedication can make a difference in children’s lives.”



*Children's Environmental Health Excellence  
Award recipients*

This is the first year that the Office of Children’s Health Protection (OCHP) has given out Children’s Environmental Health Excellence Awards. EPA established OCHP in May 1997 to make the protection of children’s health a fundamental goal of public health and environmental protection in the United States. OCHP supports and facilitates Agency efforts to protect children’s health from environmental threats. The awards program recognizes both individuals and organizations for their activities in outreach, education, and intervention that protect children from environmental health risks.

Join us as we celebrate this award, for it is only through your ongoing support that WE ACT will be able to continue its work of improving the health and living conditions of children in Northern Manhattan.