

2007 EJ/AIR WORKSHOP COLLABORATIVE TRACK CASE STUDY

Case History Title: From Assessment to Action: Hudson Hill Community
Harambee House/Citizens For Environmental Justice

Impacted Community

Hudson Hill is a small neighborhood located in the Southeast Region of the United States in the City of Savannah, Georgia. It is an old community on the northwest part of the city, near the Georgia Port and the Savannah River. Hudson Hill is the neighbor to at least 17 industrial facilities with International Paper being the major source of air emissions for several decades. On its southern border is a major thoroughfare with constant heavy commercial truck traffic and is slated for expansion over the next few years. Hudson Hill is approximately 98 percent African American with a new Latin immigrant population that is growing fast. The population is approximately 883 residents.

Thirty-three percent of the population is estimated to be employed with 43 percent high school graduates and 22 percent having some high school, no diploma. The household income in 2005 was:

less than 15,000 = 28%

15-25,000 = 21%

25,000-35,000 = 14%

The estimated population living at or below the poverty line is over 30%.

Problems Affecting the Community

The Hudson Hill Community has been affected by the past practices of primarily International Paper. Thousands of pounds of certain air pollutants have been emitted over the past several decades. Residents continually complain of night and early morning releases of substances that damage the paint on their cars and homes – and believed to have negatively affected their health, the air and the soil. Air pollution is a major issue with dioxin topping the list of concerns.

A lack of scientific data, validated by trusted researchers and experts is affecting how residents, elected officials and other stakeholders perceive the problems and potential solutions.

Major health concerns are prevalent and include cancer of various types, respiratory diseases (particularly asthma), skin disorders and gastro-intestinal problems. According to school nurses, asthma is a primary cause of high absenteeism in the public schools. ADD and low academic performance have been identified by parents as a major

challenge that need to be addressed immediately to help change the children's development.

Partnerships

A partnership of 11 organizations and individuals was formed in 2004 to help address the problems and challenges in the Hudson Hill Community. The partnership included:

- The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
- Environmental Protection Division (State)
- Chatham County Health Department
- Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (City)
- Savannah State University
- Eastside Concerned Citizens
- Auto Works
- Tools for Change – Savannah
- Clark-Atlanta University
- Ultimate Magazine
- City Councilman Van Johnson
- Hudson Hill Residents
- US EPA – Region IV

Major Challenges in Overcoming the Problems

- internal community division/common vision
- expansion of partnership to include industry
- credible data

Overcoming the Challenges

The community continues to engage itself in overcoming their major challenges.

- New leadership has been elected and is attempting to develop a master plan for development in collaboration with key stakeholders
- Hudson Hill in collaboration with its partners continues to conduct outreach to the neighboring industry(s). International Paper agreed to serve on a community working group that is engaged through ATSDR in a health consultation with the aim of identifying potential pollutants of concern, exposure pathways and potential impacts to health and environment

In addition, the Collaborative Problem Solving Project funded by EPA Office of Environmental Justice produced a Comprehensive Action Plan that presents recommendations in four areas of concern: Environmental Health, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Job Training and Revitalization. The report's

recommendations are supported by many residents and is being presented to the Hudson Hill Neighborhood Association Board of Directors for their endorsement for implementation.

Tools

- Community Based Participatory Action and Research
- Elements of the Collaborative Problem Solving Model
- Community Interns
- House meetings for residents
- Community driven activities including health fairs, health screenings, trainings, site visits/exchanges with peer communities (Regenesis of Spartanburg, SC)
- Food
- Involvement of youth
- CPS/CARE grants

Major Successes

- Health consultation being conducted by ATSDR
- Development of Comprehensive Action Plan
- International Paper participation in ATSDR working group for the Health Consultation
- CEMA (Chatham Emergency Management Association) agreement to develop community emergency response plan and conduct evacuation simulations
- Operation of the warning siren indicating emergency and/or emission
- Attention brought to the community of its issues
- Empowerment of women leaders
- Training of young people

Community Leader Bio: Dr. Mildred McClain is a teacher by love and choice. She has over 30 years of teaching and organizing experience. She has served as the Executive Director of the Harambee House/Citizens For Environmental Justice for the past 17 years. Dr. McClain is the founder of the Black Youth Leadership Development Institute which will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2008.

As an environmental justice organizer, Dr. McClain has traveled extensively throughout the United States and abroad advocating for environmental justice, neighborhood by neighborhood. She served as an official Community Based Organization delegate of the World Conference Against Racism and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, both held in South Africa. She presented testimony to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland further introduction the Environmental Justice landscape for inclusion in their environmental and human rights agenda.

Dr. Mildred McClain is a leading activist on issues related to nuclear weapons production, transportation of nuclear waste, non-proliferation and public participation in

the decision making processes of military and federal facilities. Dr. McClain served as a co-chair of Congressman James Clyburn's National Environmental Policy Commission for four years. She is also a Bannerman Fellow and received the Keystone Award for Leadership in the Environmental Justice field of work.