

## Summary: Post-Sandy Funder Briefing--Series I

**Funder Briefing:** #16

**Date:** March 18, 2013

**Topic:** Update on Environmental Justice Issues in the Aftermath of Sandy

**Speakers:** Leigh Gibson, Senior Program Officer - The Fund for New Jersey;

Nicky Sheats, Esq. PhD, Director - Thomas Edison State College, The Center for the Urban Environment & member of New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance;

Ana Baptista, Director of Environmental and Planning Programs - Ironbound Community Corporation;

Debbie Mans, Executive Director - NY/NJ Baykeeper;

Debra Coyle McFadden, Assistant Director - NJ Work Environment Council

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### **HIGHLIGHTS**

**Urban Communities update** - Leigh Gibson - [The Fund for New Jersey](#)

- [Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.](#), hired by HUD, published data recently that determined Jersey City and Hoboken were the 4th and 5th most damaged zip codes in the state when calculated by the number of FEMA registrants. Newark homes flood with water from rivers that are known to be contaminated. Yet we are not seeing the level of media coverage that the shoreline has received.

**Newark's Toxic Flood** - Ana Baptista - [Ironbound Community Corporation](#) (Newark, NJ)

- Communities of "environmental concern" mean communities that are low-income, that have a concentration of environmental burden, and can be urban or rural. Social, health and environmental vulnerabilities that already exist within the community - a storm like Sandy exacerbates those vulnerabilities.
- Dense residential area mixed in with a concentrated industrial sites and use along the Passaic River, which is also a [Superfund](#) site.
- A storm surge of 8- to 10-feet brought toxins and sewage into Newark homes, having first washed through industrial facilities, such as silk and paint manufacturer, and through active [brownfield](#) sites.
- There were and are challenges with communication, evacuation, clean up recovery efforts, etc. and people are suffering disproportionate environmental exposures.
- Vulnerable communities need to be targeted for enhanced resources and innovative solutions - think about how hard it is to rebuild in better resourced communities?
  - Homes are not insured, compromised health, undocumented, language barriers, public housing, etc.
  - Both active and blighted properties exist on brownfields. Exposure, economic blight and other rippling effects in neighborhoods
- Rebuilding:
  - Don't exacerbate underlying vulnerabilities - make sure environmental policies are in place and are not skirted for the sake of rapid recovery
  - Need to include community in conversations and decision making process
  - Limited access and mobility - we'll have the same problems if these are not taken into consideration

- Green infrastructure requires a lot more collaboration in order to implement in socially and environmentally vulnerable communities

How funders can help:

- Funders can direct resources to organizations close to the ground/on the ground, to support - cooking meals in public housing, door to door, long term planning and resiliency funding often goes to policy think tanks but shouldn't be in lieu of supporting the continued work on the ground and community level as they work on solutions

#### **Water Contamination** - *Debbie Mans* - [NY/NJ Baykeeper](#)

- Storm surge caused 3 separate oil spills in the tidal waterway between NJ and Staten Island - tanks collapsed when surge overtopped the berms around the tanks
  - Woodbridge - 378K gallons of diesel oil was released, including waste oil
  - Carteret - 10K gallons of biodiesel released
  - Linden - 5K refined oil released
- Raw sewage spills in northern NJ - sanitary wastewater is combined with storm water pipes and overloads when it rains, so there are discharges.
  - 2 major plants - Passaic Valley Sewerage Commissioners (Newark) (5th largest in country - 350M gallons per day) - equipment was completely flooded and entire plant went down and weren't at capacity for several weeks. **7 billion gallons of untreated wastewater was released.**
  - Middlesex County Utilities Authority (Sayreville) - plant was fine but 3 pump stations went down so water from houses was not moved into plant. Temporary bypasses were installed but **750 million gallons were released.**
    - Clamming industry has been shut down in the area because of this for several months - fishermen have had to move to find other work
- **It took several days for the public to be notified that the contaminants were in the water.** People had been wading through their yards and basements, not realizing there were high counts of bacteria and pathogens in the water.

Preparedness:

- Do we have emergency preparedness in place and do those plans account for climate change mitigation and continuing extreme weather events, sea level rise, etc.? We have a lot of our critical infrastructure on the coast - do we need to think about moving that to safer locations?
- Do we understand how we can communicate to our vulnerable communities - mapping overlays with demographics and floodplains
- How do we educate public about what money is coming in and how it's being used? Public engagement in those decisions would be transparent - like buyouts. How do we get info from the ground to the decision makers?

#### **Labor and Safety** - *Debra Coyle McFadden* - [NJ Work Environment Council \(WEC\)](#)

- WEC is an alliance of labor, community and environmental organizations working together for healthy sustainable job environments that tries to protect front line workers by making workplaces safer.
- It's the most vulnerable workers recruited to do the most dangerous work and often don't have the necessary health and safety training or equipment and are walking into sites with chemical spills, water contamination, sewage, lead, asbestos, hazardous mold, etc. We also learned some contractors were hiring and not paying the workers.
- During 9/11, there was a failure to help volunteer workers with proper respiratory and safety equipment. With Sandy, WEC developed a basic hazard awareness flyer distributed widely within days of Sandy.

Getting Critical Hazard info out to the public immediately helps to keep Sandy from being a second disaster. PSAs developed and should be aired later this month.

- WEC sent highly trained workers into the field along coastal region - did formal trainings with volunteers, informal trainings with day laborers, and Occupy Sandy participants. WEC also developed volunteer network of health and safety professionals who could be contacted with questions.

**Race and Rebuilding** - Nicky Sheats - [The Center for the Urban Environment](#) / [New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance](#)

- We're not talking about race and we will not make good policies if we continue to avoid talking about race. Funders can catalyze conversations about race around recovery and climate change - including low-income issues.

Examples of why discussions about race are important:

- Cumulative impacts: multiple pollutants emitted by multiple sources. Highly correlated with race and income, amount of people of color or low income people go up, the more pollution. Need to make sure we're not perpetuating this correlation by asking questions of rebuilding plans:
  - Is a new facility going to pollute?
  - Is lot of pollution in neighborhood already?
  - What are the demographics?
  - How do we minimize pollution coming from a facility or NOT build it there until we can minimize pollution in this neighborhood?
- Discrimination in lending. This may be happening in NJ and we're not looking at it. Funders could also help to look at this research.
  - More people of color displaced in Katrina, fewer returned due to housing discrimination.
  - If it's harder to get loans as person of color, then recovery will be more difficult.
- Adaptation & mitigation
  - Elderly, young, chronically ill, homeless, disabled, low-income communities and communities of color should all be protected.
  - Mitigation policies should not detrimentally affect communities of color/low-income.
  - Funding community can help spread best practices to help protect these populations.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- Nicky Sheats recommendations for further reading on Environmental Justice: [Dr. Robert Bullard](#) and [Dr. Beverly Wright](#)
- State Action plan released last week: The \$6 million of Community Development Block Grant Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) money that will be administered by HUD is the equivalent of 300 years of typical CDBG money.

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Beginning on the first Monday after Hurricane Sandy struck New Jersey, The Council of New Jersey Grantmakers began hosting weekly conference calls for grantmakers in-state and nationwide, facilitated by CNJG President Nina Stack, to discuss their response to Sandy and strategies facing NJ as a result of the storm. Each conference call briefing offered expert guest speakers who represented government agencies (FEMA, HUD, HHS, etc.), national philanthropic leaders, expert psychologists with experience in PTSD, planners and community redevelopment leaders, and representatives from NJ's Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, among others. The twenty-five audio files and written summaries are available at: <http://cnjg.org/hurricane-sandy>