



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

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Member Organizations

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*Youth
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Citywide Environmental Justice coalition calls on Mayor and Governor to protect low-income waterfront communities from potential toxic exposures during hurricane storm surges

New York, NY (October 29, 2012) – The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) applauds the Bloomberg and Cuomo Administrations for their Hurricane Sandy disaster preparations. We echo the call to our fellow New Yorkers to stay out of harm's way and hope that damage to our City is minimal. However, NYC-EJA remains concerned that toxic environmental risks remain for both Sandy and future major storms, particularly in waterfront low-income communities of color. NYC-EJA urges the Mayor and Governor to take assertive steps to minimize the toxic contamination risk exposures these communities face – risks posed by dated waterfront policies and inadequate data collection.

Since 2010, NYC-EJA has highlighted the threats presented in the Significant Maritime and Industrial Areas (SMIA) zones. SMIA are zones created by the NYC Waterfront Revitalization Program, which encourage the concentration of heavy industrial uses and polluting infrastructure in six neighborhoods: Sunset Park, Newtown Creek, the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Red Hook, the South Bronx and Staten Island's North Shore.

These communities are not only clustered with the City's heaviest industrial and infrastructure uses – they all also happen to be in storm surge zones. Storm surge zones (now popularly known as Zone A) are waterfront properties most at risk for water surges, flooding and inundation during nor'easters, hurricanes and tropical storms. The City of New York has not analyzed the cumulative contamination exposure risks associated with clusters of heavy industrial uses in such vulnerable locations. Moreover, the SMIA communities are also populated with some of the City's poorest residents, New Yorkers saddled with numerous public health burdens, from asthma and other respiratory diseases to inadequate health insurance coverage. (For more information about these zones & risks, please visit

http://dl.dropbox.com/u/4969505/NYC-EJA_WaterfrontJusticeProject_102912.pdf)

As with Hurricane Katrina, the great concern is that storm surges could sweep through these clusters of heavy industry and infrastructure, spreading unsecured heavy chemicals throughout these waterfront communities – and beyond – leaving brownfields and worse

in their wake. Two of NYC's federal Superfund sites are within and adjacent to SMIA's – and they are not the only toxic exposure threats. The web-link above shows several maps of SMIA zones overlaid with data culled from government agency environmental databases identifying possible contamination risks – all in storm surge zones.

To protect New Yorkers from the cumulative risk exposures posed by SMIA clusters of heavy chemical uses in storm surge zones, City and State government must enact reforms to make these industrial waterfront communities more climate adaptable and resilient. NYC's Waterfront Revitalization Program is in the midst of an amendment process by the NYC Planning Commission for City Council approval. This Program must be amended to require risk assessments for industrial waterfront projects in storm surge zones to reduce toxic contamination risks. More importantly, government must partner with community-based environmental justice groups and local businesses to identify “best management practices” to reduce potential chemical risk exposures in storm surge zones along NYC's working waterfronts – along with the necessary resources for local businesses to meet these best management practices and protect local residents, workers and businesses.

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