



Environmental Justice Quarterly

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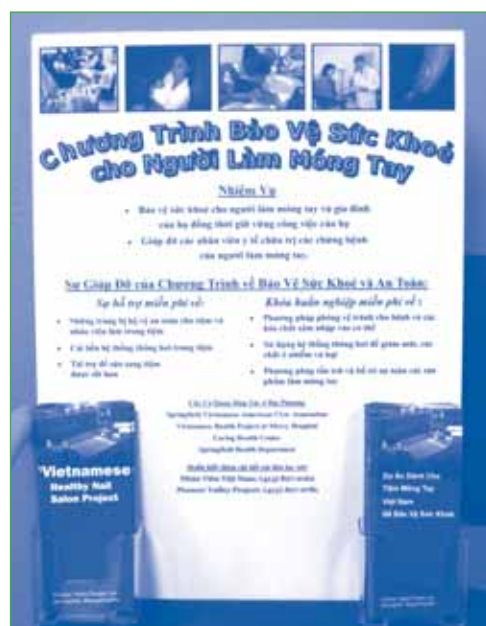
Winter 2007

Nail Salons: An Environmental Justice Issue?

"Close your eyes and walk past one of the city's countless nail salons and you might think you're passing an auto body paint shop. That's because many of the chemicals are the same, albeit in smaller quantities." That is the opening line of a recent article in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (December 4, 2006), and yet it could have easily referred to any city in the United States.

Across the country, newspapers have published many disturbing articles, and television news reports have shown the potential hazards of nail care products. Those who are most at risk are the nail salon workers, or "nail technicians," who are exposed to the chemicals in these products 10 to 12 hours a day, six to seven days a week. Many of these nail technicians are predominantly low-income, people of color, uninsured, women of child-bearing age. They are recent immigrants or refugees who speak little or no English and are afraid to come forward with their health conditions. A few can grasp the possible links between their work and their health conditions, and do not know where to go for help. Others just accept health risks as an occupational hazard. There is also a growing concern among customers who fear they are being exposed to chemicals while getting manicures and pedicures.

The nail salon industry is a booming business, responsible for \$6.43 billion in revenue in 2005. In the past five years, the number of salons rose 17



Outreach poster for PVP's nail salon project.

percent to 57,838, and the number of licensed technicians rose 23 percent to 380,635. That means, on average, 40 new licenses are issued by local governments daily. Ninety-five percent of the technicians are female, and almost two-thirds are people of color. Vietnamese technicians dominate 39 percent of the industry and make up 80 percent of the nail salon workforce in California.*

In 2001, EPA's Nail Salon Project identified at least 26 "chemicals of concern" that are hazardous and highly volatile. The health effects range from mild skin irritation to respiratory illnesses like occupationally induced asthma to reproductive disorders, cancer, and

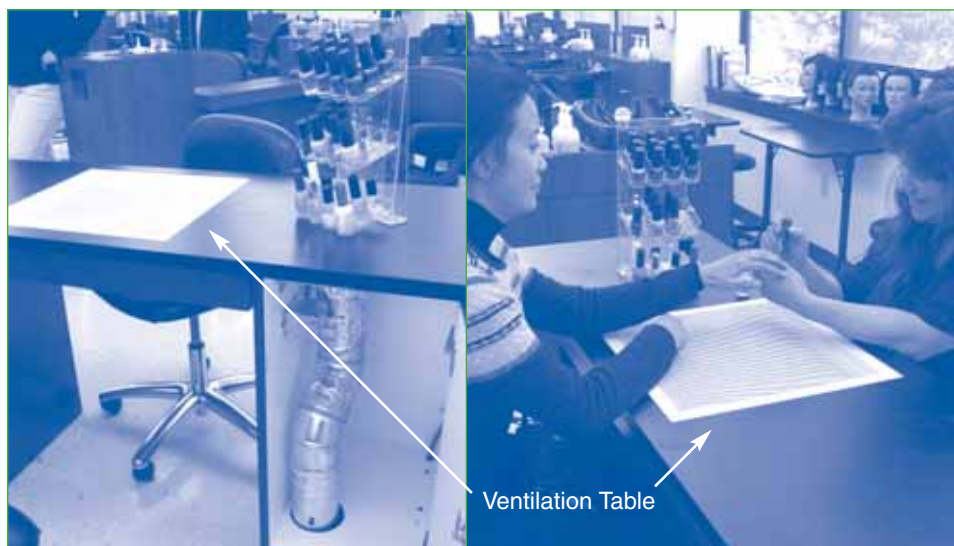
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*Source: Nails Magazine 2005-2006 Big Book

Nail Salons: An Environmental Justice Issue?

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This model salon is equipped with three ventilation tables that draw the nail products' chemical vapors down and completely away from customers and nail technicians.

even death. Some of the most widely used and popular artificial nail products have no established exposure limits. Many other chemicals are unregulated, and little is known about their adverse health effects.

Although the regulatory oversight for cosmetics like nail care products lies with the Food and Drug Administration, EPA has taken initial steps to address this emerging environmental and public health issue through outreach, education, and training. Through engaging the Vietnamese community, local and state regulators, the health and research communities, non-profit community organizations, and industry, EPA strives to ensure that these efforts provide long-term sustainable solutions and do not negatively impact salon businesses. The Agency released a booklet on nail salon best practices in 2003 and plans to publish an updated version in 2007.

"We believe that the chemicals in nail care products and their health effects on the workers is an emerging environmental justice issue," says Barry E. Hill, Director, Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ). In 2004, OEJ awarded a \$100,000 grant to the Pioneer Valley Project (PVP), a community-based

organization in Springfield, Massachusetts, to form collaborative partnerships across the state to address the potential environmental and public health issues in operating nail salons.

PVP has creatively leveraged its resources by working with state and local partners such as the Springfield Health Department, the Caring Health Center, Vietnamese community groups, the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative (LPVEC), the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Division of Occupational Safety, and the University of Massachusetts Toxic Use Reduction Institute.

PVP's education and outreach project has resulted in the construction of the

first model salon in the United States. As part of a new Cosmetology Program, the LPVEC invested in building a model salon that is fully equipped with proper ventilating systems, personal protective equipment, and other safety features. This salon will provide hands-on training to salon owners, technicians, vocational students and teachers, and others. PVP is developing a training curriculum to educate nail salon owners and technicians about the biological and chemical hazards of conducting nail services. The training will provide guidelines on how to reduce the use of hazardous nail products and to properly store, handle, and dispose of those that cannot be reduced.

PVP is also working with local health-care providers, like the Caring Health Center, to adequately diagnose symptoms and to communicate with and treat patients with health ailments related to chemical exposure in nail salons. EPA Region 10 recently invited a representative from PVP to provide a briefing on the project and facilitate a focus group to possibly initiate similar activities and partnerships in Washington State.

Altogether, PVP's outreach efforts, training program, model salon, and other aspects of the project make it ideally replicable in other states that want to address nail salons as an environmental justice issue. "Through successful partnerships like PVP's, we hope to continue to raise awareness of this issue," says Hill.



The Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative recently constructed the first model nail salon in the United States. (Before and after photos)

NEJAC Update

The National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) provides EPA with timely, salient advice and recommendations on broad public policy environmental justice issues.

In August 2006, NEJAC provided its advice and recommendations on the following reports: (1) *Future Mechanisms for Stakeholder Involvement and Engagement to Address Environmental Justice*; (2) *2005 Gulf Coast Hurricanes and Vulnerable Populations: Recommendations for Future Disaster Preparedness and Response*; and (3) *Unintended Impacts of Redevelopment and Revitalization Efforts in Five Environmental Justice Communities*.

Following NEJAC's recommendations in its *Future Mechanisms* report, Deputy Administrator Marcus Peacock decided to renew NEJAC's charter in September 2006. NEJAC recommended that EPA utilize this

federal advisory council as its primary mechanism for continuing to obtain public policy advice on environmental justice issues. EPA renewed the NEJAC charter for a customary two years, in accordance with the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

While EPA is carefully reviewing all of the recommendations provided, some of the suggestions made on the *Gulf Coast Hurricanes* report have already been implemented. This report included recommendations to address 14 issues of concern, which were distilled into three major areas: (1) enhance EPA's disaster preparedness and response procedures; (2) facilitate risk communications and environmental health response; and (3) foster environmentally sound redevelopment. EPA has already taken steps to address each of these areas. Most notably, EPA is modifying the emer-

gency management Incident Command System to enhance the Agency's ability to address environmental justice issues. On November 2, 2006, Susan Parker Bodine, Assistant Administrator for Solid Waste and Emergency Response; Granta Y. Nakayama, Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance; and Thomas P. Dunne, Associate Administrator for Homeland Security, issued the memorandum on incorporating environmental justice considerations into EPA's disaster preparedness and response procedures. This memorandum outlines changes to the Agency's Incident Command Management Handbook that will direct key incident command officers to ensure that environmental justice issues are addressed in a timely manner and that resources would be dedicated for that effort.

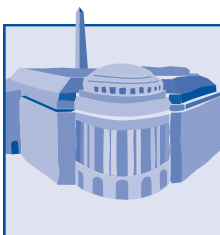
Environmental Justice Awards Program

A new award program from EPA's Office of Environmental Justice will recognize businesses that undertake environmental justice initiatives to make a positive impact in communities. The Achievement in Environmental Justice Award will recognize industry organizations, such as a member of business or a member of industry, for achievements in addressing environmental justice issues or achieving the goals of environmental justice in ways that positively impact a community. Entries must be postmarked by March 31, 2007. The award will be presented in September 2007 at the National Association of Manufacturers Annual Meeting in Washington, DC.

The award competition is open to all industry organizations within the United States. The nominated entity must have reached a significant environmental justice milestone or accomplishment within the past five years (2001-2006). Nominations will be judged on the following six criteria:

- Innovation (10 points)
- Corporate Responsibility (20 points)
- Community, Equity, and Public Involvement (20 points)
- Partnerships and Collaboration (10 points)
- Environmental Justice Integration (20 points)
- Demonstrated Results/Effectiveness/Sustainability (20 points)

Self-nominations are allowed and expected, and there is no entry fee. For more details on how to enter and the judging process, visit www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/index.html.



Headquarters Update Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation

Each quarter, the Headquarters Update features a specific office at EPA Headquarters, highlighting recent activities, programs, and policies aimed at addressing a variety of environmental justice issues.

OPEI's Smart Growth Program Makes Gains for Environmental Justice

For communities facing urban decline and suburban sprawl, the Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation's (OPEI's) Smart Growth program promotes development that invests in town-centered, transit- and pedestrian-oriented infrastructure. The Smart Growth program also serves communities by encouraging the preservation of open space, revitalizing forgotten city centers and older suburbs, and supporting Brownfield initiatives, which by their very nature are inextricably linked to environmental justice.

"There's an obvious interface between the Smart Growth program and environmental justice," says OPEI's senior counsel Robert Wolcott. He cites an example of these linkages in the city of Atlanta. During the 1996 Olympic Games, the city enhanced public transit, closed downtown to private cars, and encouraged businesses to promote telecommuting and alternative work hours. This course of action for reducing traffic congestion had the unintended effect of reducing hospitalizations for asthmatic attacks in the city, particularly among children, by 20 percent during that time. "By reducing the number of vehicle trips needed and the walkability of communities, you can reduce the localized air pollution and accompanying health impacts," states Wolcott.

OPEI's Smart Growth program is a member of the Smart Growth Network—a national coalition formed by EPA in 1996 in response to increasing community concerns about the need for new ways to grow while boosting the economy, protecting the environment, and enhancing community vitality. In 2001, a subgroup of the network (on which OPEI participates) released the report *Affordable Housing and Smart Growth: Making the Connections*. The approaches profiled in the report demonstrate how smart growth and affordable housing strategies, when applied together, can lead to more opportunities for development than when the concepts are applied solely on their own.

The Smart Growth program also played a major role in the development of the publication, *Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation*. In 2004, the publication was translated into Spanish to broaden the audience who could access the information.

In 2006, EPA's National Awards for Smart Growth Achievement featured an awards category for "equitable development," which highlights smart growth's role in meeting the needs of underserved communities. The category was added to last year's awards after Joe Brooks, of PolicyLink and a member of the 2003 external review panel for the awards, suggested that EPA feature a category that recognizes models for fairness in planning and development practices. On November 15, 2006, EPA announced the city of Chicago as the winner in this category. The city supported the development of Bethel New Life Center, which provides employment services, child care, retail space, and banking in a "green" building erected on a former brownfield site in the neighborhood of West Garfield Park.

Smart growth and environmental justice both recognize the interconnectedness of the built environment to the overall economic, social, and natural health of communities. OPEI's Smart Growth program has made some gains in linking these two areas. However, the true vision of environmental justice can not be achieved until underserved communities and vulnerable groups are equal partners in the process for fostering communities that are healthy, vibrant, and diverse.

To this end, the pace of achieving the objectives of smart growth and environmental justice can be accelerated by:

- Incorporating smart growth into the Agency's environmental justice training.
- Featuring "equitable development" as a permanent category for the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement.
- Building new partnerships with organizations and institutions that reach out to minority audiences such as the National Urban League or Operation Hope.
- Increasing education and outreach to untapped audiences, underserved communities, or vulnerable populations, especially at the New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, sponsored by the Local Government Commission and Pennsylvania State University.

Regional Corner

Region 8

This column explores exciting environmental initiatives under way in EPA regional offices. Each quarter, we focus on a different regional program. EPA Region 8 covers Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, and 27 tribal nations.



Region 8 Fights for Clean Drinking Water in Rural Colorado

One of Region 8's foremost environmental justice concerns is to ensure that all residents have access to clean and safe drinking water. Here, as in many other parts of the country, a number of communities obtain their drinking water from privately owned wells rather than from public water systems. Although the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 regulates public water systems, many private wells are untested and unregulated due to the small number of people served by the individual systems.

In Colorado, two rural communities were identified as being at risk for exposure to contaminated drinking water: the migrant farm worker population and the San Luis Valley community. Due to the remote location and outdated infrastructure of their well systems, the communities' water may contain a variety of contaminants that affect water quality, including lead, biological contaminants, pesticides, and nitrates from agricultural runoff. Knowing the serious health risks associated with water contamination, Region 8 set out to address this issue by implementing two environmental justice programs that would engage the communities, instill awareness, and provide a healthy drinking water supply.

The Migrant Farm Worker Initiative, led by Region 8's Michael Wenstrom, is the first regional project to target the issue of drinking water safety for this particular minority population. There are approximately 45,000 migrant farm workers in Colorado who reside in nearly 300 widely dispersed camps. With an annual income of about \$7,500, the average migrant farm worker faces substandard living conditions, high risks of injury, and poor healthcare.

In 2002, testing showed that the drinking water at one camp had nitrate levels that were more than double

the maximum contaminant level (MCL) allowed in drinking water. That same year, Region 8 launched its Migrant Farm Worker Initiative to provide free testing of drinking water to any interested camp at no charge to the owner, operator, or lessee. The first major goal of

the project was to make residents and owners of the camps aware that well maintenance (including water quality monitoring) is their responsibility, and one that must be taken seriously. The second goal was for EPA to take steps to provide safe drinking water for residents of the camps and to establish itself as a supportive and trusted resource in the community.

With the help of EPA and its partners, the Colorado Department of Health and the Environment and the Colorado Rural Water Association, the Migrant Farm Worker Initiative has been extremely successful. In one camp located in Gilcrest, Colorado, EPA and its partners installed a water treatment system that uses reverse osmosis to purify the water. The system has brought the community's water within the Safe Drinking Water Act standards; nitrates have been reduced from about 20 parts per million (ppm) to below 5 ppm and total dissolved solids from about 800 ppm to less than 100 ppm. These encouraging results have led to a press release and radio interview, which in turn have brought about increased participation in the program. The success of the Migrant Farm Worker Initiative has not come easily, however. "It's a

real challenge, and it takes an enormous amount of work," says Wenstrom. His advice to other organizations is to be persistent. "You really need to stay with it and understand that you can get there."

The second environmental justice program developed by Region 8 addressed drinking water safety in the San



Migrant Farm Labor Camp Water Treatment System, Gilcrest, Colorado.

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Region 8 Fights for Clean Drinking Water in Rural Colorado

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Luis Valley. Initiated in June 2005, the San Luis Valley Drinking Water Well Project is the first regional project to provide free sampling and analysis of drinking water from household wells. San Luis Valley is located in one of the oldest communities in the state and has a predominantly Latino population. About 30 percent of its residents are not served by the public water system and instead obtain their drinking water from private wells, many of which are more than 100 years old, increasing the risk of water contamination.

Led by Region 8's Tami Thomas-Burton, the project aimed from the start to engage the community as much as possible to create a program that would continue to benefit the area even after EPA was no longer there. "We needed to get people invested in the program and in the habit of doing these tests," says Thomas-Burton. Therefore, educating local residents and community leaders on the importance of well maintenance was a crucial part of the project. EPA held eight listening sessions and two community meetings, during which testing kits were handed out to local families.

Over the course of two months, EPA tested the water quality of 417 household wells. Testers traveled in a mobile lab equipped with a testing apparatus that could return bacterial test results within 48 hours of collection. Tests for arsenic, pesticides, and nitrates had to be shipped back to the EPA lab. If a household's drinking water was found to be positive for *E. coli* or coliform bacteria, EPA immediately instructed the residents on how to perform shock chlorination on their well and how to identify the source of the contamination. "It was very labor intensive," says Thomas-Burton. "We visited six counties in this rural area and had to drive to various locations. But we were able to get instantaneous results, and community participants really liked that."

Another challenge was meeting the cost of the testing, which ranged from \$150 to \$250 per well. While EPA was able to test every household's water for bacteria, it had to limit testing for arsenic, pesticides, and nitrates due to lab capacity constraints. "There are a large number of low-income family households (according to the 2000 Census) that live in the San Luis valley, and so the affordability piece is a big factor for the future of the program," says Thomas-Burton.

While significant obstacles do exist, EPA is optimistic that the program will endure and will continue to benefit families who currently face water contamination. Region 8 will soon perform an extensive review of the program, which will include making call-backs to each household

to see what kind of corrective action has been taken, following test results. Region 8 will also develop a model plan to be used as a template for other regional offices' environmental justice programs.

The success of both the Migrant Farm Worker Initiative and the San Luis Valley Drinking Water Well Project in instilling awareness, providing outreach education, and supplying affordable technology solutions represents a significant step forward in Region 8's battle for environ-



The San Luis Valley Drinking Water Well Project provides free sampling for household wells like this one.

mental justice. "A lot of folks forget that household water wells aren't regulated at the state or federal level, and we could potentially have families and children drinking contaminated water," says Art Palomares, Region 8 Director of the Policy, Information Management and Environmental Justice Program. "If we have knowledge that children and pregnant women could be drinking contaminated water, we really can't allow that—we have to reach out. And here, we met our goal in reaching out."

Collaboration for Change in Pacoima, California

The community of Pacoima is located in Los Angeles, California, northeast of the San Fernando Valley. Since the mid-1990s, Pacoima has benefited from the efforts of a local, community-based, non-profit organization called Pacoima Beautiful. Pacoima Beautiful is dedicated to creating resident-driven programs to improve the community's health and environmental quality. Already, the organization has addressed a wide range of environmental hazards that threaten the community's health, including congested freeways, a nearby airport, and abandoned hazardous waste sites. In 2000, Pacoima Beautiful developed a Lead Poisoning Prevention Community Program to target the specific problem of lead poisoning in the area. Four years after its inception, the program received a Collaborative Problem-Solving (CPS) grant of \$100,000 from the Office of Environmental Justice, which has provided the means for significant improvement and expansion.

Lead poisoning first came to the organization's attention in 1999, when one of its university partners discovered

that the northeast Valley area was at particularly high risk for lead poisoning. Most of the houses in the area were built before 1978 and contain lead-based paint. Exposure to lead is linked to a wide range of health problems, particularly in infants, children, and pregnant women. Upon learning of this significant health threat to the area's 98,000 residents, Pacoima Beautiful decided to take action.

Grants and organizational support from universities and organizations—such as the Washington-based Alliance for Healthy Homes (formerly the Alliance to End Child Lead Poisoning)—allowed for the creation of an initial partnership in 2000, featuring a *promotora* (Spanish for health educators) training program. The *promotoras* received extensive training on the health risks associated with lead exposure and became leaders in educating the community. In a process that included meeting with more than 120 physicians and health care providers, Pacoima Beautiful and the *promotoras* have been able to educate more than 300 families on primary prevention of lead poisoning and asthma triggers.

The 2004 CPS grant allowed Pacoima Beautiful to expand on the program by increasing the number of community residents with access to educational tools and screening services for lead poisoning. The grant also helped the organization further develop its partnerships and improve resource networks to enrich educational outreach opportunities.

"We have a consortium of health care providers and university partners coming from various disciplines," says Marlene Grossman, Executive Director and Principal Investigator for Pacoima Beautiful. "We all come from very different perspectives, but each of the partners takes this very seriously and believes that, through collaboration, we can prevent lead poisoning in many children and prevent risk for many others. With this partnership, we can work on a much larger scale."

One of the main goals of the partnership is to create long-term, multi-organizational engagement, which will support community health revitalization even after EPA is no longer involved. To this end, Grossman believes that partnering with universities is crucial. "University partners provide us with students, interns, and technology that we didn't previously have. We learn a great deal from them. I think that a very key aspect is having the university faculty in the partnership—they are invested in being around for the long haul."

The Lead Poisoning Prevention Community Program continues to be a great success, reaching 2,500 people a year through outreach. The *promotora* model is spreading throughout the country, according to Grossman, who sees it as an excellent way to learn about environmental justice and health issues while actively engaging residents in the process of improving their community. "We have all listened enough to believe that there is no safe level of lead in children's blood," she says. "The challenge now is to communicate what we know to all kinds of other communities."



Pacoima Beautiful is dedicated to educating the community and working for environmental justice, and seeks self-determination for all residents.



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