

Communities for a Better Environment, LA Youth Making the Connection: Climate Change, Local Fossil Fuel Impacts and Alternatives

An Environmental Justice Grant Success Story

Project Overview

Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) is a California based environmental health and justice organization which promotes clean air and water and advocates for toxic-free communities. The Connection project focused on youth in the disadvantaged community of South East Los Angeles. The project educated youth about the local and global impacts of fossil fuel use on their community and other environmental justice communities, enabled youth to carry out simple alternative energy projects such as installation of photovoltaic panels and involved youth in local fossil fuel policy and regulatory processes.

The Community

The community of focus for this project, funded by a [\\$25,000 Environmental Justice Small Grant from EPA](#), is the area of South East Los Angeles (SELA). Located in the northern portion of LA's industrial corridor, South East Los Angeles is home to vibrant communities of predominantly Latino working class families. The area, which is a major apex of fossil fuel use, hosts an array of power plants, factories, meatpacking plants, oil drilling operations, diesel trucking operations, two ports, and an extensively used goods-movement corridor. Collectively, these industries disproportionately affect the health and well-being of SELA and adjacent communities. Many residents face high rates of asthma, cancer, birth defects, and high infant mortality.

On top of dealing with numerous environmental health hazards, SELA residents cope with extreme nuisance impacts that include constant noise generated from pollution emitting facilities, foul odors, and other irritants that significantly affect their ability to enjoy daily life activities.

Although there are no instant solutions to solving the environmental justice issues South East Los Angeles residents face, the community has a strong desire to bring about change through grassroots mobilization.

Project Description

In 2010, with the support of a \$25,000 Environmental Justice Small Grant from EPA, Communities for a Better Environment conducted a series of fossil fuel youth leadership trainings. The trainings discussed the global and local impacts of fossil fuel use on environmental justice communities and used toxic tours to pinpoint the links between fossil fuel usage and its impacts on the community's health.

It is CBE's mission to use this project as a means to develop the skills and knowledge of youth participants so that they may become effective community leaders.

Results

CBE Youth participated in hands on fossil fuel leadership training sessions and attended multiple events that allowed them opportunities for capacity building.

CBE held a workshop entitled Air Pollution 101, which trains students to monitor emissions from polluters such as oil refineries. The students used the “Bucket Brigade” sampling that uses a bucket to monitor emissions from polluters. Because of the training sessions and technique used, students are now able to identify the effects green house gas emissions have on the local and global community. Nineteen youth participated in this training event.

CBE Youth also participated in grassroots efforts for the United Nations Climate Change Negotiations forum. To prepare for this event, CBE Youth worked in solidarity with the Bus Riders Union, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy and Eastyard Communities for Environmental Justice to hold an action meeting highlighting the I-710 campaign that links the local struggle to the global struggles for real climate change solutions. Over 75 people from several organizations came to support this action.

In addition to these multiple networking opportunities, 15 CBE Youth and adults took a leadership development trip to Mono Lake, CA. During this trip, CBE Youth participants worked with the Mono Lake Committee to understand the human, environmental, and climate change impacts on the Mono Lake natural habitat.

CBE Youth also participated in the Moving Forward Conference by bringing a dozen members and working with core youth members to plan and conduct a workshop on the I- 710 Freeway expansion project, the potential health impacts, and on youth organizing, to approximately 30 conference participants from around the country. CBE Youth worked with youth from Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma.

Opening of New Doors

To gain a greater understanding of how other disadvantaged communities organize to fight against heavy pollution producing industries, CBE brought 30 SELA EJ participants to Northern California to participate in a toxic tour that explored the refinery communities of the City of Richmond.

CBE also conducted an EJ Youth exchange with PODER-San Francisco (People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights) to highlight the work each organization is doing as well as build continuing relationships between each organization’s youth members.

What's Next for CBE

Currently, the South East Los Angeles community lacks access to green infrastructure opportunities. CBE has developed new hands-on training programs to provide youth with an opportunity to learn about alternative energy sources. Through in-depth training sessions, youth will learn how solar panels generate power and calculate how much energy one can get out of a single panel. CBE also plans to invite owners of alternative-powered vehicles to demonstrate to youth the alternatives to using diesel.

Establishing a training program geared towards green infrastructure provides CBE with an opportunity to educate youth and help them educate their communities to reach a new alternative energy future.

LA YOUTH MAKING THE CONNECTION KEY RESULTS

- 19 youth participated in the Air Pollution 101 emission monitoring training session
- EJ youth participated in United Nations Climate Change Negotiation forum
- 30 EJ youth participated in a Bay Area Toxic Tour
- 15 EJ youth and adults participated in a leadership development environmental justice leadership trip to Mono Lake, CA

To learn more about the LA Youth Making the Connection, please visit [Communities for a Better Environment](#) or contact Darryl Molina, Youth Program Coordinator, at (323) 826-9771 ex 102 or dmolina@cbeocal.org.