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legal update



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Rochester Community Environmental Project

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In October 2003, the United States Environmental Protection Agency selected Rochester as one of only four cities in EPA Region 2 to take part in a collaborative project to assess the environmental health of our community. According to the EPA's Durval Thomas, this effort will forge partnerships with stakeholders from various sectors of government, business and the public to create linkages to environmental information and encourage use of Agency compliance assistance programs.

In its role as the federal protector of the environment, the EPA collects a wealth of environmental information about local companies through regulatory oversight and voluntary reporting. Companies track and report their chemical usage, air emissions, waste generation and emergency management practices. This volume of data enables the EPA to take a measured look at local communities and prepare a comparative analysis evaluating and contrasting respective environmental risks and determining ways in which compliance assistance programs can reduce them.

In implementing the Rochester Community Environmental Project, the EPA first studied available local environmental, health, and demographic data to identify environmental risks which could impact public health and undermine community quality of life. Environmental justice and children's health issues received special attention. For a long time the medical community has acknowledged that children are particularly vulnerable to environmental risks. Identifying those risks and protecting children against them is a core goal of the Project.

Similarly, residents of poor neighborhoods often find themselves living with the environmental harms associated with failing businesses, deteriorating neighborhoods, and historical pollution. Identifying these sources is the first step to preventing or remedying negative impact and creating environmental justice. Equally important is ensuring that target audiences receive accurate information in an easy-to-understand format. The EPA has been working with The Center for Environmental Information to explore the creation of a single local source for environmental information. Lorna Midgelow of the Center has been working with the EPA in this effort and welcomes the significant resources which the Agency brings to the Project.

To assist in the information gathering process and ensure a full airing of individual, neighborhood, business, and government concerns, the EPA has met with stakeholders throughout the community. They have conducted more than 160 compliance visits to business, schools and industry and have met with neighborhood leaders in an effort to better understand local needs and environmental issues. In

November, the EPA plans to hold a communitywide meeting to ensure that no one's input is missed and to provide an opportunity for all viewpoints to be heard.

Working with trade groups, the Rochester Business Alliance, the City of Rochester, Monroe County, and the Rochester Green Business Network, the EPA is preparing a report on the state of Rochester's environmental health. When it is released it is anticipated that each of these stakeholders will continue to collaborate with the Agency in crafting a priority hierarchy for action. To assist with implementation and help provide funding for its partners, the EPA has created Community Action for Renewed Environment ("CARE") grants. Eligibility requirements and criteria may be found on the EPA website at www.epa.gov.