

# The Multnomah County PACE EH Community Coalition

The Multnomah County PACE EH Community Coalition is a blossoming network of over 45 community-based organizations, citizen activists, environmental health and environmental justice advocates, and local agencies/public officials committed to improving environmental health and environmental justice awareness and solutions in the communities of Multnomah County. The goals of the coalition include:

- Create and strengthen relationships among individuals and organizations concerned about environmental health and environmental justice.
- Mobilize individuals and local organizations to take an active role in setting an environmental health and environmental justice agenda for their communities.
- Involve communities in planning and decision making about local environmental health and environmental justice issues.
- Integrate data-driven assessments of environmental health and environmental justice concerns with the values and perceptions of communities.
- Promote leadership among environmental health and environmental justice advocates.



The Coalition process is based on a guidance tool developed by environmental health professionals around the country called PACE EH, which stands for Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health. For more information on PACE EH, "The Tool", please refer to our website, [www.PACE.EH.org](http://www.PACE.EH.org)

### 3 Primary Selection Criteria

1. Environmental justice area:
  - a. Large % of people of color
  - b. Low-income
  - c. Disproportionately affected by environmental and health threats
  - d. People with less political power
  - e. Exposure to multiple environmental problems
2. PACE EH support is welcomed by the community
3. Availability of existing data on that area

### First Community Assessment Process and Results

The Multnomah County PACE EH Community Coalition has recently completed its first environmental health assessment. Criteria for selection of the geographic area where the first PACE EH Assessment was conducted were designed to identify a community with multiple exposures to environmental health challenges, yet requires minimal resources to address those challenges.

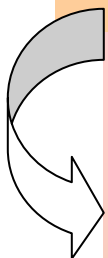
The Assessment Team gathered data and maps documenting the following indicators on communities in Multnomah County. *(see graphics to left on data collection process)*

### Previous Data Reviewed for 2004 EJ Data

- Percent of population below the 100% and 200% of poverty
- Percent of non-white population by census tract
- Cancer risk per million population by census tract
- Potential Brownfield's
- Industries generating hazardous waste
- Superfund sites
- Pre 1950s Housing
- Childhood lead poisoning cases, 1992-2002
- Percent of low birth weight births by census tract, 1996-2000
- Air concentrations of formaldehyde by census tract
- Exposure concentrations for diesel particulate matter
- Exposure concentrations for benzene
- Illegal dumpsites
- Solid waste facilities

### Five Communities In Multnomah County

1. Inner North and Northeast Portland Community (Albina)
2. East County/Rockwood (Gresham-East Multnomah County Area)
3. St Johns'/Peninsula Community of North Portland
4. Northeast Cully and Outer Northeast Portland Community
5. Lents/Outer Southeast Portland Community

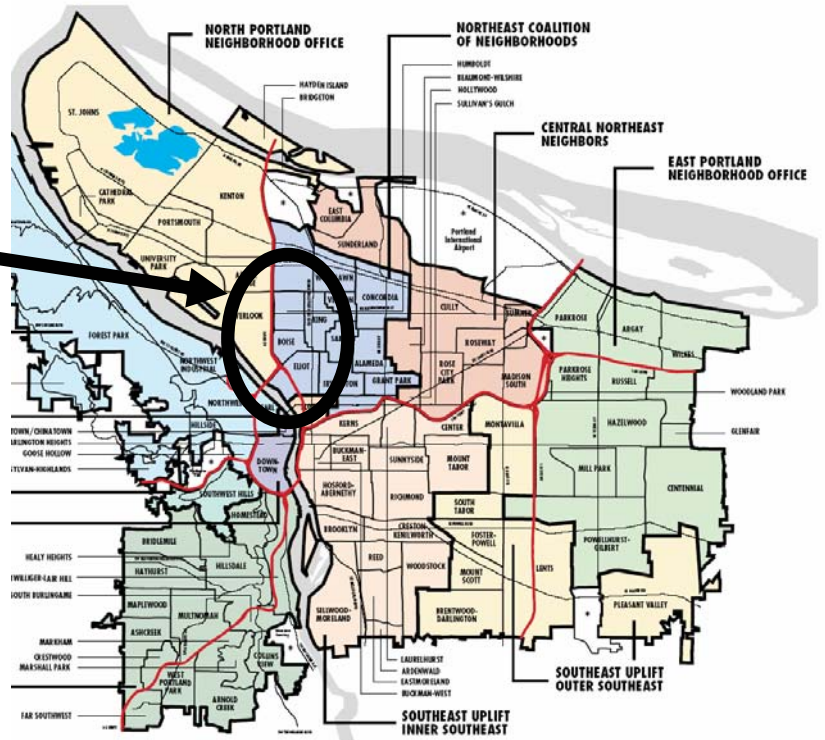


## Community Identification

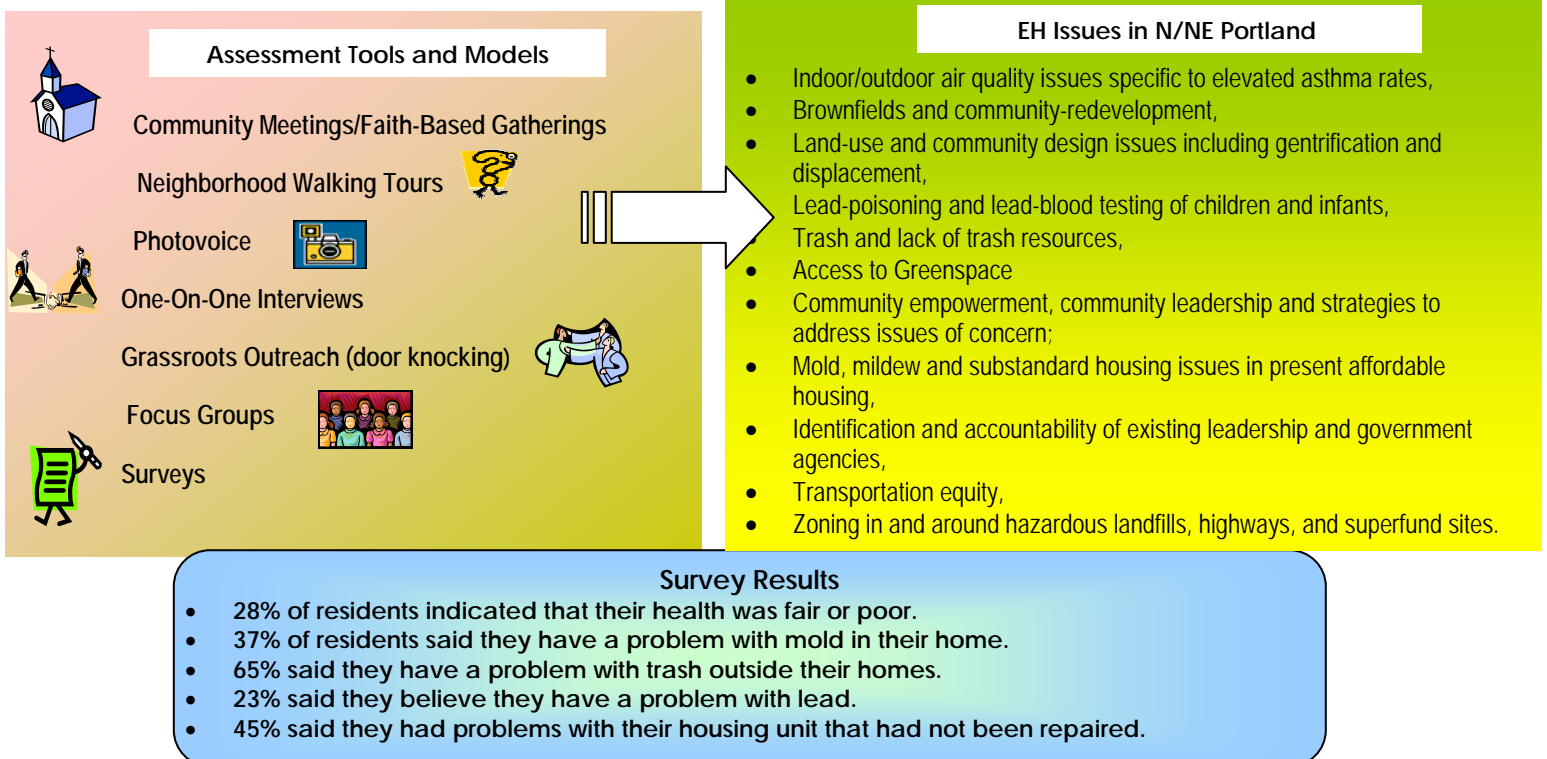
Five communities in Multnomah County emerged from the criteria and cross-referencing of indicators and exposure rates as the geographic area of greatest immediate concern.

The Coalition further narrowed the community-based assessment of environmental health issues in the affordable housing community of **North and Northeast Portland** due to this community coming forward and self-identifying themselves as a group with environmental health issues and needs. The affordable housing communities from five neighborhoods in N/NE Portland (**Boise, Eliot, Humboldt, King and Vernon**) were used as the specific geographic scope for the assessment.

Using culturally mindful techniques toward meaningful involvement, including coalition meetings in the affected community, faith-based gatherings, viable language translation of all materials and presentations, child care, approval from coalition partners and community members on all decisions, and consistent emphasis on creation of relationships among the citizens and neighborhood leaders, the coalition has stayed true to the importance of environmental justice and the role of community in the problem-identification and solution processes. It was this approach that successfully led to the identification of community concerns.



## AT-A-GLANCE: N/NE Portland Community Assessment Methods and Findings



Four primary issues of focus emerged from the data collection effort: **mold, trash, lead, and feeling like an ignored community**. Resident beliefs and observations are displayed below.

## Mold

There is a connection between mold and their health effects (e.g. allergies, headaches, sore throats, asthma, coughing, and congestion).

Most have mold in their homes. Biggest contributors to their mold problems were maintenance issues, structural problems, and poor ventilation.

It is the responsibility of property managers to remove mold and to take care of the mold sources: leaky pipes, plumbing problems, poor ventilation, and water damage. In every focus group, residents described management as unresponsive to their requests for repair of water damage and other maintenance. Many were unclear about how to move their issues forward in a meaningful way.

Want more open communication with managers. Suggested that managers hold monthly meetings with residents to keep them informed and discuss concerns.

## Feeling Like an 'Ignored Community'

Uncertain as to how to make meetings with managers happen.

Provided examples of management's non-responsiveness and of residents' beliefs that it is difficult to have their needs addressed because others are reluctant to come into their neighborhood.

There is a need for PACE to develop cultural competencies and extend outreach efforts to non-English speaking

## Trash

Very concerned about overflowing dumpsters, trash that gets dumped on the ground, the smell, and the animals that the trash attracts.

Overflowing dumpsters are caused by: infrequent trash pick ups, trash being handled by children who cannot reach the top of the dumpster, non-resident use of the dumpsters, and dumpster drivers throwing trash out of the dumpsters.

## Lead

Most are uncertain about lead exposure routes and whether it was a problem.

There is little knowledge of existing lead prevention and testing services

Indicate that they need more information about lead.

## Assessment Team Recommendations to the Community Coalition

In June 2004, the PACE EH Community Coalition Assessment team created 9 recommendations in response to assessment findings which the Community Coalition is using to help steer actions for community intervention:

1. Help residents, property managers, and owners work together to identify and solve environmental health problems affecting multi-family affordable housing units.
2. Work with existing organizations to inform residents, management, and owners about mold, trash, and lead issues.
3. Advocate for health-based, sustainable building practices and property development to prevent problems such as mold and insufficient garbage facilities in future housing developments.
4. Investigate the causes for the shortage of dumpsters in housing areas.
5. Help residents organize neighborhood cleanups.
6. Work with community partners to educate residents about how to protect children from lead problems, and how to get homes and children tested for lead.
7. Partner with housing groups to advocate for health-based priorities in housing maintenance standards and compliance with housing codes.
8. Promote Tenant's Rights training for community residents.
9. Increase PACE's ability to work effectively with multiple cultures living in affordable housing.

### Resident's thoughts/observations on MOLD

*"... Moist and damp and then it develops from that. It's bad for your breathing. I do have a problem ... if I close my windows where I live there is a headache all through the night."*

*"It messes with your lungs. The air that you breathe, those little particles ... you're breathing that into your system, and you get sore throats, coughing."*

*"My son has asthma bad. Smoke goes in (the exhaust fan) and just blows back out."*

*"... Some of the apartments, the way they build them, they just slapped them up and they put poor ventilation. Like, in our laundry room, it's a large room, it's closed off, and it's subject to mold and mildew."*

*"... Management was trying to get everybody to sign that piece of paper saying it was our responsibility to keep the mold and mildew cleaned up. But it's not our responsibility. No, how can that be our responsibility? We didn't cause it."*

*"We've been asking that same question for the past three years. And that's why we've been talking about the fact that ... none of the fans have been vented outside. We've been argued down for years and each manager has to actually go into a bathroom and take the stupid fan down to see what we already have seen and what we know."*



## PACE EH Actions to Date As Result of Assessment

The following table describes a few of the activities accomplished to date.

Date	Activity/Event
05/04	MCHD receives email notification from Bureau of Housing and Community Development (BHCD) that Albina CDC properties are scheduled for rehab later this year
06/04	Lillian Shirley, Lila Wickham and Joice Taylor meet with PDC staff Wyman Winston and Andrew Wilch. PDC agreed to include green building principles in future building and rehab contracts and offered to provide a letter of support to MCHD's Healthy Homes Grant application.
06/04	MCHD staff met with the director of Albina CDC and staff from Cascade and Infinity Property Management companies to discuss communication issues between residents, property managers, and property owners and the need to create a more sustainable process for meaningful communication that generates positive outcomes.
06/04	Meetings with stakeholders to develop a competitive Healthy Homes Grant application to address housing-related EH issues at PACE EH sites.
08/04	CDC Public Health Prevention Specialist begins at MCHD EH to work with the PACE EH coalition and various other community groups to develop and implement strategies and interventions to address housing-related health issues
09/04	MCHD sponsors 4 Environmental Justice trainings for community members as well as housing and other agency staff.

## Resident's thoughts/observations on FEELING LIKE AN 'IGNORED COMMUNITY'

*"Sometimes if it's a problem that they can't fix, then they take it easy and they don't get back to you. You go and talk to management the second time. . . they start hating you. The third time. . ., they try to close the door on you."*

*"Neighbors are always complaining and nobody comes down. And I say if you're not going up there and speak, they're not going to hear. I think a lot of people don't come and speak because they don't got no power and they feel nothing's going to be done, and that's why they don't come."*

*"The people that do the repairs don't want to come in our neighborhood. We have problems getting them to come and repair things because they don't want to come into our community."*

## Future Action

To expand the opportunity for community input on the next steps, at a Community Coalition meeting in November 2004 participants interactively identified suggested actions to take in response to each of the 9 recommendations that center on mold, lead, trash, and feeling like an 'ignored community'.

These suggested actions are condensed and presented in the supplementary **Community Action Plan as Education/ Advocacy/Policy ACTION**

**STEPS** that PACE will take in 2005. The Action Plan is organized by the 4 issues PACE is targeting and describes desired community partnerships and issue-specific activities. This Action Plan will be presented to the listed community partners to communicate planned PACE activities, work with them to identify their committed level of involvement, and to invite contributions. With a goal date of March 2005, at the conclusion of meetings with all community partners, implementation of the action steps will begin.

## Resident's thoughts/observations on TRASH

*"It's still bad. A lot of trash still gets dumped on the ground . . . and over the weekend when it's the worst, for some reason they pick up during the week, but over the weekend it really gets trashy."*

*"When the trash company comes they don't collect the trash on the ground. It stays and starts stinking."*

*"They're (lawn maintenance crews) blowing the trash out there, too. So we're paying them to come in and provide this service. If this was in SW Portland, or out SE, they wouldn't blow nothing in the street."*

*"People don't clean it up. The maintenance man ain't cleaning it up; the garbage man ain't cleaning it up; sometimes I clean it up but you get tired of doing that."*



For more information on the PACE EH Community Coalition Pilot Assessment Project, coalition members, accomplishments, newsletters, and activities, please visit <http://www.PACE.EH.org/>

