

Climate Change Could Bring Toxic Deluge to Bayview

by Carol Harvey

Walking the site of a planned condo development in Bayview's Candlestick Point, Marie Harrison observes, "There's more water when the tide rolls in." Harrison lives in Bayview-Hunter's Point and works with Greenaction, seeking ways to include low-income people of color in the global warming/climate justice debate.

The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) predicts that sea levels will rise 16 inches by mid-century and cover coastal lands like Candlestick.¹

The Bayview's wetlands and landfills straddle the Hayward and San Andreas faults. If they were slammed by an earthquake and diluted by flooding, their loose-packed, sandy soil could produce intensifying shock waves and then liquefy, undermining San Francisco's infrastructure, says Dr. Raymond Tompkins, a biochemist at San Francisco State University and toxic-cleanup expert.

Rising waters and earthquakes could also shake loose buried toxic and irradiated materials. The former United States Naval Shipyard—now a Superfund Site—was contaminated by depleted uranium abandoned after atomic bomb "Little Boy" was assembled there. The 46-acre industrial landfill at Parcel E contains radium dials, irradiated animal carcasses and other unknown carcinogenic contaminants, Dr. Tompkins says.

Development poses dangers as well. "There is a very real prospect that redevelopment on radiation-contaminated parcels at D and E will generate airborne and soil releases of contaminants that contain low-level radiological materials," says Dr. Ahimsa Sumchai, a local environmental health expert. San Francisco intends to accept parts of parcel D as early as 2010, without complete cleanup, and build homes, a park, and a green tech center there, Sumchai says.

Green Center at Toxic Epicenter

In July 2009, Mayor Gavin Newsom proposed a \$20 million United Nations Global Compact Center to be constructed in 2012 by master developer Lennar Cor-

poration on Parcel C, adjacent to the Bayview Superfund site. The Center would include "an incubator to foster green tech start-ups, a conference center... office space for academics and scientists," the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported.²

The proposal draws its name from the "Global Compact" concept launched in 2000 by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Compact sets standards of corporate conduct that include respect for human rights and use of green technologies.

Little information on the toxic dangers reaches the neighborhood through the corporate media, so Harrison holds informal "table meetings" to educate residents. People are asking the right questions, she says, despite their focus on the struggle to survive.

To those looking for green jobs at the U.N. Global Compact building, she says, "How long have they been promising our community jobs? (Do) you think every black person is so stuck on stupid they're going to believe that garbage—they are going to literally get 35 percent of these jobs?"

"You can't throw in a building about green research and sidestep the substantive issues affecting the neighborhood," says Jaron Browne, Bayview organizer for POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights). "The rush to transfer the land before it's clean, or cap it and build on top of it, is driven by developer rather than community interests," he says. ■

Endnotes

1. San Francisco Bay Scenarios for Sea Level Rise Index Map. San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission. www.bcdc.ca.gov/planning/climate_change/index_map.shtml
2. Knight, Heather. "S.F., U.N. Partner on Global Warming Center," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 30, 2009. www.sfgate.com

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This issue is dedicated to Luke W. Cole (1962-2009)

Founding co-editor of the journal *Race Poverty & the Environment* and founder of the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment.



Photos: (Above) Montage from the Luke Cole memorial booklet published October 25, 2009. Courtesy of Nancy Shelby.

(Front cover) San Francisco Financial District, Sept 21, 2009. ©2009 West Coast Mobilization for Climate Justice / Rainforest Action Network.

(Inside Front) Richmond refinery. ©2008 Scott Braley. (Inside Back) Urban garden in Havana Cuba. © John and Faith Morgan / www.powerofcommunity.com.

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