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## Residents for Air Neutralization Louisiana Bucket Brigade (LABB)

### ***Project Summary - Part I. Description***

#### **Participating organizations and geographic location(s) of the project**

The Louisiana Bucket Brigade (LABB), founded in 2000, is an environmental health and justice organization working with communities adjacent to the state's oil refiner, chemical plants and other hazardous sites. Our mission is to support communities' use of grassroots action to create sustainable neighborhoods free from industrial pollution. Organizing community members affected by pollution to create systemic change in the regulatory systems and industry culture is at the heart of what we do. All we have accomplished has been realized in collaboration with local community groups, including the Concerned Citizens of Norco, Community Empowerment for Change, and the St. Bernard Citizens for Environmental Quality.

Residents for Air Neutralization is a well-organized grassroots community group living mere feet from the flaring stacks and tank farms of Calumet Refinery. They have been fighting for cleaner air for Shreveport, LA neighborhoods since 2002. RAN represents the 99,840 people living within 5 miles of this refinery in the metro area of Shreveport, LA. RAN will focus on the low income, majority African American neighborhoods of Ingleside and Mooretown in Shreveport, LA. These neighborhoods bear a disproportionate impact of petrochemical pollution from the Calumet Refinery. RAN is the primary beneficiary of this project.

Environmental Integrity Project (EIP) is a D.C. based organization who provides technical assistance on refinery processes, regulatory issues and enforcement actions. EIP's director Eric Schaeffer used to be the EPA's Director of Enforcement under the Clinton administration. Environmental Working Group is also a D.C. based organization who provides technical assistance for LABB's Refinery Accident Database. The trends and analysis gleaned from this database provides the platform for the Refinery Efficiency Initiative.

#### **Background or problem statement**

RAN goal: Residents for Air Neutralization builds the capacity of 5 youth leader to create an environmentally just and healthy community in Shreveport, LA.

Strategic Objective One: RAN Youth Leaders use participatory research techniques to collect a body of evidence on the local health impacts of chemical exposure from petrochemical pollutants.

Strategic Objective Two: RAN Youth Leader create increased awareness among 100 local youth and residents on health impacts of chemical exposure and utilization of user-friendly pollution documentation tools.

Strategic Objective Three: LABB and RAN build strategic linkages at the community, local, state and North American regional levels to reduce petrochemical pollution and its public health impacts in Shreveport, LA.

### **Description of the project**

Four youth successfully completed the Environmental Justice Corps program. These EJ fellows have been actively canvassing the Ingleside and Mooretown neighborhoods to educate and inform community members about the problems at the refinery. RAN and the EJ Corps fellows took over 800 health census surveys, which provide an idea of how the pollution from the neighboring refinery is affecting the community. Ten bucket samples were taken during the project.

### **Description of outcomes and follow-up**

RAN has been very successful at building community awareness and support. Residents of the Ingleside and Mooretown neighborhoods have been trained to use tools that document their experiences with pollution and to advocate for a pollution-free community.

Community members are now better informed about what is affecting their families and neighbors, and what they can do about it.

The four graduates of the Environmental Justice Corps program have been very instrumental in getting other youth involved in the environmental justice movement. By getting the youth interested and active in the movement, RAN has ensured that the fight for clean air will continue for at least another 20 years.

### ***Project Summary - Part II. Analysis***

#### **Successes**

Describe the most significant successes achieved during the implementation of the project.

The most significant success of this project has been getting the youth interested and involved in the work that Ms. Velma White has been doing for over 20 years. The four EJ Corps graduates- R.J. Bowman, Shamekia Jackson, Ronsha Johnson and Aneesha Stephens- have been very instrumental in the achieving the objectives set out for this project. Getting them involved in engaging and educating community members ensures that the fight for environmental justice in Shreveport, LA will not stop with Velma White.

The settlement with Calumet has also been a huge success for RAN and LABB. This settlement got media attention, and shows that enforcement officials are starting to listen to the information coming from the community beside Calumet. This settlement also proves to community members that battles can be won, and it serves as encouragement to continue to speak up about their struggles with the refinery.

The biggest success has been achieving so many of the objectives that were set at the beginning of this project- some goals were even exceeded. Community members are now well informed on the subject of environmental justice. They residents of the Ingleside and Mooretown neighborhoods have been adequately trained to take bucket samples and

report their experiences with pollution- and they understand why this documentation is important. NAPECA has played an important role in making this possible.

## **Challenges**

Describe the most significant challenges encountered during the implementation of the project. Community involvement is a challenge that RAN continues to face. It's hard to keep residents engaged and active in reporting pollution when they outcomes of their actions aren't immediate. In November 2013 the EPA issued (CAFO) ordering Calumet to pay a fine of \$326,000 and install 32 fence line monitors around the perimeter of the refinery, which was the result of an inspection that happened on August 15-18, 2011. The CAFO issues a penalty for nine different violations that were discovered during that inspection. It is hard to keep community members motivated in the fight for clean air when it takes two years for a penalty to be levied.

There continues to be a distrust of both government and industry within the community, which has been hard to overcome. RAN has tried to address this problem by holding community meetings that are attended by residents, plant workers, and government officials. One such meeting was held on January 24, 2014 for community members to meet the new plant manager of the Calumet refinery. There were 30 community members and 6 plant workers in attendance at the meeting. Velma White attempted to address the problem in a meeting with Congressman Fleming in November, 2013. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss better inclusion of community members in meetings between the EPA or LDEQ and Calumet. The distrust of government and industry is a product of many situations, including lack of cooperation with the community. RAN reached out to both Calumet and the Shreveport City Council for a Memorandum of Agreement for a grant they were applying for. After weeks of editing the MOA's to suit the requests of both Calumet and the city, neither party signed the document. While RAN may have not been successful at obtaining MOA's from Calumet and the City of Shreveport, the organization continues to work towards a cleaner community.

## **Lessons Learned**

NAPECA has been instrumental in helping RAN grow its capacity by providing the tools and the means to move forward with our goal of achieving a better quality of living in a petrochemical ridden environment.

This goal cannot be achieved without the full support of the community. RAN learned that one of the best ways to gain community support is to get the youth of the community active in the cause. Without the help of NAPECA, RAN might not have been as successful at getting the youth involved.

Velma White has been working for cleaner air in her community for over 20 years. It is important to get the next generation interested and involved in the cause so that they may eventually take the reins. RAN has successfully trained 4 Environmental Justice Corps fellows, who recently received certificates of completion for their spectacular work in the community. Over the course of the grant period RAN has made 114 youth contacts, and held more than 5 youth meetings. The EJ Corps were also instrumental in getting environmental justice curriculum into a local middle and elementary school.

Our goal for the project was to develop five youth leaders, and we developed four. Throughout the terms of the grant period we had various candidates for the fifth Fellow

spot. There were two young men and one young woman who entered the program, only to drop out or be let go for various reasons, including tardiness and poor job performance. Other reasons included illness and family issues which prevented participation. We targeted this particular area of Shreveport both because of the strong leadership of Ms. White and because of the neighborhood's challenges. Over 40% of the children in the neighborhood are in poverty. This situation brings the usually associated problems including poor education, illness and a host of entrenched obstacles. Our program repeatedly encountered these problems. The identification of the fifth Fellow was a victim of this environment.

### **What next?**

RAN intends to continue to utilize the tools developed during the NAPECA project period to make even larger strides to ensure that Calumet Refinery is held accountable for its adverse impact on the community's health. Community education and engagement will continue to be important. RAN will still be canvassing the Ingleside and Mooretown neighborhoods to keep people involved in the work that RAN and LABB are doing. However, it will be an ongoing challenge to continue the work that was started during the project. The EJ Corps Fellows are not from privileged families, and so the money that was paid during their fellowship actually made the work possible. Now that the program has ended, they have the skills. They will need to find and allocate the time to keep their hard work going.

For more information about this project please contact:

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