



CLEARWATER INITIATES STUDY

Environmental Justice in the Hudson Valley

By Katarra Peterson and Mary Rynasko

While we all know that not everyone is equally affected by pollution, just how great are the differences? Who is living around power plants and toxic waste dumps, burdened by pollution daily? Those are the central questions of the Hudson River Environmental Justice Project, an intensive investigation of “environmental justice” in the Hudson River Valley, undertaken this past summer by a student-faculty team at Skidmore College.

As defined by renowned environmental justice activist Majora Carter, environmental justice is the notion that some communities are saddled with more environmental burdens and fewer environmental benefits than others. Sociologist Robert Bullard began this area of scholarship study—and social movement activism—twenty years ago, when he examined the siting of garbage dumps in non-white areas of Houston, Texas. Led by Skidmore sociologist Rik Scarce, our project examines who is burdened most by pollution throughout the Hudson River region.

About Environmental Justice

Environmental justice (EJ) is often a heated topic because, as Robert Bullard describes it in the introduction to *The Quest for Environmental*

Justice, “The environmental justice movement is largely a response to environmental injustice.” EJ is a form of social inequality in which the racial composition or social class (poverty) of a neighborhood is closely related to the environmental conditions in that area. As both a social movement and a respected area of scholarship, there are close ties between the research community and community activists.

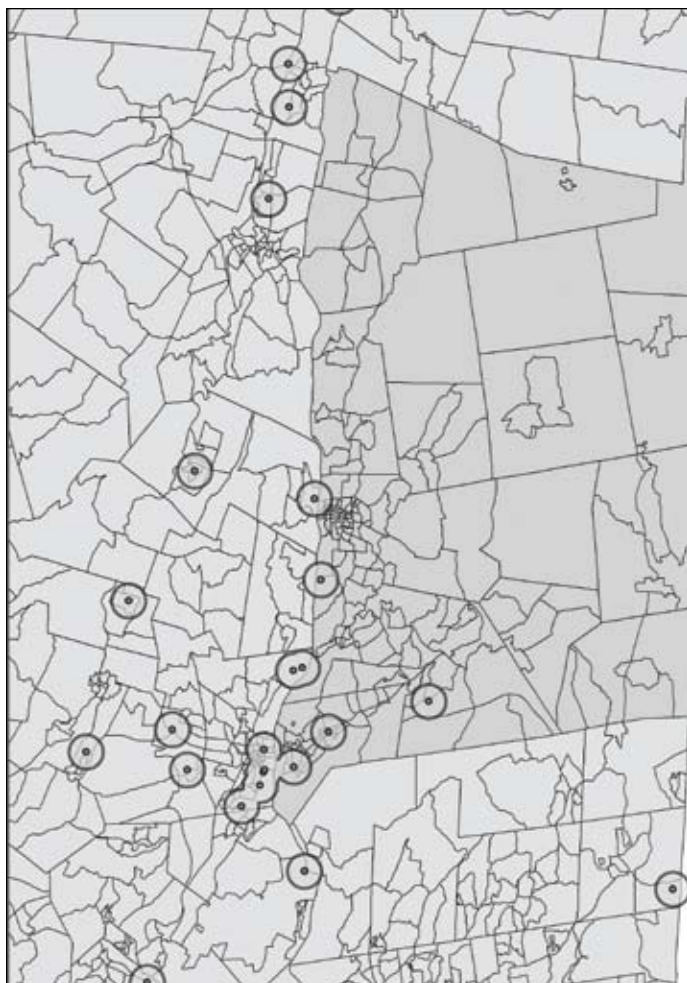
EJ activism is strong in the Hudson region. For example, Majora Carter, formerly the Executive Director of Sustainable South Bronx, began her environmental justice advocacy when she saw her own community being “dumped on.” And Aaron Mair of the Arbor Hill Environmental Justice Corporation in Albany has long been a leader in the field. Despite the presence of these and other EJ advocates, little scholarship exists on EJ in the Hudson region, thus the need for the Hudson River Environmental Justice Project.

Studying Environmental Justice along the Hudson

The project began in 2007 when Clearwater Executive Director Jeff Rumpf told Rik Scarce of his interest in obtaining baseline EJ data for the region and it developed into a working relationship involving Skidmore, Clearwater and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation’s Office of Environmental Justice, which provided much of the data for the study.

Our project focused on the fifteen counties bordering the

*Pictured above, authors Katarra Peterson and Mary Rynasko.
Photo by Rik Scarce.*



Pictured above: GIS map showing one mile radius around major pollution sources in Dutchess County and surrounding areas.

Hudson River, from Essex in the north to Westchester and Rockland in the south. We used GIS (geographic information systems) software to map the region's almost 2,000 "noxious" facilities, which include hazardous waste facilities and superfund sites, along with thirteen other facility types.

Assisted by Skidmore GIS expert Alex Chaucer, our analysis followed a series of complex steps. In brief, after pulling in DEC, Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. census data, we plotted the noxious facility sites in ArcMap, a GIS software program. Next, we drew a virtual circle with a one-mile radius around each facility and calculated the racial, economic, and social characteristics of the neighborhoods within that one-mile "buffer" area. Finally, we compared the facility neighborhood data inside the buffer with the characteristics of the surrounding region to identify any disparities.

Although we have only just begun to analyze the data, it does appear that substantial differences exist between noxious facility neighborhoods and the surrounding regions.

Previous Studies

Surprisingly, little EJ scholarship exists for the Hudson region, despite the river's extensive population, dense network of noxious facilities, and its place in American environmental history.

However, EJ scholarship nationally and globally is quite

Key Points in Clearwater's Environmental Justice Contention:

- Entergy's Environmental Report (ER) concludes, "no significant off-site environmental impacts will be created by the renewal of the IP2 and IP3 Operating Licenses." However, this analysis is based upon several very flawed premises:
- Entergy's EJ and Demographic Methodology is flawed and incomplete.
- Entergy's ER does not adequately acknowledge the significant EJ communities within 50 miles of Indian Point or assess Indian Point's impact on this community.
- Minority and low-income populations may be more susceptible to cancer from Indian Point Radionuclide Emissions than other populations.
- The ER fails to take into account subsistence fishing in the Hudson River.
- Low-income populations will be more severely and negatively impacted by an evacuation resulting from a radiological event at Indian Point.
- Residents of special facilities will be more severely and negatively impacted by an evacuation after a radiological event at Indian Point, including disabled patients in hospitals and long term care facilities and inmates in the many prisons in the area.
- Environmental Justice concerns relating to production and long-term storage of Indian Point's fuel, especially upon Native American populations.

For more information about Clearwater's Intervenor Petition and Clearwater's Environmental Justice Contention see page 12.

extensive. Our study mirrors one that examined neighborhood characteristics of toxic waste disposal facilities in Michigan by professors Robin Saha and Paul Mohai. Saha and Mohai used the same approach we're using, including the same demographic, economic, and social variables: percent African American, percent Hispanic, percent Nonwhite, percent without a high school diploma, percent with a Bachelor's degree, percent living in poverty, percent on public assistance, percent unemployed, percent employed in a "white collar" occupations, percent employed in a "blue collar" occupations, and economic variables concerning housing values and household income. We added another economic variable as well, percent of households receiving public assistance.

The Hudson River Environmental Justice Project will provide both scholars and activists in the region with substantial data to aid in understanding the extent of environmental injustices here and will serve as a starting point for further study.