

Environmental Justice in North Birmingham

By Sharia Hudson



For the third installment of The Edge of Chaos Scholars lecture, Dr. Michelle Fanucchi discussed environmental justice issues regarding particulate air pollution in North Birmingham. Four local neighborhoods are strongly affected by the air pollution and are included as a part of a superfund site declared by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A superfund is a program utilized to address abandoned hazardous waste sites and a fund was established by the (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and enacted in 1980. The fund is designated to provide aid in the clean-up efforts of abandoned or uncontrolled sites. In addition, the 1986 superfund amendment, Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA), "stressed the importance of permanent remedies and innovative treatment technologies." It also provided new enforcement of laws and settlement tools.

We have known for a long time that pollution has been a problem in the Birmingham metropolitan area. Furthermore, particulate emission has been problematic for Birmingham since 1968. The EPA was established in 1970 and 11 months after the EPA was created, both the EPA and Department of Justice shut down some of Birmingham's industries. As a result of the shut downs, Sloss Industries Corporation entered into RCRA in 1989. In 2009, Walter Coke agreed with the EPA to sample yards, drainage, and school properties in close proximity to their industry outside the fences. This was requested to see how far the pollution reached properties nearby. To comply with the EPA's request, the company hired a consulting firm and submitted all results to the EPA office. One of the defining moments to get the public involved regarding pollution issues was during the soil remediation that occurred at Hudson Elementary School. So a question remains. What can we expect to happen next? The EPA established a superfund community engagement because of the residents' distrust in local and state governments. Therefore, the EPA is helping to coordinate and form a North Birmingham Community Coalition where citizens can voice their concerns regarding their health and living environment.

