

Living on a Landfill: A Resident's Experience with EPA Region 6 Superfund Program

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**The Agriculture Street
Landfill Superfund Site
Community**

**Upper Ninth Ward
New Orleans, LA**



- During the 1970's a subdivision was developed by the City of New Orleans with HUD funds and marketed to African American families. This subdivision included the Moton Elementary School, Gordon Plaza single-family homes, and Press Park town houses.
- There was a parade and a ribbon-cutting ceremony that welcomed new families to their new homes.
- We soon discovered debris, discarded auto parts, oil barrels, and bones as we planted gardens in our yards.
- It was routine for streets and sidewalks to cave-in that would rupture underground water pipes and electrical wires, causing families to go without water and electricity until repairs were made.
- Our families began raising concerns over health problems, such as leukemia, cancer, respiratory problems, skin rashes and boils.
- A lot of time passed, before families discovered that the school and homes were built on a municipal landfill that operated for 50 years, and continued to be a dumping ground after it was officially closed by the city of New Orleans.



Home of Don & Daisy Lewis, whose daughter died from leukemia at the age of 17.

What EPA Region 6 Found in Our Subdivision

- Over 150 toxic chemicals and heavy metals as far as 17 feet below ground
- Soil samples showed elevated levels of harmful substances below ground

What EPA Region 6 Recommended

- Partial removal of contaminated soil, 1-2 feet
- Installation of a geotextile mat and backfill
- While residents lived at home, exposed to the toxins unearthed by EPA
- While children played in the neighborhood and also exposed to the toxins
- EPA refused even temporary relocation for residents

What ATSDR Found About Health of Residents

- Significant number of men and women have breast cancer
- 55% of mothers reported problems with child birth
- 18% of children have elevated blood-lead levels.



*Moton Elementary School
built in the early 1980's*

The Moton Elementary School was closed in 1994 after EPA Region 6 soil testing in the subdivision revealed more than 150 toxic chemicals and heavy metals as far as 17 feet below ground.

- EPA Region 6 decided to take no clean up action at the school.
- In 2001, EPA Region 6 recommended re-opening the school after removing only 1-2 feet of contaminated soil in the surrounding subdivision.



48 acre undeveloped area adjacent to the subdivision that continues to be a dumping ground in and outside of the fence that EPA Region 6 calls an “institutional barrier.”

No EPA soil removal in this area, which allows toxins to spread in rainwater runoff. Flooding from rainfall before Hurricane Katrina was always a problem as well as subsidence.



EPA Region 6 would not clean up the Ag. St. subdivision to the same level it did for industrial sites with the same underground toxins – complete excavation, treatment & disposal.

EPA okayed permanent relocation 17 times for white neighborhoods, and only 1 time for an African American neighborhood.



CCASL and EJ advocates briefing the United Nations on environmental racism in the United States (1999)

- Concerned Citizens of the Agriculture Street Landfill lobbied Congress to provide funds for permanent residential relocation.
 - EPA's partial soil removal plan cost \$20 million
 - Residential relocation cost \$12 million
- CCASL brought the United Nations' attention to the human rights violations arising from building homes on a toxic landfill and planning to dig up toxins without relocation.
- CCASL won a lawsuit against state and federal agencies and insurance companies that developed the subdivision.

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