

## PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release:** Wednesday, June 18, 2008

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### First Graduating Class of Urban Environmental Institute calls for Environmental Justice Remedies in Newark

Newark, NJ —Today, the first graduating class of the Urban Environmental Institute (UEI) brings its environmental justice and health concerns to the Newark City Council meeting. With their newly found organizing skills, they will be offering recommendations for action for the City of Newark to set a new course for its residents that will both prevent future harm from polluting facilities and poor housing, as well as support a “green jobs” agenda.

The Urban Environmental Institute is a project of the New Jersey Environmental Federation (NJEF) and Clean Water Fund (CWF)\*, carried out in partnership with Quest Ink! Inc., one of Newark’s oldest youth leadership organizations. The UEI is training 16-35 year olds to be the next generation of environmental justice leaders and grassroots activists in the city of Newark. In doing so, we create a voice and constituency for demanding remedies to the environmental injustices its residents experience everyday, in some cases without even knowing it. The first graduating class consists of 12 Newark residents from each of the 5 wards. A week long summer academy is being planned.

“The goal of the UEI is to fight for real solutions to Newark’s environmental problems,” **said Sonny Gaddy, UEI student from the West Ward** “Just by living in Newark, we are at greater risk for asthma, cancer, and other public health ailments. That’s why we are calling for a healthier environment, green jobs, and sustainable neighborhoods. The time for Newark officials to act is now.”

#### **Newark faces numerous environmental injustices:**

- Newark is riddled with diesel “hot spots” as it is surrounded by the shipping port, airport, major highways, and rail lines. A recent report by UMDNJ cites that Newark residents are 25% more likely to suffer from asthma and other respiratory illnesses due to its geographical location as the “commerce” corridor of the Northeast. According to a 2005 report, Essex County’s air ranks the 27th most polluted in the nation. These hot spots are in our neighborhoods, next to playgrounds, ballfields and community pools, where our most vulnerable, children, are most active.
- Newark’s asthma related hospitalization and death rate is double that of suburban Essex County. Newark’s children are especially hard hit - with 1 in 4 children suffering from asthma and other respiratory illnesses, double the state and national average.
- The Ironbound section is one of the most polluted neighborhoods in the city. It is the home of one of the largest garbage incinerators in the Northeast, over 100 toxic sites including several federal superfund sites, over 8 million pounds of air toxics from polluting facilities, and more.

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**Urban Environmental Institute**  
**A Project of NJ Environmental Federation & Clean Water Fund**

“Low income and communities of color living in Newark are disproportionately impacted by the cumulative impact of multiple pollution sources and toxins,” **said Brenton Osborne, who is the father of three and North Ward resident.** “The Ironbound is heavily burdened with truck traffic, incinerators, industrial and port operations, as well as abandoned and contaminated sites. That’s why the UEI is taking our environmental justice platform to Newark city hall. We want our public officials to act now.”

Every Saturday for the past 8 weeks, UEI students have been learning about environmental justice issues – both the problems and possible solutions for the present and future generations of Newark residents. “But the best part about UEI has been to gain the skills needed to run a grassroots campaign, write a press release, canvass door to door with petitions, **emphasized Heather Kollar of the South Ward.** “Knowing about a problem is one thing, but being part of the solution is what we at the UEI are all about. We came to the city council today to let you know we are ready to spread the word about environmental justice and demand action not just ideas.”

### **The UEI proposes that the Newark City Council and Mayor :**

- Create an **Office of Environmental Affairs** to coordinate and address environmental problems, as well as make Newark residents an equal part of relevant future decision-making.
- Advance a **“sustainable cities” program** that reaches *into* all of the neighborhoods, not just the downtown. Promote water and energy conservation, efficiencies and renewables (i.e. solar) on existing and new buildings. Establish a **“green jobs”** program that puts more Newark residents to work with livable wages and benefits - taking advantage of the wide range of skills that exist or can be trained to do.
- Construct a **“green mobile”** that goes to the neighborhoods raising public awareness and greater access to services, programs and funds (grants and loans) that remedy EJ issues and promote green jobs, power and other measures that move the city towards greater sustainability.
- Ensure Newark’s **housing is safe** to live in. Address specific problems raised in Hyatt and Riverview Court regarding lead, mold and mildew, a health hazard for its residents.
- Take aggressive steps in the spirit of the city’s **diesel reduction** ordinance to demand significantly reduced diesel emissions at the port of Newark by calling for retrofitting ships, tugboats, yard equipment, cranes, trucks, and railroads, rerouting of port traffic, strict enforcement of no idling laws, and electrification where trucks congregate.

“We know the City of Newark has taken some initial steps with regards to our concerns (e.g. co-hosting a green jobs summit in September). But they should also know that the UEI and its growing number of graduates will be both a booming voice for environmental justice and action,” **concluded Adrienne Kinard, of the North Ward.** “Every day we ignore this we are making the residents of Newark pay with their health and pocketbooks, as well as reduce their ability to work, be productive and part of society. We must end this injustice.”

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\* Clean Water Fund (CWF) is a national 501(c)3 grassroots non-profit organization. CWF is the training, research, and education partner of the New Jersey Environmental Federation (NJEF). CWF works hand in hand in our communities, homes, workplaces and schools to reduce the use, exposure and health impacts of toxic chemicals. The Urban Environmental Institute is a project of CWF and NJEF in collaboration with Quest Ink! Inc.. Support for the UEI includes the Ford Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Schumann Fund for NJ, Fund for New Jersey and more recently the Andy Cappon Community Action Project for the UEI’s upcoming summer academy. For more information, visit [www.cleanwaterfund.org](http://www.cleanwaterfund.org) or [www.cleanwateraction.org/njef](http://www.cleanwateraction.org/njef)