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The Organization:

DRCC/TAG was founded in 2001 by ten community, environmental, tribal and small business organizations to serve as EPA's Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site and as the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to the affected communities. DRCC/TAG's mission is to secure a Superfund site cleanup plan that is accepted by and benefits the affected community and protects fish, wildlife, and human health.



An Urban Waters Impact Story

A River for All – Fighting for Environmental Justice and Health Equity in Seattle

Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition/Technical Advisory Group (DRCC/TAG) - Seattle, Washington

The Setting

The Duwamish River is a 5.5 mile long Superfund site that flows through Seattle's Duwamish Valley – a highly developed urban and industrial center south of



Northernmost portion of the highly industrialized Duwamish River, with downtown Seattle and Elliott Bay in the background. Photo: Paul Joseph Brown

downtown. It suffers from a legacy of pollution that has accumulated in the river's sediments and throughout its food chain. Eighty percent of Seattle's industrial lands are located within the Duwamish Manufacturing and

Industrial District and over 7,000 people live in the

immediately adjacent neighborhoods, which include the "fenceline" communities of South Park and Georgetown. Most affected by the contamination are Seattle's most marginalized and impoverished communities – low-income, homeless residents, immigrants and tribal fishing families. In addition to residents, three Tribes use the river for fishing and/or cultural ceremonies, and low-income, immigrant and homeless families from throughout King County harvest seafood from the river for subsistence, and to maintain cultural and community traditions. Over 20 native languages are spoken throughout the valley. Further, due to industrial development, public access to the river is highly restricted. For all these reasons, attaining environmental justice is one of the driving forces shaping the community's river cleanup and advocacy efforts.



*A young resident submits her comments to EPA with a photo.
Photo: DRCC/TAG*

A High Bar for Culturally Inclusive Community Engagement

In 2013 and after 12 years in the making, EPA released its Proposed Cleanup Plan for the Superfund site, starting the clock on a 105-day public review and comment period. This highly technical document recommended a mix of technologies for addressing the river's toxic sediments and meeting the four objectives of the cleanup, which include protecting the health of people who consume seafood. Recognizing the need for an informed, educated and organized community to advocate for the most comprehensive river cleanup possible, DRCC/TAG staff set off to design and implement a community engagement plan to give the many diverse communities impacted by the contamination a voice in the cleanup plans. This effort was supported in part by a \$59,000 *River Network Urban Waters Capacity-Building grant* funded by EPA that DRCC/TAG received between 2011 and 2013. Additional funding to support community participation in the cleanup was provided by the EPA Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Program.

Alberto J. Rodríguez, DRCC/TAG's Program Manager, led this outreach work in partnership with organizations that include educational institutions, health providers, faith-based groups, business and neighborhood associations, PTAs, artist groups and others. Outreach strategies were carefully designed to accommodate the different target audiences. These events, sponsored by the DRCC/TAG during and following the public comment period, reflect the organization's culturally inclusive approach to community engagement:

- A community "World Dance Party" was organized and designed to encourage cross-cultural and cross-generational connections, while capturing participants' input on the kind of community they want to grow old in and on the river cleanup;
- The Duwamish River Festival / Festival del Río Duwamish included live art, and multicultural music and dance, while hosting interactive and educational booths about the cleanup and community health;
- Floating classrooms/boat tours took groups of students and specific immigrant groups on the water to learn, in their own language, about the natural and human history of the valley, issues of environmental health and justice, and the proposed cleanup of the river;
- Public meetings and workshops were conducted in multiple languages, included use of a 50-foot model of the Superfund site as an educational tool, and attracted large audiences with offers of food, child care and complimentary tickets to local attractions;
- Public hearings were simultaneously interpreted into Spanish and Vietnamese. In the case of a Spanish-language public hearing, the first in EPA history, English-language interpretation was provided;



Fifty-foot model of the Duwamish River Superfund site and its proposed cleanup plan. Photo: DRCC/TAG

- *A River for All*, a recently-released public awareness campaign, is led by community leaders and local personalities demanding a comprehensive, health-protective Duwamish River cleanup. Five-time Grammy-winning hip hop artist, Macklemore, is the campaign's public face.



Results

- Over 2,300 written comments were submitted to EPA through letters, photos, Facebook posts, digital stories and other media;
- Written comments were submitted in 10 languages, including English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Tagalog, Mien, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesian. Verbal comments were also submitted in Lushootseed, a native language spoken by the affected Tribes;
- 3,350+ people were actively engaged during the public comment period, including nearly 1,300 who attended public hearings or meetings organized, designed or promoted by DRCC/TAG's Rodríguez ;
- 50+ community engagement events on the proposed cleanup plan were organized/co-designed by DRCC/TAG's Rodríguez;
- Five formal public hearings were held by EPA (four more than the agency is legally required to). This included one hearing conducted 100% in Spanish, for the first time in EPA's history;
- Information presented at events was shared in 7 languages, 5 more than had been the practice before DRCC/TAG's involvement. In addition, written materials were developed and distributed in three languages.
- The *A River for All* campaign spurred action from more than 43,000 people from across all 50 states in the nation, demanding a comprehensive cleanup of the Duwamish River.

Additional Resources

- Visit www.duwamishcleanup.org to learn more about current outreach and advocacy efforts on behalf of a comprehensive, health-protective Duwamish River cleanup.

The Urban Waters Learning Network is coordinated by Groundwork USA and River Network with US EPA support. Go to www.UrbanWatersLearningNetwork.org for more information.



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