

Gateway Green Alliance

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WILL CITY DISCUSS LEAD PROBLEMS WITH CRITICS?

January 3, 2006. St. Louis, Missouri. Several St. Louis community organizations say that the City of St. Louis is rebuffing their invitations to discuss problems with its lead programs. "The City says that it wants to discuss lead with citizens; but it will not give us an answer," charges Barbara Chicherio, Co-Coordinator of the Gateway Green Alliance. "We've sent Ron Smith an invitation by mail; we invited him by e-mail; and he has not returned any of my calls."

Ron Smith, Director of Operations for the City, heads its lead poisoning prevention efforts. Groups that would like to discuss shortcomings with those efforts include the Gateway Green Alliance (GGA), Universal African Peoples Organization (UAPO), and Health & Environmental Justice (HEJ).

In October 2005, the advocacy group HEJ issued a "Report Card" on City of St. Louis lead programs. The City received a "D" on "Maintenance of a lead safe registry," a "C-" on "Enforcement of lead law violations," and an "Incomplete" on "Lead hazard evaluations."

In November 2005 the GGA released a survey documenting that the City had made no progress in removing lead from the block of 3300 Nebraska. Throughout 2005, the City had claimed 3300 Nebraska as a showcase block for removing lead to prevent childhood poisoning. (See www.gateway-greens.org)

The first finding of the survey was that seven months after it began the 3300 Nebraska Project, the City still did not have an accurate list of residences on the block. "There was a 32% error rate," reported Don Fitz, who directed the survey. "The City listed homes that were not there, failed to list residences that existed, and had the wrong number of residences at multiple-family units. If they intended to make every home lead-safe, they should at least have had an accurate list of homes on the block."

"Overall, we found that the City was making progress in educating people and testing homes but that it never got to the point of the project, which was to remove lead once you found it," Fitz notes. The GGA interpreted this as evidence that the City is using education and testing programs for public relations rather than as the first step in removing lead.

The UAPO sponsors the radio talk show, "The Power Hour." In its December 29, 2005 program, hosts, guests, and listeners raised concerns that the City is slow to respond to lead poisoning in neighborhoods that are predominantly African American and that this is evidence of environmental racism.

"Will the City only talk with organizations that promise not to raise concerns with the Mayor's lead programs?" Barbara Chicherio would like to know. "All of these groups are concerned that the City is still using children as lead detectors. The City waits until after children are poisoned before it tests for lead in homes. The City should be testing buildings and removing lead before children are poisoned."

The forum to discuss lead poisoning prevention efforts is titled "Is St. Louis Removing Lead from Homes?" It is at 7:00 pm, Wednesday, January 4, 2006 at the Carpenter Branch Library, 3309 South Grand. Speakers include:

- * Don Fitz, Gateway Green Alliance;
- * Kathleen Logan-Smith, Health & Environmental Justice;
- * Ron Smith, Director of Operations, City of St. Louis, has been invited; and,
- * Zaki Baruti, Universal African Peoples Organization.

To ask Ron Smith if he will attend, contact him at SmithR@stlouiscity.com or 314-622-3744.