

## **Science of Environmental Justice Working Conference**

EPA New England, in conjunction with Boston University School of Public Health, hosted a 2-day working conference sponsored by ORD's Regional Science Program, "Science to Action: Community-based Participatory Research and Cumulative Risk Analysis as Tools to Advance Environmental Justice in Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities". The conference was held at Boston University May 25-26, 2004, with the goal of providing an interactive, learning forum joining together scientists, technical experts, community leaders, nonprofit groups, academia, and government representatives to discuss current, national community-based participatory research efforts helping to assess, address and resolve environmental and public health risks in potential environmental justice areas of concern.

The conference was preceded by an afternoon bus tour of Chelsea and East Boston, MA, led by representatives from two local community-based organizations to illustrate environmental justice concerns. Chelsea and East Boston have populations of 35,000 and 38,000, with over 50 percent of residents representing people of color and more than 20 percent falling below the poverty level. Some of the most pressing environmental justice concerns that local residents face include lack of open and green space; limited waterfront access; numerous state-designated hazardous waste sites; heavy concentration of industries in a designated port area; traffic; and air pollution.

The conference began with welcoming comments from Robert Varney, Region 1 Regional Administrator, and Bill Farland, ORD Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for Science. Dr. Farland identified this conference as one of many "science topic" workshops that the Regions and ORD stage each year to improve understanding of local and national science issues, as well as to explore opportunities to integrate EPA science into decision making. He further gave examples of ORD science for environmental justice: Air Modeling—refining air pollution models to estimate at community levels; PM Health Studies—focusing on disproportionate health effects on children and elderly; National Children's Study—studying long-term influences on children's health and development; Border Program—addressing environmental health concerns to reduce exposure and other factors associated with increase in disease rates along the border; and Tools for Communities—providing tools like Framework for Cumulative Risk Assessment, Integrated Exposure Model for Lead, and EPA Science Inventory.

Plenary fora addressed the two major conference themes: "Assessing and Understanding Cumulative Risk in Environmental Justice Communities" and "Community-based Participatory Research in Urban, Suburban and Rural Environmental Justice Communities". Concurrent panel sessions focused on the topics of Air Toxics; Asthma; Children's Environmental Health; Land-based Risks; and Water Quality, with participants engaging in facilitated, small group discussions to identify key research needs and priorities for future action. The conference concluded with all participants gathering to hear brief reports from each topic workgroup, including a summary of panel presentation highlights and key themes emerging from the small group discussions. Ample opportunity was provided for participant feedback to discuss potential next steps.