

Ashtown

Ashtown is in a low-lying part of the City in between the Ocher River and Interstate 971. Because of its location, the area around Ashtown has long been an attractive location for industry. Many manufacturing companies have plants, large and small, in and around Ashtown. During its heyday, the largest industry in Ashtown was steel making. In the 1960s, Great Steel, the largest employer, closed its Ashtown facility. It was then converted into a scrapyard, which is still in operation. The scrapyard causes significant noise, dust, stormwater runoff, and other nuisance effects. But enforcement of environmental regulations has been non-existent at the site. Another large facility in the area is a refinery. It causes odor problems, air pollution, and groundwater contamination.

A majority of Ashtown residents are African-American. Another group of residents are retired steelworkers and their families, most of whom are white and over the age of 70. There is also a Latino community which is small but growing. Many residents fall into the lowest income quintile. Many residents feel they are part of a cancer cluster due to living close to industry for many years. Although unemployment is high in Ashtown, a large percentage of those employed work in the industries located in or near Ashtown. Many other workers commute in from the suburbs or the county but leave as soon as work is over.

The refinery has filed a permit application with the State Bureau of Air, asking to significantly expand its facility and operations along the River. Many hope that the expansion will bring new jobs to the area.

Representatives of two community-based groups contact the Clinic and ask for help. One group, No More, represents tenants in a public housing development in Ashtown. The members are concerned about the expansion and the resulting increase in air pollution, especially particulate matter. They are also concerned about the high rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses among Ashtown children. They feel they should not have to bear more negative impacts because they already experience a significant cumulative impact from the refinery's current operations, the scrapyard, and other industrial facilities, when they fear any additional jobs would go to those outside the community. Another group, Grow Ashtown, is engaged in job training and wants the refinery expansion to happen. In exchange for Grow Ashtown's support for the

expansion, the refinery has offered to modify its operations to reduce air pollution. Grow Ashtown wants the Clinic to help assess the refinery's offer and help ensure the refinery managers honor the agreement.

Both groups have asked the Clinic to help. The situation presents opportunities for legal, political/organizing, and public health/policy efforts. Legal issues include becoming involved in the permitting process and in enforcement efforts through one or more lawsuits. Political issues include persuading the government to adopt and enforce new laws to better control pollution and public participation; the companies to clean up their existing operations; and the refinery to withdraw its permit application. Public health and policy issues include working with available public health experts to research, education and outreach regarding the negative effects of air pollution, water pollution, and noise.

Instructions for groups

Participants will break up into 3 groups, with Helen, Jamie & Elizabeth each heading a group. Each group will come up with a set of questions to consider when designing a clinic method and curriculum to address these types of community problems. (For clinic method discuss utilizing one or more of the following practices/tools: 1) litigation; 2) policy research, drafting and/or advocacy, 3) community economic development, 4) intervention in permitting process, 5) negotiation with polluters and/or local governments, 7) community organizing, 8) other.) Consider how to train students to: 1) build client relationships and provide advice and counseling to organizational clients; 2) identify the client's goal when the constituent groups may not be able to agree on a single goal or may disagree about the ultimate outcome; 3) collaborate in a coalition setting; 4) collaborate with experts from other disciplines who bring public health, engineering, or other knowledge; 5) identify the role of the lawyer, where the client is addressing the problem in legal and political ways; 6) recognize the limitations of using legal tools. Then the groups will return to the large group to discuss the questions, the way each of our three clinics have addressed these questions and how these clinic design questions relate to other types of clinics.