ENVIRONMENTAL DISPARITIES IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS: FROM USE-INSPIRED RESEARCH TO COMMUNITY ACTION

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Abstract: The application of research to “real-life” issues in community settings has taken on increased importance in New Orleans and the surrounding area following hurricane Katrina, August 29, 2005. Center for Bioenvironmental Research made a strategic decision shortly after the storm to focus our resources and expertise on community based problems. This program, entitled Sustainable Urban Ecosystem, has emphasized work on sustainable building, energy, health, and job creation. We are exploring the interaction of the built and natural environment and the impact on human health in various parts of our city and region. We have worked on the premise that environmental sustainability is the basis of environmental health. As a guide, we have used a new approach to scientific research (Use-inspired research) as outlined in Pasteur’s Quadrant: Basic Science and Technological Innovation by Donald Stokes (1997). The early result suggests that a transfer of scientific knowledge to community action is feasible. The Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans has adopted a sustainable restoration strategy that encompasses all aspects of community life including human health. This may provide a model that can be applied to disparity issues in other cities in which the communities use sustainability to take charge of the future.