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UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5
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CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

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REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF

MISSISSIPPI RIVER GATEWAY INITIATIVE UPDATE MARCH 1995

Background:

Welcome to the first of a series of updates on the Mississippi River Gateway Initiative. In 1994, U.S. EPA, the Illinois EPA and a host of other Federal, State and local agencies met to pool resources and programs in order to better protect public health and the environment. The initiative will focus on the western portions of St. Clair and Madison counties as well as certain environmental issues in St. Louis, Mo. (see attached map). The objective is to approach environmental protection comprehensively, and to focus government resources such that risk to human health is reduced and environmental improvement is secured in a timely and efficient manner.

You may have been involved in some recent meetings of the initiative or you may have seen some articles in the local newspapers regarding this new program. It is hoped that through these updates, you will learn more about it and choose to get involved in some way. The updates will provide short articles about recent programs and will state a contact name for you to call for information.

Gateway Partners:

You may be wondering what agencies are involved in Gateway. Currently, the major partners are U.S. EPA Region 5 (Chicago) and Region 7 (Kansas City), Illinois EPA, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Regions 5 and 7, and the Illinois and Missouri Departments of Public Health. As the initiative progresses, other agencies at all appropriate levels of government will work with these partners. Whenever possible, we will work with community groups, local industry and any other groups that can assist in Gateway's goals.

Current Events:

Quite a bit of internal planning has happened over the last year. The agencies have formed a steering committee to provide direction to the initiative and a number of working groups have been formed to address specific environmental issues. We spent three months in early 1994 meeting with a variety of local individuals and groups to determine key environmental issues. We also convened in June and December of 1994, groups of citizen and business leaders to discuss the initiative and how these groups can become involved. In 1995, we will continue that dialogue to insure that the environmental and public health programs we undertake will be done in a meaningful and coordinated way.

Local Environmental Problems:

When we asked what were the most important environmental problems in the area, a variety of issues were raised. Local residents, community leaders, environmentalists and industry members told us that the aging, deteriorating sewer system posed a significant public health risk, especially during the spring

rains. Also derelict and vacant housing, abandoned cars and illegal dumping posed public health, environmental and crime risks. Lead in older homes, contaminated waste sites and air pollution from major industries were also identified as problem areas. U.S. EPA historically has not dealt with sewer systems and abandoned homes and instead has dealt with larger issues like air and water pollution and the cleanup of hazardous waste sites. However, upon hearing of these local problems, U.S. EPA, working with the Gateway partners, will be taking the lead from the community and will work to bring whatever resources are available to address these problems. This is new way for U.S. EPA and our partners to conduct our work and one that we think will yield better public health and environmental results.

Coordination of Lead Contamination Issues:

Coordinating and working with existing programs is one way the Gateway Initiative insures that programs are effective. This is especially true in identifying environmental and public health problems associated with lead paint in older homes. There are several programs that are being implemented in the area:

- St. Louis University is training workers, inspectors and supervisors in abating and cleaning up lead paint in homes as well as providing money for taking lead out of homes of children who have elevated blood lead levels. In addition, they are working with the St. Louis Department of Health to develop an educational puppet show for children regarding household sources of lead and how to avoid them. These projects were funded by U.S. EPA Region 7 in Kansas City for \$201,000. Contact: Greg Evans and Kwesi Dugbatcy, St. Louis University School of Public Health (314) 977-8157.
- The Illinois Department of Public Health is working with high risk families to reduce lead exposure through aggressive housekeeping and lead dust reduction techniques. A video (in both Spanish and English) has been developed to aid agency staff in their initial and follow-up visits. They are also working on a unique multi-media investigation to evaluate human health exposure to lead and cadmium occurrences in various environmental media throughout the East St. Louis area. The first project was funded for \$21,000 from U.S. EPA's (Region 5) environmental education program and the second was funded for \$90,000 from U.S. EPA Headquarters. Finally, IDPH received \$800,000 from HUD to clean up lead in over 100 East St. Louis area homes where lead levels are too high. Contacts: Catherine Copley and David Webb, both at (618) 656-6680.
- U.S. EPA, Region 7 also provided \$20,500 of Environmental Justice grant funds to three St. Louis area groups to implement lead awareness projects and school-based asthma health education. U.S. EPA, Region 5 provided \$9,900 to the American Lung Association of Illinois (Edwardsville) to carry out asthma education programs for asthmatic African American children in the East St. Louis area. Contacts: Hattie Thomas, Region 7 (913) 551-7762 and Gina Rosario, Region 5 (312) 353-4716.
- St. Louis County received \$1.24 million for lead abatement activities from U.S. Housing and Urban Development, Region 7. The program focuses on providing financial assistance to individuals who contract for lead abatement within their homes. Contact: Valda Croskey, St. Louis County Health Department, (314) 854-6902.

In future editions, we will report on the status of these programs.

Monsanto-Community Partnership:

On December 13, 1994, U.S. EPA convened a group of local industries to outline the Gateway Initiative and how they could get involved in helping to solve some of the unique issues in the area. In response, Monsanto Company's W.G. Krummrich Plant in Sauget, IL recently provided \$10,000 to Operation New Spirit of East St. Louis for the demolition and removal of a number of abandoned homes in the Rush City neighborhood. This is an excellent example of how government, industry and the community can work together in addressing local public health and environmental problems.

Future Editions:

As you can tell, there is quite a bit of activity going on in the Metro East and St. Louis area. It is our goal to keep you informed on ongoing and future environmental and public health programs. We will seek to report on the successes and, in a learning effort, report on those projects that need further work. In so doing, we would like you to get more involved in the initiative. Please note the names listed below to get and give more information on any of the programs and projects discussed in these updates. Also, feel free to use the attached comment sheet to provide us with any comments or suggestions you may have on the Gateway Initiative.

For More Information:

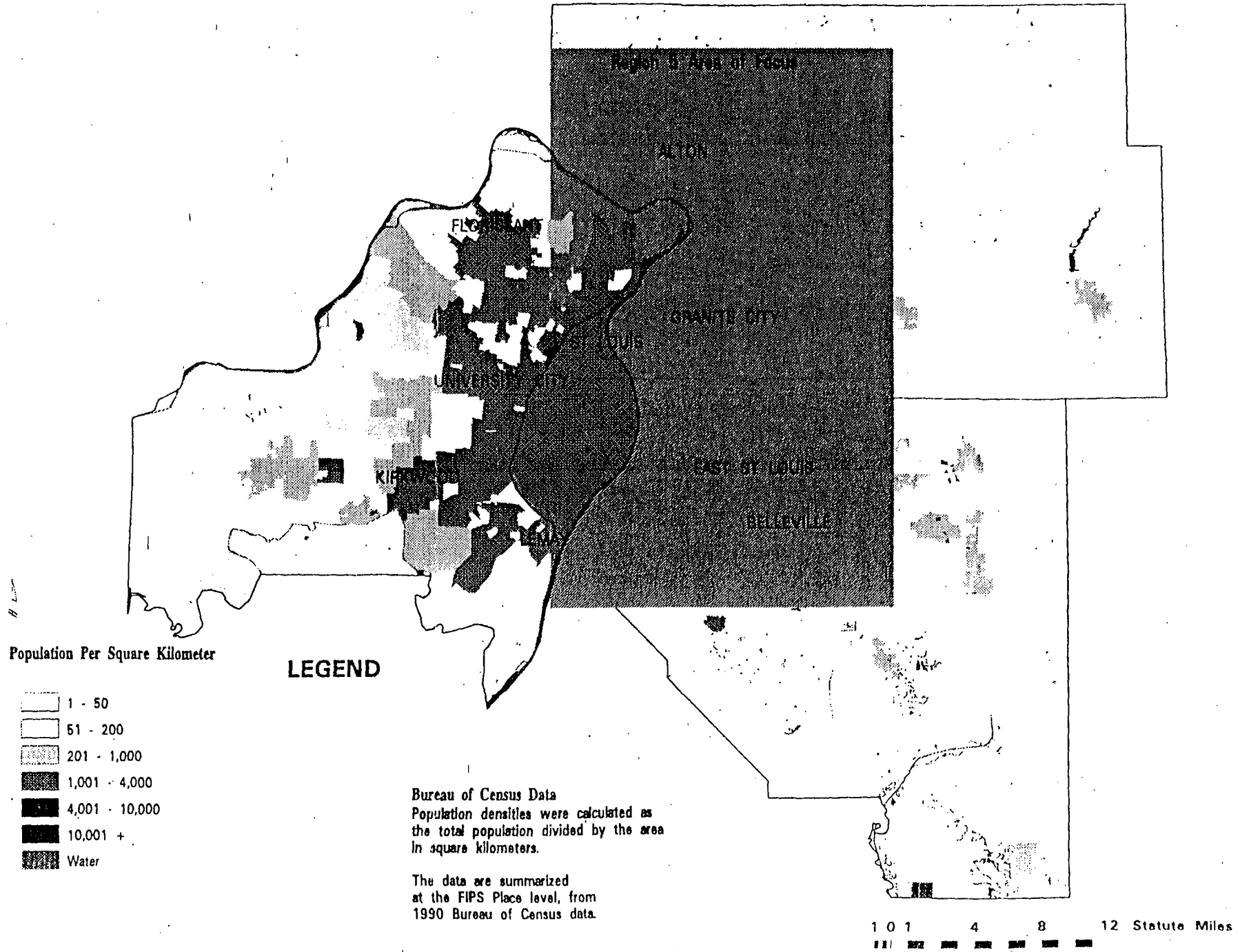
Feel free to contact the following individuals for more information:

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Doug Elders
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Toxics and Pesticides Branch
726 Minnesota Avenue
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(913) 551-7393

Ken Mensing, Regional Manager
Bureau of Land
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Mississippi River Gateway Initiative

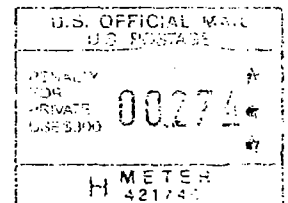
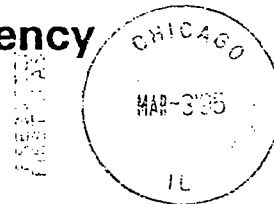


What Are Your Concerns?

Now that we have talked a little about the Gateway Initiative, what are your concerns? Feel free to use the space below and tell us your issues, comments, praise and criticisms of the Gateway Initiative. Tell us what you think is good about it and how it can be improved; we would certainly appreciate it. Also, if you have any comments on the format or layout of this update, feel free to discuss that as well. Please fold this paper in third and return it (with proper postage) to the address printed on the other side. Thank you.

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