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St. Louis Post Dispatch
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Speakers Focus On Problems With Ecology

'There's Anger And Fear' In Poor Areas, Critic Says

By William Allen
Post-Dispatch Science Writer

Pollution in poor pockets of cities, largely occupied by minorities, is causing grief and rage that few outsiders pay attention to, a St. Louis civil rights leader said Friday.

"Among the victims of environmental injustice, there's anger and fear about the future," said the leader, the Rev. Dr. Buck Jones. "And there's pain about how others have mistreated them."

Jones is minister of the Metropolitan Mission for the Illinois South and the Missouri Conference of the United Church of Christ. He spoke at the annual World Ecology Day symposium at the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

The symposium, sponsored by the university's International Center for Tropical Ecology, drew about 200 people, most of them from St. Louis area high schools.

Three fifth-graders from the McKelvey Elementary School in the Parkway District won the symposium's environmental display contest for their exhibit, "Compost: A Positive Effect on the Environment." The students are Lindsay Abbett, Katie Guebert and Allison Hourcade.

The symposium — on "Environmental Justice: Pollution, Poverty and People" — featured several activists and industry executives. They argued about whether industry behaves responsibly when it generates pollution in minority communities.

Jones described a distraught East St. Louis woman who came to his office one day complain-

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Pollution

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ing of pollution from local industrial plants.

"We can't smell it, we can't see it and we can't touch it, but we know it's there — because it's killing people in my community," the woman told him, crying. She reported that 25 people on her block had cancer, then revealed that she had just received a diagnosis of cancer.

"Why won't someone pay attention to us?" she asked. "We feel like throw-away people."

In a slide show, Jones depicted a legacy of industrial pollution and government indifference in East St. Louis. He called on the audience to challenge government and industry to correct environmental problems there and in St. Louis.

Representatives of Monsanto Co. and Mallinckrodt Chemical Inc. cited recently developed programs aimed at cutting pollution and improving relations with residents near their plants.

"We do the right thing," said Keith Miller, an environmental official with Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich Plant, in Sauget. "We go beyond compliance [with pollution regulations]. We realize that we are granted by the

public the privilege to operate."

He cited Monsanto's progress in reducing emissions, improving the handling of hazardous materials and establishing links with residents.

Ron Harding, vice president of operations for Mallinckrodt, said the company had reduced emissions to land, air and water by 50 percent since 1987. The company has also formed a community advisory program.

"As long as we have poverty, as long as we have industry, we're going to face the issue of environmental justice," he said. Industry and residents need to work to solve the problems together, he said.

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Belleville News-Democrat

REGIONAL

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NEW SPIRIT: The first of four derelict buildings in the Goose Hill neighborhood was reduced to a heap of rubble Tuesday.

Demolition points way to beautification

By Rod Hafemeister

Belleville News-Democrat

EAST ST. LOUIS — Ruby Whitfield watched as the front-end loader crashed into the charred wood and pushed it together into piles.

On Tuesday morning, Whitfield's derelict property was converted to clear land, with a possible future as a neighborhood flower garden in a program of Operation New Spirit and the Monsanto Fund.

"I'm so delighted I feel like shouting!" she said — and did. "They say good things come to those who wait. And I've been waiting a long time."

For almost 50 years, Whitfield has lived in the Goose Hill neighborhood of East St. Louis, the 22 blocks along the city's border with National City.

She's seen it go from a neighborhood of nice, modest homes to one of vacant lots and derelict structures — including the former rental home Whitfield owned at 818 N. Second St.

The house burned down about 18 months ago, leaving behind crumbled and charred remains. The lot quickly became choked with weeds and brush and the trash such lots attract.

"I tried to keep it up the best I could, but it just got away from me," Whitfield said. "I needed help."

Help arrived from Operation New Spirit, a neighborhood improvement project under the Metro East Church-Based Citizens Organization. Using a \$10,000 grant from the Monsanto Fund, New Spirit is demolishing four derelict structures

in the Goose Hill neighborhood.

This is the second \$10,000 grant Monsanto has given New Spirit for cleaning up derelict buildings. In June, five buildings in the city's Rush City neighborhood were demolished.

"I think this is a good example of social responsibility by Monsanto," said Alandra Byrd, with New Spirit. "They were more than willing to help. We're hoping to get donations from other corporations."

East St. Louis has identified about 1,600 derelict properties in the city and is beginning a citywide demolition program that is expected to take several years.

"We're just doing a few homes at a time," Byrd said. "But it's a start."

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Neighbors, industry solve pollution woes

By Mike Fitzgerald

Belleville News-Democrat

COLLINSVILLE — In 1988, Monsanto Corp. leaders knew they faced a big problem at their Sauget plant.

The year before, the plant discharged 4 million pounds of pollutants. Monsanto's top executives knew they were within their legal rights, but they also knew that a potential public relations disaster loomed.

So Monsanto began looking for ways to cut Sauget's pollution releases. The chemical giant also took a step in a radically new direction. It set up one of the first community advisory panels. For the first time, East St. Louis residents had Monsanto's ear.

The partnership clicked. Over the next seven years, the plant's emissions dropped by 90 percent, while the advisory board provided a model for other community advisory boards.

Monsanto's success story provided the springboard Tuesday for

a public discussion among environmental activists, industry leaders and government regulators. Held at the Gateway Convention Center, the "Workshop on Good Neighbor Dialogues" drew more than 80 participants. The Mississippi River Gateway Initiative and the St. Louis Regional Commerce and Growth Association sponsored the event.

The event's participants said it gave them a rare chance to drop the adversarial stances that often keep them apart.

"I see this as an opportunity for people to sit down and talk about what they're doing," said Stephanie Green, an East St. Louis resident and a member of the Midwest Environmental Training Institute.

The event's speakers offered plenty of tips on how other businesses and community groups can work together.

Keith Miller, Monsanto's general supervisor of environmental

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Seminar-

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safety and health, emphasized that a company must follow up its promises to the community with action. "You must say what you are going to do, then do it," Miller said.

Jo Haberman, an activist from Minneapolis, told the audience that information is a key resource in dealing with industrial polluters. "I cannot overemphasize the importance of unbiased technical assistance," said Haberman, a leader of Citizens for A Better Environment.

A few audience members, however, cited reasons for concern.

Pennie Livingston, an assistant state's attorney for St. Clair County, noted that earlier this year the Illinois General Assembly passed a law that limits to \$500,000 what an individual may receive in punitive damages. This limit could do little to deter big polluters, Livingston said.