



Southwest Air Pollution Control Authority

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TDD Accessible

NEWS RELEASE

The Southwest Air Pollution Control Authority (SWAPCA) Has Been Awarded A \$100,000 "Environmental Justice" Grant by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Summary - Robert Elliott, Executive Director of the Southwest Air Pollution Control Authority (SWAPCA), announced today that his agency has been awarded a \$100,000 Environmental Justice grant by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency after a national competition on Environmental Justice issues. Mr. Elliott said "the concept of environmental justice has its origin in the 1990s observation that middle and upper class America tend to place a disproportionate share of the environmental impacts of new projects and environmental regulations on low income citizens or in low income areas. Although not done intentionally, the environmental impact of new projects (e.g., routing of highways, urban renewal, location of prisons, environmental regulations, etc.) disproportionately impacts low income citizens. These citizens and areas are often not able to raise significant political resistance to such projects or programs." Mr. Elliott explained that the purpose of the Environmental Justice grants program is to raise the level of awareness of Americans on how growth related decisions are being made.

In the effort to improve air quality in metropolitan areas, Mr. Elliott said low income citizens receive a disproportionate share of the burden from the motor vehicle emission testing program. Vehicles owned by low income citizens tend to be older and are likely to be the higher polluters. At the same time, these citizens have the least amount of income to insure compliance with the air pollution regulations on which the vehicle emission testing criteria are based.

Mr. Elliott said the purpose of this grant is to demonstrate the dramatic reductions in air pollution emissions which can be obtained by fully repairing the emissions from vehicles owned by low income head of households. It will also provide information on the seriousness of the financial crisis caused by the emission failure and faced by the low income head of the household. Another evaluation issue will relate to the degree of dependency which low income citizens have on their motor vehicle just like the rest of America and raise the public's awareness on this issue. He said getting low income citizens off of welfare may require a recognition that the low income segment of our society is just as dependent on having a motor vehicle as middle class America.

The alternative to this project is that these households spend up to the \$150 waiver amount which is often insufficient to make a significant reduction in their air pollution emissions. SWAPCA will be able to assist low income citizens in obtaining full emissions compliance while also helping with the financial crisis which failure of the emission test causes these citizens. These funds are expected to be exhausted over a period of about 6 to 8 months.

Mr. Elliott explained that The Salvation Army will be a key partner in the day-to-day offering of this program to low income citizens. All motor vehicles registered in Clark County who fail the emission test on their vehicle will be given a contact form. This contact form will inform the citizen that if they meet the low income eligibility criteria, they may qualify for financial assistance in the emission repairs to their vehicle. The contact form has the telephone number of The Salvation Army and citizens who believe they may qualify are instructed to call and set up an appointment. Once eligibility for the program is confirmed in this one-on-one meeting with The Salvation Army at their east Clark County office, the citizen is given a voucher to take to pre-approved vehicle emission repair shops. Upon completion of the emission related repairs, the pre-approved repair shop sends an invoice to The Salvation Army. Department of Ecology personnel will review the repair bill to confirm that only emission repair items have been included in the invoice. The Salvation Army then issues a payment directly to the vehicle repair shop.

A smaller pilot project in 1997 demonstrated the significant value of this concept. First, the air pollution emissions coming from these vehicles after emission repairs was reduced by as much as 70 percent. Second, a serious financial crisis was averted for many low income citizens because the head of the household did not have to choose between putting food on the table or paying the rent versus keeping their vehicle in operating condition. Third, the automotive repair industry in Clark County praised the earlier program for the way in which it was able to assist low income citizens. These businesses were able to observe the positive impact which this project had on the lives of these citizens. Mr. Elliott said, "the goal of this project is to demonstrate that a win-win program can exist for both the environment and low income citizens."

Mr. Elliott said that eligible Clark County citizens will begin to benefit from this project immediately. Upon completion of this project, Mr. Elliott said SWAPCA will prepare a final report summarizing its impacts and benefits. This report will be submitted to EPA Region 10 and EPA Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Clark County has two motor vehicle emission testing sites. One is in the Cascade Park area of east Vancouver and the other is in the Salmon Creek area of north Vancouver.

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