

# Howard University/Center for Urban Progress

## Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Technical Study Launch Ceremony

Washington, DC, Sept. 16, 2004



## DC groups answer call to action at HUCUP Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Technical Study launch event

On Sept. 16, 2004, Howard University leaders, national experts, leading local ministers and the public gathered at a public forum and town hall meeting to launch an important new partnership to study lead poisoning and improve the selection, recruitment, outreach and education of affected families in Wards 1, 4, and 5 of the District of Columbia. The research initiative is supported by a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to Howard University.

Spearheaded by the Howard University Center for Urban Progress (CUP), a ten-year old unit of the University committed to holistic community development in the neighborhoods of the District of Columbia through University-Community collaborations, the new partnership includes: the National Center for Healthy Housing; The Coalition for Environmentally Safe Communities; the DC Lead Poisoning Screening and Education Program of the DC Department of Health; the Fishermen of Men Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith; the Mount Bethel Baptist Church; and the Third Street Church of God.

*“We are working with community and faith-based organizations to better reach, educate and assist families to defeat this entirely preventable disease.”*

*-- Dr. Janet Phoenix*

## Presentation and Dialogue

### Panel: *Lead Hazards in the DC Community*

The intent of the meeting was to provide the platform for announcing the launch of the Lead Poisoning Prevention Technical Study research to improve services to the Washington, DC low-income neighborhoods; and also a public forum to discuss and identify the lead poisoning issues in the Washington community and the specific actions needed to eliminate lead hazards from the homes of young children.

Four panelists and the panel moderator addressed the severity of the childhood lead poisoning problem in the District of Columbia, which has one of the highest lead poisoning incidents rates in the nation.

The panelists and moderator were:

- Leopold Clarke, *Lead Safe Washington*
- Christine Onwuche, *Childhood Lead Poisoning Screening & Education, DC Dept. of Health*
- Cecilin Chisholm, MD, *Third Street Church of God*
- Rodney Green, PhD, *Howard University Center for Urban Progress*
- Janet Phoenix, MD, MPH, *Coalition for Environmentally Safe Communities (moderator)*

A highlight of the meeting was the number of groups and organizations who came forward during the course of the dialogue to offer their involvement in community action work needed to increase lead poisoning awareness in the city. Among these were the following:

- Representatives of the Howard University student groups
- A representative of the Howard University Alumni Association
- A physician involved in organizing symposia on lead contamination in the water



Panelists at the Town Hall Meeting spoke to the daunting challenge of eliminating lead hazards in homes with young children and need for greater involvement from every sector of the Washington, DC community.



Representatives from a wide variety of community groups (above and below) offered their involvement in the efforts to spread awareness of the effects of lead poisoning on children and of the hazards that exist in thousands of older homes in the District.



## Town Hall Meeting tie-in with Howard University Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Research Project

The CESC Town Hall Meeting on Lead was co-sponsored with Howard University's Center for Urban Policy (HUCUP). Prior to the start of the Town Hall Meeting, Howard University officials announced the launch of "an important new partnership to study lead poisoning and improve the selection, recruitment, outreach and education of affected families" in the district's most vulnerable neighborhoods.

The innovative research initiative is supported by a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to Howard University. CESC is a major partner in the management of the project.

The project will provide a demonstration of the effectiveness of partnering with religious based organizations to increase awareness of lead poisoning dangers by utilizing the voices and energies of trusted religious leaders and church members in the Washington, DC community.

"This is our opportunity," says Dr. Janet Phoenix, the project's director," for Howard University, in partnership with the District of Columbia's faith-based organizations, to lead the way for the rest of the nation."

Lead poisoning is the nation's top environmental health threat, and the incidence rates in Washington, DC are among the worst in the nation. Of the children tested in the highest risk District wards, 16% were found to be lead poisoned – nearly 4 times the national average. And despite mandatory testing requirements in the District, only 43% of the children are tested annually.

The project is partnering with the following faith based organizations under the research project, but also welcomes and is working with a wide variety of faith based organizations: Fishermen of Men Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith; the Mount Bethel Baptist Church; and the Third Street Church of God.



Leo Clark, director of Lead Safe Washington, addresses concerns about which wards in DC are the most likely to have lead hazards in the homes. Ready to offer additional information is Christine Onwuche of the Childhood Lead Poisoning Screening & Education Program



"It's working!" A member of a DC community organization describes the work she and other members have been doing working with CESC and Howard University to help reach her neighbors with an increased awareness of the dangers of lead poisoning. Rebecca Morley (below) of the National Center for Healthy Housing addresses a question from the audience.

