**NEWS RELEASE**

**New Report Highlights Community Concerns with Industrial**

**Activities and Toxic Substances in Winnipeg**

**WINNIPEG, MANITOBA: Tuesday, March 21, 2023**

***“We are scared to eat our vegetables and our gardens are covered in this dust, metal dust.”***

***“I have gone outside on days where the chemical smell was so bad, it burned your eyes and throat to the point where you had to go back in the* house.”**

Today, the Manitoba Eco-Network is releasing the final report for its ***Healthy Environment, Healthy Neighborhood (HEHN) Project***. The HEHN project documented first-hand experiences of Winnipeg residents in inner city and mature neighbourhoods who live near industrial and contaminated sites, most notably in Point Douglas and St. Boniface.  The project’s community-based research also involved examination of government policy and law, with a focus on identifying opportunities that empower citizens seeking environmental justice and better protection of human health and the environment.

Community members who were interviewed shared serious concerns about the negative impacts they have experienced due to industrial hazards in their neighbourhoods. This includes contamination of soil, noise, odours, explosions, and unusual particulate matter observable in the air.

HEHN Project Lead, Alexandra Caporale, notes the importance of also recognizing the mental health impacts that citizens experience when they are constantly worried about potential health and environmental risks. “Interviewees emphasized that the difficulties they were facing added up to something greater than the sum of its parts,” says Alexandra. “Overall living was impacted in pervasive ways, such as garbage making it impossible to walk their dogs in a certain area, the loss of feeling refreshed from open windows, the dangers of eating homegrown vegetables, and the stresses of not knowing future health impacts. These issues compound on each other and create a burden of concern about daily life. This effect has significant negative consequences for emotional well-being.”

The report indicates that residents near industrial sites feel that they have been ignored by industry and the government when they try to seek remedies for the negative impacts they have experienced due to toxic chemicals in their neighbourhoods. Community members in the study areas have limited access to environmental justice. The main opportunity for citizen engagement in relevant legal processes is usually limited to the submission of written feedback, participation in public hearings (which are rarely held), and reporting potential contamination to government.

“There is clearly a need for policy and legal changes to improve Manitobans’ access to environmental justice and ability to hold all levels of government and industry accountable”, says Heather Fast, MbEN’s Policy Advocacy Director.

Possible legal and policy solutions identified in the report include:

- recognition of environmental human rights

-a more inclusive and comprehensive land use planning approach

- new legal tools to improve enforcement of existing requirements and government accountability

- the publication of more health, environmental, and enforcement data

Manitoba Eco-Network views this project as the first in a series of future projects and advocacy efforts seeking to assist community members in Manitoba seeking policy and legal change.

**ATTACHED**: LINK TO FULL REPORT

**MEDIA CONTACTS:**

**NOTE: Several residents with lived experience can join Alexandra and Heather in media interviews.**

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*Manitoba Eco-Network is a public interest environmental organization seeking to promote and facilitate good environmental governance and the protection of Manitoba’s environment for the benefit of current and future generations.*
*https://mbeconetwork.org/*