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Street Science: Community Knowledge and Environmental Health Justice (Urban and Industrial Environments)

Jason Corburn

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When environmental health problems arise in a community, policymakers must be able to reconcile the first-hand experience of local residents with recommendations by scientists. In this highly original look at environmental health policymaking, Jason Corburn shows the ways that local knowledge can be combined with professional techniques to achieve better solutions for environmental health problems. He traces the efforts of a low-income community in Brooklyn to deal with environmental health problems in its midst and offers a framework for understanding "street science" -- decision making that draws on community knowledge and contributes to environmental justice.

Like many other low-income urban communities, the Greenpoint/Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn suffers more than its share of environmental problems, with a concentration of polluting facilities and elevated levels of localized air pollutants. Corburn looks at four instances of street science in Greenpoint/Williamsburg, where community members and professionals combined forces to address the risks from subsistence fishing from the polluted East River, the asthma epidemic in the Latino community, childhood lead poisoning, and local sources of air pollution. These episodes highlight both the successes and the limits of street science and demonstrate ways residents can establish their own credibility when working with scientists. Street science, Corburn argues, does not devalue science; it revalues other kinds of information and democratizes the inquiry and decision making processes.

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