

VIMS graduate student receives EPA CARE grant

(October 18, 2011) Erica Holloman, a doctoral student at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and the Greater Southeast Development Corporation, a local non-profit, have received a \$100,000 CARE grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to work with community groups and residents in the city of Newport News. Their goal is to identify and reduce risks from toxic pollution in the Southeast Community, a historically African-American and highly industrialized area of the city.

The EPA held a ceremony to honor the winners of these highly competitive grants at its Ronald Reagan Building on October 18th. Only 100 CARE grants have been awarded nationwide since the program launched in 2005.

Dr. Linda Schaffner, Associate Dean of Academic Studies at VIMS, says “Less than 10 percent of all applicants to the CARE program are successful. It speaks very highly of Erica’s talent and moxie that she received one of these awards while still a graduate student.”

The CARE program—Community Action for a Renewed Environment—helps communities across the country better understand and address their environmental problems through local partnerships. Since its launch in 2005, CARE has leveraged EPA grant funding dollar-for-dollar with in-kind donations to 87 communities in 40 states and territories with more than 1,700 partners.

In Newport News, Holloman will collaborate with the Greater Southeast Development Corporation and its Moton Community House to better inform Southeast residents about how toxic pollutants may be affecting the local environment and their own health. Holloman then plans to partner with the informed citizenry on projects to improve local environmental quality and reduce associated health risks.

“Our project will provide a framework and a scientific process that addresses environmental quality and associated impacts from a community perspective,” says Holloman. “It will empower the community to take action to reduce exposure and risk as soon as possible.”

Holloman’s CARE project builds on her dissertation research at VIMS, in which she used “community-based participatory research” to study fish and shellfish consumption and its possible relation to mercury exposure among African-American women in the same Newport News neighborhood. Mercury is a toxic metal that tends to accumulate up the marine food chain—reaching dangerous levels in some predatory fish.

Holloman says her dissertation shows that “even though women in Southeast Newport News aren’t subsistence anglers, they consume fish and shellfish at a subsistence-angler rate, and that the amount consumed plays a significant role in their dietary mercury exposure.”



*VIMS doctoral student
Erica Holloman.*

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Virginia Institute of Marine Science
School of Marine Science
College of William and Mary
Gloucester Point, VA 23062
(804) 684-7000

Holloman's ultimate goal is to work with members of the Southeast community to develop dietary guidelines that would help them receive the positive health benefits of eating fish and shellfish, while minimizing their exposure to mercury.

Environmental pollution in the Southeast Community—whose population of 34,707 is 78% African American—correlates with commercial port operations, the proximity of Interstate 664, and various industrial facilities. Of 16 known industrial facilities now operating in Newport News, 7 are located within the city's Southeast section.

Holloman notes that the history of industrialization in the community dates back to the 1880s. "This historical legacy and the continued operation of various industrial facilities continue to concern Southeast residents," she says. "Our CARE project will hopefully engage citizens to better understand the impacts of toxic pollutants on their community and health while ultimately generating action to reduce pollutant concentrations and exposures in the Southeast Community."



East End Seafood Consumption: VIMS Ph.D. student Erica Holloman (R) interviews a woman about her seafood consumption outside a mini-mart in Newport News.