

# Take a Tour of Your Town

*Martha Merson*

To get to know the history of a place, tourists sign up for walking tours. Along the Freedom Trail in Boston, on a tour of monuments in Washington, DC, and down under the sidewalks in Seattle, guides tell stories of times gone by – heroes and bad guys, wars, fires and floods.

People in the Little Village neighborhood in Chicago and in Roxbury, MA, and in Detroit, MI, also have stories to tell – stories about towering piles of toxic soil left standing uncovered, stories about leaking drums and mysterious health problems. They have designed “toxic tours” to show people the environmental problems in their neighborhoods and to celebrate their successes in cleaning up toxic messes.



*Stuart Spina of Alternatives for Community and the Environment explains the history of toxic sites in Roxbury, MA.*

## Recipe for a Walking Tour

1. Get a map or make a rough drawing of the neighborhood.
2. List places around the neighborhood that have a toxic history and mark them on the map.
3. Identify places that are assets too, like gardens.
4. Add one or more answers for each place:
  - What is the problem?
  - What statistic explains the size of the problem or its toxicity?
  - How long has it been going on?
  - What actions have been taken?
5. Season with principles, for instance: fairness or lack of input from the community.
6. Sprinkle with hope by explaining what people were able to accomplish when they took action.
7. Final Prep
  - Practice it
  - Time it
  - Schedule it
  - Advertise it
8. Serve to some people who want to hear the stories.