

# How to run a successful: White Flag Campaign

## Inside this package:

Determining the Study Area	2
Gathering Community Partners	3
Assembling the Materials	3
Launching the Initiative	5
Flag Distribution and Canvassing	5
Flag Collection	7
Prepping Flags for Presentation	7
Sharing the Results	9

**“A simple, powerful, and effective community monitoring tool.”**

**“When the flag is white, the air’s alright!”**

**“It’s easy, yet so ingenious at the same time.”**



## What is this initiative?

The white flag tactic was originally created and utilized by Italy’s Legambiente (Environmental League). To draw attention to industrial soot, the group distributed white flags for members to hang out their windows. Before long, the white flags turned gray.

This was a great tactic because it was simple, effective, allowed many people to get involved, and its meaning was clear to all.

Recognizing the success that was had overseas, the Hamilton Good Neighbour Campaign decided to conduct the initiative within the northeast end of the city. Our goal was to create a strong visual and bring attention to the visible industrial pollution which covers our homes and enters our lungs. Having no supporting documents from the Legambiente to lend guidance, the campaign was

forced to create a methodology from scratch.

**This guide outlines the process that we created and utilized to successfully hang 400 white flags in the residential communities adjacent to Hamilton’s industrial core in the summer of 2010.**



# 1. Determining the Study Area

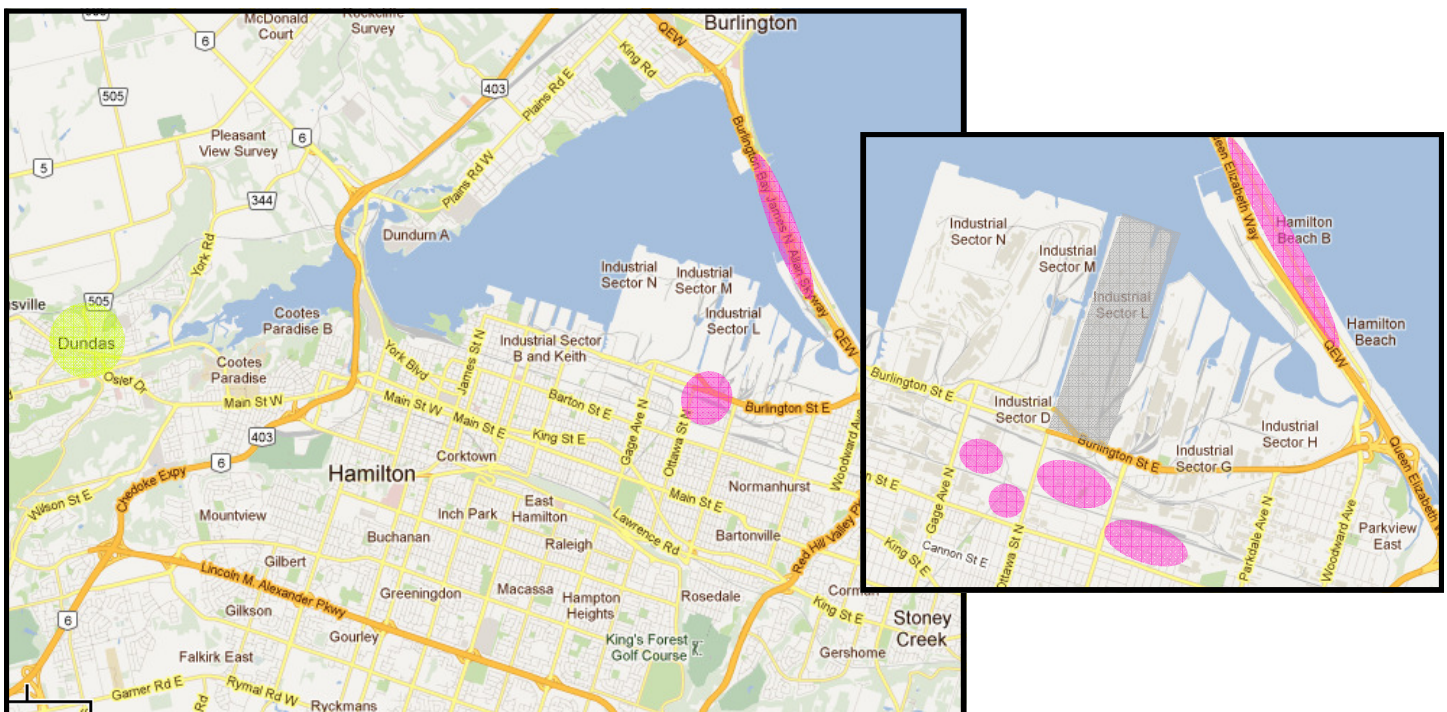
By saturating flags in specific impacted areas, and by placing additional flags in a rural community to act as a control, we were able to gauge the industrial impacts.

A white flag initiative should take place in an area that is anticipated to be heavily impacted by neighbouring industry and contain high levels of visible dust and particulate matter. For our initiative, we chose to concentrate on the residential neighbourhoods surrounding ArcelorMittal-Dofasco, the city's largest steel producer. Here, black fall-out (soot), among other things, was considered an on-going issue within the communities and residents were actively seeking ways

to not only identify the specific source of the contaminants, but showcase the degree to which their neighbourhoods were being impacted. Specifically, and as identified on the map below, we chose to focus on 4 north end communities located directly south of AM-Dofasco and the Beach community located to the north and across the bay. Although we could have expanded our reach to include additional areas, such as the homes between Barton and Main

St., we felt that our area selection was appropriate. By saturating those specific highly impacted areas with flags, we were able to not only create a more detailed understanding of the particulate levels in each community, but we were able to create a better visual for residents and media. Having said that, although we decided to focus on/canvass those specific areas, we offered flags to anyone in the north end who felt impacted and wanted to monitor their

air. They would simply have to come to us to obtain a flag. We additionally placed a small set of flags in Dundas, an area distant from local industry and known to have a relatively clean air-shed. This was done to act as a control measure. By establishing a baseline of particle levels within an industry-free air-shed, we were able to create a contrast and show that these high levels of particles are not found in all areas of the city.



## 2. Gathering Community Partners

Two sets of hands are better than one. By working with community partners we were able to expand our outreach and disperse some of the workload.

Recognizing that canvassing alone would not serve as a sufficient way to distribute and collect flags, we decided that community-based pickup and drop-off centers were also needed. The role of these centers was to provide an accessible way for people to pick up flags should we have missed them at the door, provide information should people request it, and provide a place for

people to drop off their flags should the canvassers not be able to collect them for any reason (eg, if they were placed within a backyard or up a flagpole).

Having worked in these areas for several months prior, the campaign had a good understanding of the neighbourhoods and had already established a network of contacts. For the purpose of this initiative, we called upon both com-

munity members and local organizations. Specifically we chose to partner with the Kenilworth Branch of the Hamilton Public Library, the East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club, and 3 residential families. These partners were chosen for multiple reasons. First, all were located and evenly dispersed within our target communities. Second, a mix of both residential and organizational partners,

provided community members with a choice as to whom they felt comfortable connecting with. Last, both of our public partners are popular neighbourhood hubs that numerous community members frequent regularly. By partnering with them we realized that the initiative would gain a larger profile and with minimal extra work.

## 3. Assembling the Materials

At the core, we found our flags, instruction manuals, and Google map to be our essentials.

The flags were by far the most expensive and time consuming aspect of the initiative. To counter this we sought donations and organized community flag making sessions.

Donation packages were compiled and sent to a variety of fabric stores located within the north end. In exchange for fabric we offered to include their logo on our door-to-door handouts with a few sentences indicating the mate-

rials for the initiative were generously donated by their company. Some stores were able to offer us poly-cotton blends, but none were able to offer us 100% white cotton. Luckily the local councillor for the area was able to provide a small amount of funding which helped to offset our costs.

To help assemble the flags we held two “Stich and Bitch” sessions with Environment Hamilton mem-

bers/volunteers. These evening events were designed to appeal to sewing fans and those artistically inclined. We provided snacks, sewing instruction, music, and great conversation which made for enjoyable yet productive evenings. In addition to these nights, we provided materials and instruction to volunteers wishing to create flags on their own time.

### Core Materials:

- Flags
- Instruction Manuals
- Google Map

We found that 100% white cotton was the most effective fabric for catching and observing particulate matter.



## Making the Flags



Average flag = 37xm x 52cm



Each flag had one end folded over and glued/sewn shut. This allowed us to thread poles or string through for easy hanging purposes.

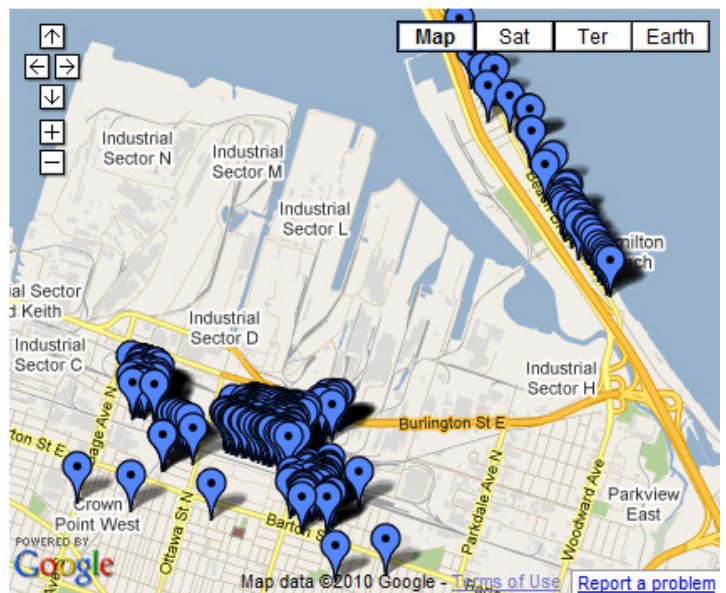
A customized stamp was also purchased to allow us to place information on the flag quickly and easily.

- Flag Making Materials :**
- Fabric (100% White Cotton )
  - Scissors
  - Ruler/Straight edge
  - Customized stamp\*
  - Glue or thread and needles

## Creating a Community Accessible Map

The Google map was created to allow anyone interested in the initiative to go online and see where the flags were being flown and where the pickup centers were located. For those not residing in the identified flag areas, it provided a great visual as to how many participants were truly involved and helped to showcase the consistent momentum the project had.

Recommendation: Should the resources exist, take pictures of each flag right before they are taken down and once collected and upload them to the map. This will provide an easier way for people to identify pollution patterns post-campaign and provide a more permanent location to house your information.



## Assembling an Instruction Manual

The handbooks were designed to act as a resource for participants. In addition to being posted online and being available for pickup at each pickup centre, each handbook was delivered door to door with the flags.

They contained information on the following:  
 What the initiative is/why

do it? How to care for/hang a flag? Particulate matter: what it is, where it comes from, and why it is harmful to human health. Where other flags can be found. Who to contact for more information.

We designed the handbooks to be as detailed as possible, and included information from a variety

of reputable sources.

When delivering the flags, if we were unable to provide a manual personally to a resident we dropped a copy in the mailbox—allowing every home to have information.

Please see website to view and download a copy of our manual.



## 4. Launching the Initiative

Create the buzz amongst community and media. Let people know they can start keeping an eye out for flags in their neighbourhoods.

To help bring attention to the program and announce to the community that it would soon be implemented, we held a launch event at the East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club. With sponsorship from two councillors and the mayor,

we were able to provide families with a free BBQ, kids activities and games, information booths providing materials on community-specific environmental concerns, a movie screening of Wall-E, and a large white flag display.

Families were encouraged to come out to have some fun, learn and ask questions about the current environmental concerns within their neighbourhood, and above all, obtain a white flag. This event supplied us with a good

amount of media coverage, allowed us to connect with interested residents, and was a great first step in getting those flags out into the community.

## 5. Flag Distribution and Canvassing

Personally bringing the flags door to door was essential in gaining resident participation.

Canvassing was essential to the success of this initiative. Had we not gone door to door and personally offered to hang the flags on the spot, the numbers

for this initiative would have been very minimal. To perform our canvass we had a team of 5 volunteers. Each volunteer was provided with a campaign t

-shirt and a training session to ensure they were properly briefed on the campaign, the initiative, and proper safety procedures.

Given our office was not located within our selected communities, one of our volunteers offered her house as a canvass hub. Here, she housed the

ready-to-hang flags, the hanging materials, the manuals, and the folding grocery cart (which was extremely useful in transporting materials from house to house). This hub proved very beneficial as it helped to eliminate the constant transport of materials back and forth, and provided our canvass group with a central meeting spot to use for rallying, storing personal items during the canvass, and relaxing, unwinding, and debriefing post canvass.

When at the door, our volunteers said the following:

“Hi there, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m with Environment Hamilton. I’m not sure if you noticed all the white flags that have been put up on your street (or area), but we’re looking to hang white flags in this neighbourhood for July and August to test the air quality by seeing how much dust and soot collects. Are you comfortable with us hanging a flag here?”

We found this approach to be very effective for two reasons. First, by identifying that other people in their area are putting up flags, people felt more inclined to put up one of their own to join the

neighbourhood trend. Second, by offering to hang the flag on the spot, and not handing it to the resident and asking them to do it on their own time, we were able to ensure that the flag went up and was hung appropriately. Often we found that homes who requested to hang their own flag did not in fact end up putting it up.

Once the resident agreed to let us hang the flag, we handed them a manual and explained to them that it contained all the information they would need for this initiative including who to contact should they have any questions. We also verified that they were comfortable with our handing method and requested that the flag not be moved until our return at the end of the summer (approximately 2 months).



Ensure that the flags are securely fastened in visible areas. Avoid placing flags in areas with high dirt concentrations (e.g., front gardens).

Once the flag was hung we would record the house number and street and later enter the data into our google map. Should a resident not be home at the time of our canvass, we would drop an information manual in their mailbox and leave it to them to either visit a pickup center to get a flag or call us to have a volunteer drop one off.

During this time our pickup centers were also given their materials along with a recording sheet. We asked each center to have each resident who picked up a flag fill out their name, address, and contact information. This enabled us to record their homes on our Google map and contact them once it was time to take the flags down (provided their flags

were not being hung in our identified areas). We would check in weekly with our centres to gather the recorded information and inquire as to if they needed more materials.

One of the benefits to saturating specific areas with flags is that the campaign continued to build itself even after canvassing had concluded. Whether residents initially declined a flag, or were unreachable at the door, we found many sought out flags from us and our pickup centers. We feel this was due in large part to their neighbours having flags and them being without. Within this initiative, a bandwagon persuasion approach developed and played to our favour.



## 6. Flag Collection

Planning our approach helped to ensure our volunteers were safe and our flags remained organized with no cross-contamination.

Flag collection began in late summer, approximately 2 months after the initial hanging dates. We asked our volunteers to revisit each area and collect / group the flags street by street and in order of house number – this eliminated having to sort the flags afterwards and helped to reduce the risk of mixing captured contaminants. While we did find that many of the flags had been removed/blown away, many remained. The challenge became spotting the flags – at times it became a game of “Where’s Waldo?”

For each flag that was collected the following actions were taken. First, the volunteer would stick a small brightly coloured notice on the resident’s front door or mailbox. We chose not to place them in the mailbox for fear that they would be unnoticed. The notice stated that their flag had been collected, offered them the chance to participate in the decision making process of what to do with the flags post-collection, and thanked them for their help in the initiative. Second, they wrote the address on the flag with per-

manent marker (if the homeowner hadn’t done so already), and third, they recorded the house address on a separate sheet creating an inventory of dirty flags.

**NOTE:** Depending on the area, it is likely that your flags contain chemicals/ materials that can be harmful to human health. Be sure to handle the flags with care and store them in a contained space. If you intend to have a sample of your flags professionally tested, be sure to follow proper chain of custody procedures.

Residents who obtained flags from community partners were contacted and asked to return their flag from the location which they received it, ensuring that the flag was labelled and in a sealed plastic bag.



## 7. Prepping Flags for Presentation

A good visual is key. By making sure observers could easily see the difference between the clean and dirty flags, the results were able to speak for themselves.

To determine how the flags should be presented to the community, residents were invited to an open community meeting. Through an open dialogue it was decided that the flags would be sewn together street by street with a clean white flag placed either in the center

or around the edges in a border – to provide observers with an immediate comparison.

When it came time to sew however, it was decided that the white 100% cotton fabric should not be utilized to show the “before” state of the flags. We became fearful that

the particles from the dirty flags would transfer to the clean flag creating a visual that was unrepresentative of our findings. In its place we used a white acrylic fabric that matched the shade of the clean cotton fabric. We found this to be an effective approach given that the acrylic was

resistant to the particles on the dirty flags – it remains the same shade of white to this day.

In addition to the flags being sewn together, we took a select sample of flags (based on resident request) to one of our volunteers who holds a PhD in Biology. Using his Konus

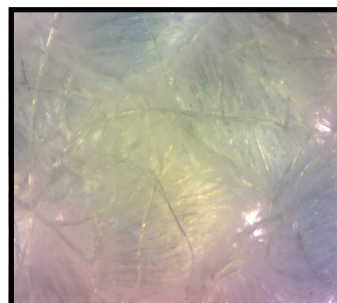
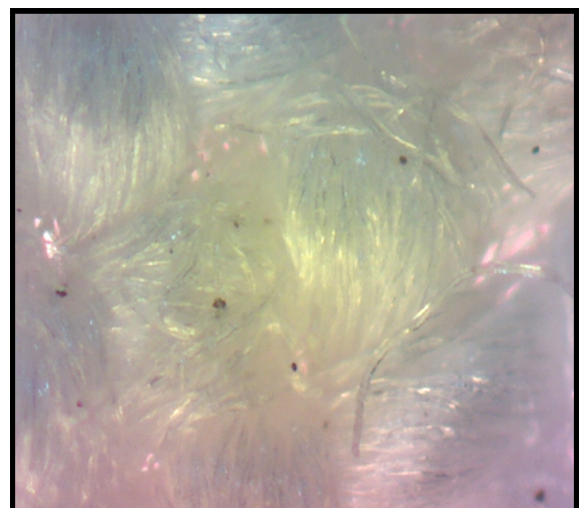
Crystal-45 binocular with a Celestron digital camera attached, we were able to get a closer look at the particulate matter which was the source of the dis-

colouration. Looking at small samples on each flag, our volunteer was able to quantify the amount and size of the particulate matter found on both Dundas

and north end flags – allowing us to quantify the differences held between the two areas.

In addition to preparing the flags, we also created a

community newsletter/ results sheet that served as a one page summary of the initiative and our findings.



Above: McAnuntly Blvd street flag. Although not fully visible in this photo, there is a clear colour distinction between the clean and dirty fabrics.

Right: Dundas flag (left) as compared to a North End flag (right) at 200x magnification - Fabric threads = 200mcm.



## 8. Sharing the Results

To ensure that our findings reached residents, industry, and key community decision makers, we utilized a variety of methods to distribute and share our results.

Share your results in the way that best suits your goals, remembering that multiple methods are often better than one. The following are examples of the types of activities we performed and found useful:

### Hold a Press Conference

Invite media, city councillors, politicians, residents, service providers, the target company, and anyone else who you feel should hear your results. We gained a great deal of exposure through the media sources which attended.

### Attend Community Events

Since our initiative was completed by the fall, we were able to take advantage of all the fall community festivals. We tabled at as many as possible to spread the word and get people talking about air pollution in the city. We found that the local farmer's market was a great place to engage people.

### Canvass Your Results

We re-visited all the areas who housed flags over the summer and provided them with copies of our one-page summary sheet. If we didn't catch residents at the door, we could leave a copy in their mailbox. We also provided sheets to the libraries.

### Hold a Community Event

To ensure residents had the chance to see their used neighbourhood flags, we organized a community block party at the home of one of our volunteers. Here, we placed poles along the sidewalk and hung the flags in between creating a neighbourhood display that was eye-catching and informative. We also provided snacks and music, and information.

### Present to Interested Groups

By searching out local groups and offering to hold presentations, we reached audiences that would likely not approach us for results. After presenting at one meeting which had Ministry of Environment personnel in the room, the MOE offered to test our flags to help determine the types of particulate matter they contained.



