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Louisville's Eboni Neal Cochran receives national Community Sentinel Award

The co-director of Rubbertown Emergency ACTion (REACT) was honored Thursday in New Orleans.

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Eboni Neal Cochran of Louisville was honored Thursday night in New Orleans with a 2026 Community Sentinel Award. The Community Sentinel Award for Environmental Stewardship is a national award, presented since 2015 by FracTracker Alliance and Halt the Harm Network, that honors frontline community leaders in the environmental justice movement who are standing up to extractive industry.

Neal Cochran is Co-Director of Rubbertown Emergency ACTion (REACT), a grassroots organization of residents living at or near the fence lines of the Rubbertown chemical plants and other polluting industries in West and Southwest Louisville. Its focus is toxic air pollution and emergency preparedness. She has worked with the organization since 2003, educating community members and decision makers and pushing for reduced exposure to toxic chemicals.

REACT works for strong laws to stop toxic air pollution, protection of residents in a leak, fire or explosion at an industrial facility or railcar, and full disclosure of information on the impact of industrial facilities.

"What got me into this work was three knocks at my door three weeks in a row by REACT," Neal Cochran said in New Orleans on Thursday. Canvassers "left these menacing looking flyers saying, they're trying to kill us. And I was like, what in the world is going on? And so after that third flyer, I decided I better check to see what's happening."

At her first meeting, she said, "there were over 100 people in that room who were talking about how Rubbertown, which is a cluster of chemical facilities, had impacted their lives."

"For me, receiving this award is somewhat of a confirmation," she said. "Sometimes in this work, it's difficult to see where the wins are. This award lets me know that other people value the work that we do and that the work we do has impacted folks in some way."

Neal Cochran is also founder and executive director of the West Louisville Math and Science Project, which builds math, science and literacy skills among children within the African diaspora and their families. She is a wife and retired homeschool mom of one, who has three adult bonus children and six grandchildren.

Her message to people in Louisville: "Not everybody can do everything, but if all of us just do a little bit, we can not only push that needle more toward justice, but we can also honor the ancestors who laid the foundation and have given us the blueprints to do the work that we do."

Dakota Lewis, a community intern with REACT who introduced her at the ceremony, said Neal Cochran's community mobilization "has helped usher in one of the strictest local air toxics regulatory programs in the country and has halted the construction of two methane plants."

"My father taught me to always sit in the front and ask at least one question, and that's what I've been doing," Neal Cochran said in her acceptance speech. "We understand that we must protect ourselves to the best of our ability because no one is coming to save us."

Neal Cochran was one of five people honored this year. The others are:

- Loice Malvo of Lake Charles, Louisiana, founder of Fisherville Environmental Action Now
- Zulene Mayfield of Chester, Pennsylvania, chairperson of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living
- Qiyam Ansari of Pennsylvania's Mon Valley, executive director of Valley Clean Air Now (Emerging Leader Award)
- Karen Feridun of Berks County, Pennsylvania, co-founder of the Better Path Coalition and No False Climate Solutions PA (Community Choice Award)

This was the first time the Sentinel Awards have been held in the Gulf South. The region has long borne the brunt of pollution and toxic industry. It is also home to leaders who have done the seemingly impossible, defeating some of the largest corporations in the world to protect the health and well-being of their communities.

"The Sentinel Awards are a time to celebrate and lift each other up," said Shannon Smith, executive director of FracTracker Alliance. "Our communities face many challenges in the face of powerful, polluting industries. The Sentinel Awards remind us that when we confront these challenges together, we are all stronger."

The ceremony included music by New Orleans musician Bruce "Sunpie" Barnes and a keynote by Jo Banner of The Descendants Project in Louisiana's St. John the Baptist Parish.

About the awards: Established in 2015, the Community Sentinel Award for Environmental Stewardship honors those who work to stop the harms of the fossil fuel industry on their communities and their environment. The 2026 program is at fractracker.org/sentinels-program.

About FracTracker Alliance: FracTracker Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that maps, analyzes, and communicates the risks of oil, gas, and petrochemical development. To learn more, visit fractracker.org or connect with us @FracTracker.

Photos attached (credit: Sam Law, FracTracker Alliance): Eboni Neal Cochran with her 2026 Community Sentinel Award, Nov. 12, 2026, in New Orleans; and, from left, Loice Malvo, Qiyam Ansari and Eboni Neal Cochran with their awards.

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