

## Introduction

### A Toolkit & Guide to Action for Student Activists

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CHEJ has put together this toolkit to arm you with the information, resources, and strategies to launch and implement a winning PVC-free schools campaign on your campus.

While historically CHEJ has worked predominantly with grassroots community based organizations fighting environmental injustices, we recognize that students have always been at the forefront of movements for social change. From the civil rights and anti-war movements to the women's movements and to today's movement for green jobs and a clean energy future, students have always played an important and unique role in fighting for social and environmental justice.

Without a doubt, the PVC (polyvinyl chloride or vinyl) plastics industry is one of the most polluting and environmentally destructive industries in the world – whose products are ending up on college campuses across the country. PVC is unsafe at every stage of its lifecycle:

- During production, PVC exposes workers and environmental justice communities to toxic chemicals like vinyl chloride, ethylene dichloride, dioxins, and gender-bending phthalates. A number of these facilities are located in an area of Louisiana referred to as Cancer Alley, an area along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, which contains numerous chemical plants. Residents living near PVC chemical plants have complained about high rates of cancer in their communities;
- During use, PVC products can off-gas and pollute the indoor air, releasing toxic additives like phthalates, organotins, lead and cadmium; and
- When burned in incinerators or dumped in landfills, PVC can leach chemical additives and release cancer-causing Dioxins into the air – some of the most toxic chemicals ever studied by our government.

Many of these chemicals trespass into our bodies, and are linked to chronic diseases on the rise, such as breast cancer, reproductive health problems in women and men, asthma, and learning disabilities.

Your university/college likely spends millions of dollars in procurement and buildings on a yearly basis. Many of these building materials, school and office supplies purchased by your university are without a doubt made out of PVC. From the flooring, carpeting and roofing inside dorms and academic buildings to the computers and 3-ring binders in offices and classrooms, your school has a direct connection to an industry that's polluting fenceline environmental justice communities at every stage of its lifecycle.

The good news is that there are plenty of safer affordable alternatives out there, and you can help shift the market away from the poison plastic and build a safer future free of toxic chemicals linked to cancer and birth defects.

We hope you will use this toolkit as a way to fight back against the PVC industry, hold corporations accountable, and stand in solidarity with environmental justice communities being poisoned by polluting corporations like Dow Chemical.



Yours for environmental health and justice,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lois Marie Gibbs".

Lois Marie Gibbs, Founder & Executive Director  
Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ)

# Acknowledgements & About CHEJ

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### **About the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ)**

*CHEJ mentors the movement to build healthier communities by empowering people to prevent the harm caused by chemical and toxic threats. We accomplish our work by connecting local community groups to national initiatives and corporate campaigns. CHEJ works with communities to empower groups by providing the tools, strategic vision, and encouragement they need to advocate for human health and the prevention of harm.*

*Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for families living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ in 1981 to continue the journey. To date, CHEJ has assisted over 10,000 groups nationwide. Details on CHEJ's efforts to help families and communities prevent harm can be found on [www.chej.org](http://www.chej.org).*



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[www.chej.org](http://www.chej.org)

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