

# EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

Vol. 22 No. 3 Fall 2004



## **The Killing Fields of South Texas**

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**Clean Up, Don't Build Up!**  
**No New Harm from Nuclear Weapons**

**The Journal of the Grassroots Environmental Movement**  
**Center for Health, Environment and Justice**

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*Everyone's Backyard* is published quarterly by the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, Inc. The editor is Stephen Lester, Alicia Fraser was contributor to Action Line, and the design layout was done by Barbara Sullivan. EB is printed on 100% recycled and 100% post-consumer waste paper, not bleached with chlorine, using low VOC vegetable oil-based inks.

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Library of Congress  
#ISSN 0749-3940.  
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# THE MORNING AFTER

When you receive this newsletter it will be late October. We hope you've already made plans to vote on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, and have convinced friends to go with you to the polls to vote.

When you wake up on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, either George Bush or John Kerry will be President. Are you prepared? Did your organization outline a plan of action for each candidate? Experienced organizers always have a Plan A and a Plan B.

**Plan A - Your candidate of choice is elected President.** Too often leaders think because their guy (women aren't in the mix yet) is in the White House they can take a deep breath and let him advocate their position. After all, he had a strong position during the race. This common thinking couldn't be more wrong. Your candidate had a strong position because groups pressured him enough that he felt he had to take a stand. Without the continued pressure from organized groups, he can weaken and even "sell out." Your organization should be planning to keep the pressure on him to achieve your goals and give your President solid on-going support.

**Plan B - The other guy is in the White House.** Some people are talking about moving to Canada or going into a deep depression. Not good plans. It's a good time to look back and examine what worked to build public support for your position over the years. What you learn from hindsight will help you develop a plan to move forward—a plan that is stronger, smarter, and more strategic. How can you adapt your plan to today's realities?

Remember that all politics are local. Building a strong base from your town to the statehouse wields great power. Everyone including U.S. Senators and Congressional Representatives are elected at home in your backyard. This reality should be central to both your Plan A and your Plan B.

## ABOUT CHEJ

The Center for Health, Environment and Justice is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization that provides organizing and technical assistance to grassroots community organizations nationwide. The center was founded in 1981 by Lois Gibbs, who together with her neighbors won the relocation of more than 900 families from their neighborhood after it was contaminated by chemicals leaking from the Love Canal landfill in Niagara Falls, NY. Hundreds of people living near contaminated sites around the country contacted Lois as her efforts and those of her neighbors captured national attention and proved, for the first time, that toxic waste is not an abstract issue but one that's in everyone's backyard.

The center's mission is to help people build democratic, community-based organizations to address public health and environmental threats. We believe strongly that the best way to solve local problems is from the bottom up, when the people directly affected speak for themselves and have a meaningful role, as equals, in any and all decisions that affect their lives, homes and family. Our focus and resources are devoted to helping local community based organizations form, grow, and become effective in achieving their goals. We do this by providing information, advice, training, and support. CHEJ has staff scientists who can answer many of your questions and who can review technical documents and test results you need help with. We also refer callers to other grassroots groups who are working on the same issues or fighting the same polluter.

# The Killing Fields of South Texas

By Iris Salinas

***“We look to the skies with tears in our eyes and pray for miracles.”*** Over six years ago, Maria Ester Salinas stumbled upon a major discovery that would dramatically change not only her life, but also the lives of thousands of people in the South Texas town of Mission, a small border town in the Rio Grande Valley. She uncovered a massive plot by federal, state, and local agencies to hide the largest human and environmental disaster in North America.

In the 1940’s, numerous factories and “bodegas,” or warehouses, that contained toxic chemicals were built in the middle of the Mexican American side of town. Railroads were built throughout the neighborhoods to deliver items to and from these bodegas. These sites housed the most potent of chemicals in their purest form, mostly pesticides that were mixed into specific formulas and shipped back out for sale, without the community’s knowledge. Initially, residents supported the idea of these facilities being built in the community, since it meant an opportunity for a stable job just down the street. Little did the community know what implications these warehouses would have on the lives of the 48,000 residents and on the lives of future generations.

Numerous pesticides were stored in these warehouses from 1945 to 1968 including chlordane, DDT, aldrin, dieldrin, lindane and toxaphene. Twelve of the fifty-four chemical contaminants that are present in this small Texas town were banned by the United Nations in May 2001 and are considered among “the most hazardous contaminants known to man.” The buildings had wooden floors that allowed pesticides that leaked from the containers to contaminate soil at these sites which subsequently spread throughout the community.

Since 1980, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has known about these sites and had scientific proof of their toxic threats. Several of these sites were considered for the federal Superfund list. One site made the state’s Superfund registry as the most contaminated site in the entire state of Texas. A Superfund site is a chemically contaminated area that poses hazards to human health. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) knew about these dangerous sites for years. In the 1990’s George W. Bush also became aware of the situation when he was governor and sent TCEQ to investigate. The city and county governments knew as well, but feared acknowledging the dangers would hurt tourism, so they said nothing. It seemed everyone knew except the people who lived in Mission that a serious health risk existed.



*Bulldozers cause contaminated dust to fly towards little girls as they walk from school only two blocks away. Photo by Ester Salinas*

Residents did know that something wasn’t right. They suffered birth defects, sickness and chemical burns. In 1999, 66.28% of all deaths in the county were caused by ailments related to chemical contamination and exposure. Families tell stories of cirrhosis of the liver (in non-drinkers), high rates of spina bifida (a birth defect that affects brain development), multiple and raging cancers, hermaphrodites (people who have both male and female reproductive organs), lumps, tumors, physical deformities, mental problems, early unexplainable deaths, sterility, babies being born chemically burned, and more. In addition, grass does not grow; and the trees and vegetation are mutated and deformed.

No one knew why all these things were happening, but thanks to the efforts of individuals like Ester Salinas, the truth is now being made public. Ester Salinas, a local resident, has evolved into a community activist and her efforts are reaching beyond the local community to find assistance and support nationwide. Ester formed alliances with La Raza Unida, the United Farm Workers, the Center for Health, Environment & Justice, and the National Council of La Raza. She has met with Congressman Ciro Rodriguez, who toured the sites and homes of the residents, and with Congressman Lloyd Doggett this past January.

The outraged community is asserting a claim of genocide due to the severe dangers and effects on human health caused by exposure. This community was initially poisoned in the 1940’s and continues to be poisoned, as the chemicals spread via air, water and erosion. The health effects don’t stop at the town borders. Since the hurricanes have hit Florida this season,

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## Thousands Call on National Leaders to Clean Up, Don't Build Up Nuclear Weapons

**B**E SAFE coalition groups held 97 events in 23 states to commemorate the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the world's first atomic detonation at Trinity, NM on July 16<sup>th</sup>, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. The *Clean Up, Don't Build Up* events protested the Bush administration's reckless nuclear weapons buildup and its weakened efforts to cleanup contaminated military sites. Groups released a Blueprint for Precautionary Action on Nuclear Weapons at media events, interfaith ceremonies, vigils, marches and citizen's weapons inspections.

Internationally, the Mayors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima denounced the U.S.'s pursuit of new nuclear weapons and called for a global ban on all nuclear arms by 2020. In the U.S., thousands of people called President Bush and candidate John Kerry on the Nagasaki National Call-In Day urging them to support safety and security by halting nuclear weapons production.

"Nuclear weapons threaten everyone's security," said Jackie Cabasso of United for Peace & Justice. "They are the most dangerous of all weapons, the only ones that can destroy civilization in a day. We believe that security must be redefined in human and ecological, rather than military terms: food, shelter, clean air and water, jobs, healthcare and education—for everyone, everywhere. In the interests of promoting *human* security, we call on the U.S. government to reaffirm and make good on its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty disarmament commitments."

"Since the devastating bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the U.S. has spent over five trillion dollars on nuclear weapons, created more than 4,500 contaminated sites and secretly tested radiation on 23,000 American civilians over 30 years," stated Alice Slater of the Global Resource Action Center for the Environment. "Nuclear waste remains lethally toxic for more than 250,000 years. We need to stop producing nuclear materials and devote our precious intellectual and financial resources to containing and safeguarding the toxic legacy of the nuclear age."

"Nearly 60 years into the nuclear age, Americans' health and safety are in acute and growing danger from the Department of Energy's nuclear weapons complex," said Susan Gordon of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability. "We oppose the U.S. government's violation of international treaties to

pursue a destabilizing buildup of nuclear weapons, and its refusal to clean up deadly radioactive waste from the nuclear weapons complex."

"Depleted uranium (DU) weapons are a perfect example of why the precautionary principle is critical for the protection of the environment and our health," noted Tara Thornton of the Military Toxics Project. "DU is a by-product of enriching uranium for nuclear weapons and power plants. Since we cannot safely dispose of nuclear waste, the Departments of Energy and Defense creatively chose to use this nuclear waste in weapons. However, the neighboring communities of DU weapons manufacturers have all become contaminated and there are reports of increased cancer, birth defects and other illnesses among U.S. soldiers and civilians. We know DU is radioactive and toxic—we know radiation and toxics kill. The precautionary principle means simply—better safe than sorry. Until the Pentagon can prove DU is harmless, we must stop producing, manufacturing, testing and using DU weapons."

"The legacy of the U.S. nuclear chain, from exploration and processing of uranium to weapons production and testing has had devastating health and ecological affects on American Indian, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders and their traditional lands and waters," said Tom Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network. "We support the BE SAFE campaign to take protective measures when there is scientific evidence that an activity threatens wildlife, the environment, or human health—even in the absence of full scientific certainty. The future of America and Mother Earth depends on it."

### Send a Message to the White House

Support the precautionary approach and prevent pollution *before* it happens. Sign on to the BE SAFE Precautionary Platform today! Be counted when we deliver this national platform to the White House. Visit [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com).

### Your Vote Counts

The next election will set the country's course on policies to prevent hazards to our health and environment. For information on environmental voting records, contact [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org) and [www.lcv.org](http://www.lcv.org). To register to vote, contact [www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net).

# Clean Up, Don't Build Up! No New Harm from Nuclear Weapons

By Amy Williams

Despite broad support for the precautionary principle in this state, there have been few successful efforts to connect it to New Mexico's three Department of Energy (DOE) sites which conduct nuclear weapons research and development and store nuclear waste. Thanks to the Nuclear Weapons Days of Action, sponsored by the BE SAFE coalition and CHEJ, valuable connections between the precautionary principle and nuclear weapons development were forged.

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), a Santa Fe-based organization that monitors emissions from the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), initiated a multi-faceted coalition. Creative Commotion: Voices

for Social Change, Nuclear Watch of New Mexico and Peace Action New Mexico have joined together to advocate for a precautionary approach to operations at the LANL nuclear weapons facility in an effort to prevent harming the surrounding communities.

Technical Area (TA) 18 at LANL houses five unshielded critical assemblies, which are akin to nuclear reactors. The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, an oversight body established by Congress, released a report in March indicating that TA-18 is one of the least safe facilities in the entire DOE complex. The report finds that an accident resulting from operator error at TA-18 could result in a lethal dose of radiation to a person located off-site.

Further, TA-18 has routinely failed mock terrorist attacks and was ordered closed multiple times by DOE. The most recent order by DOE Secretary Spencer Abraham coincided with CHEJ's and the BE SAFE coalition's Nuclear Weapons Days of Action. Several New Mexico groups seized this opportunity and called for a halt to all TA-18 operations until the problems were resolved.

As part of the campaign, we developed an action pack that included a bumper sticker that proclaimed, "Clean Up, Don't Build Up! No More Harm from Nuclear Weapons," fact sheets about the precautionary principle and TA-18, and postcards addressed to our decision-makers asking them to urge DOE to stop operations at TA-18 until it could be verified safe and secure.

There was overwhelming support for the campaign. Nearly every community member with whom we discussed taking a precautionary approach toward operations at TA-18 agreed that it was better to BE SAFE than be sorry.

CCNS participated in a flurry of events from Trinity Day to Nagasaki

Day (see BE SAFE Campaign page). Through two educational fairs, hosted by the collaboration, and numerous events commemorating Hiroshima Day, we shared information and collected postcards. The first educational fair was held on the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trinity blast, which was the first nuclear test held near Socorro, New Mexico.

We attended an event sponsored by Pax Christi New Mexico featuring Bishop Thomas Gumbleton on the evening of August 5<sup>th</sup>. On the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, CCNS's Executive Director, Joni Arends participated in an annual march from the center of Los Alamos to the entrance of LANL, carrying a banner with Ed Grothus, Los Alamos' preeminent voice for disarmament. The sixth annual Peace Day took place that same day in Santa Fe. Hundreds of locals and tourists who were interested in learning more about peace and disarmament attended this event. There was music, art, massage, information and thousands of handmade peace cranes from around the world produced by the Santa Fe Cranes for Peace project.

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*Nuclear Waste Storage at Los Alamos National Laboratory*

# ACTION LINE

## ALABAMA

Late August marked a major victory for the poor and minority communities of Alabama, thanks to the work of the **Alabama African American Environmental Justice Action Network**, the **ADEM Reform Coalition**, and the **Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation (LEAF)**. Alabama's Environmental Management Commission approved two new measures, one to hire an ombudsman for environmental justice and second, to require that new pollution permits include demographic data such as the race and poverty level of the people affected. About 150 people attended the meeting and spoke in support of these two measures. Research presented by LEAF documented the frequency with which poor and black communities are chosen for sites of garbage dumps. Alabama's only black U.S. Congressman, Rep. Artur Davis, spoke to the crowded room, "I'm willing to bet there's no one in this room who is [sic] against jobs, but I'm willing to bet that a lot of you believe we've been given a false choice between growing jobs and protecting the environment." Both decisions have yet to pass through committees, but the all-white commission's approval is a groundbreaking victory. Congratulations!

## ARKANSAS

**Citizens Against Creosote** have collected nearly 2,000 signatures on a petition opposing a proposed sawmill/creosote plant to be built in Texarkana, located on the border between Texas and Arkansas. The group is worried that the company, Ameritracks, wants to get their foot in the door by getting a permit to operate a sawmill and then convert the operation to a creosote plant. This working class community is already home to two Superfund sites within three miles of the proposed site, and also has borne toxic emissions from the Texarkana Wood Preserving Plant, a water treatment plant, a city dump and the recently closed Kerr-McGee wood treatment facility. The community has had enough and doesn't want any more!

## CALIFORNIA

Near the San Francisco Bay, in Richmond is an 85-acre piece of land so polluted after 100 years of dumping that the state water board named it a toxic "hot spot" in 1997. This same piece of land is now targeted for 1,330 high-rise dwellings. Instead of cleaning up the site, the homes would be built with a crawlspace vented by pipes to remove toxic gases coming off the soil. An attorney working for a growing number of neighborhood, citizen, and environmental groups who oppose the project described the proposal as "irresponsible. It's an absolute outrage to tell people that, 'Yeah, there are a lot of volatile organic compounds in the ground, but we'll have fans to whisk those away.'" State agencies must evaluate the risks to human health and determine whether the land is fit for residential use before issuing any permits. Good luck Richmond! You definitely have common sense on your side!

◆ Taking on space and defense contractor giant Lockheed Martin Missiles and Space Company is not something one does casually, but **Community Concerned About Lockheed Martin (CCALM)** is tired of having their concerns and questions ignored. CCALM wants Lockheed Martin to release information that describes what chemical substances are being trucked in and out of the facility located in Bonny Doon, a rural area in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The company finally released some data in a 1800-page report that overwhelmed the group who is trying to figure out what's real and what's garbage. CHEJ's science staff is helping them sort this out.

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The **Bucket Brigade** is lending their expertise in air quality monitoring to **Citizens for a Clean Environment** by collecting air samples and providing technical assistance to evaluate the results. CHEJ connected the two groups to determine if the community is being exposed to volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, diesel fuel, and other pollutants generated by a waste transfer station located in the middle of the neighborhood. The results of the testing should provide important ammunition to support the group's goal to shut down the transfer station.

## FLORIDA

**Panther Parents Against Pollution** are continuing their efforts to relocate their magnet middle school, located across the street from the Escambia/Agrico Superfund site in Pensacola, a site so contaminated with dioxins that more than 350 families were relocated by the USEPA. With CHEJ's help, the parents have quickly galvanized and organized. They have more than 80 active members and have attracted the attention not only of the media, but also the Florida PTA, the FL Department of Health, and the school board. Despite these efforts, the school board is reluctant to close the school and has put off making a decision until after the October school board elections. PPAP has succeeded in finding an alternative site for the school and remains hopeful that the school board will recognize the dangers the children face attending school next to a Superfund site.

◆ **Power U Center for Social Change** in Miami is fighting to stop the city from dumping contaminated sediment dredged from the Miami River onto a lot near schools and homes in a predominantly African American neighborhood. The sediment, contaminated with dioxins and heavy metals, will be stored on the lot until it dries and then sent to a local landfill. It's not clear how long this might take. The group is concerned about evaporation of toxic chemicals from the waste pile, leachate run-off, and the spread of contaminated dust into the neighborhood. CHEJ science staff is reviewing the proposed dredging plan and will provide written comments for community leaders describing key technical issues related to dredging and dioxin exposure.

## GEORGIA

While BFI Waste Management Systems is hoping to make Emerson the home of the southeast's largest landfill, the people who live there have other ideas. The City Council didn't think the public would care about the plan, so they cut a deal with BFI. Now they have the **Alliance for a Better Emerson (ABE)** to contend with. In just six months the group has grown to include 200 members, each of whom is determined to give the City Council and BFI their opinion: Emerson doesn't need another landfill (there's plenty of capacity already), doesn't need \$1.2 million a year, won't accept 150 truckloads of garbage every day, and isn't going to be persuaded by BFI's bribe of a senior center and a playground. ABE doesn't see how a new landfill will improve their community.

## KENTUCKY

Hats off to the **Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers Union (PACE)** at the DuPont chemical facility in Louisville and **Rubbertown Emergency Action (REACT)**, a local community based environmental group, for becoming allies as DuPont threatens to bring in replacement workers if the union strikes. After working without a contract for over two years, the union has authorized a strike to demand job security. DuPont wants to outsource jobs and dismantle the seniority system used to choose job positions. Local President Carl Goodman wants to avoid a strike and is hopeful that pressure from REACT may make DuPont agree to contract talks. Both REACT and PACE are concerned that replacement workers are a safety hazard since they would be unfamiliar with the plant and its operations. Communities shouldn't have to choose between safe, healthy environments and well-paying jobs!

## MASSACHUSETTS

The **Coalition for the Responsible Siting of LNG Facilities** of Fall River is organizing to keep a liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facility from being built on the Taunton River in a residential area with two nursing homes, an elementary school, a 100-family low-income housing unit, and numerous private homes. The group is trying to educate the public that LNG facilities are highly dangerous and should be sited as far from people as possible. The Coalition has discovered hidden ties linking the law firm that represents the company proposing the plan and the two government agencies in charge of LNG facility siting and regulations. This discovery, along with hours researching the dangers of LNG, is fueling the group's organizing efforts. They've succeeded in getting the entire state House of Representatives and the Senate to sign a resolution opposing the facility. Keep up the good work!

◆ Congratulations to **Massachusetts United Methodist Women (MUMW)** who have convinced office supply giant Staples to start an



# ACTION LINE

education project informing its stores' staff and communities about the dangers of chlorine and dioxins, and their health effects. The decision followed a meeting with **MUMW**, who are on a quest to eliminate dioxin and prevent cancer one corporation at a time. Prior to the meeting, MUMW visited more than 300 Staples stores across the country, surveying employees on whether or not they carried chlorine-free paper. Most staff knew nothing about chlorine and paper or its health effects. MUMW is pleased with this decision, though their long-term goal is to get Staples to carry and promote chlorine-free paper.

## MINNESOTA

**BE SAFE Minnesota** held a School Environmental Checklist Tour at the Dodge Nature Preschool in St. Paul and a media event at the Hartley Nature Center in Duluth with a school director, **Environmental Association for Great Lakes Education** and **Mercury Free MN**. The Back to School Environmental Checklist, developed by groups participating in CHEJ's Child Proofing Our Communities campaign, helps parents, students and teachers identify and fix environmental hazards. Be SAFE partner groups will be distributing it to MN schools over the coming year.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

Concerned parents in Bedford are trying to stop construction of a new school less than 1,000 feet from an old unlined landfill that was also the site of the town garage. One soil sample revealed elevated levels of barium, cadmium, chromium and arsenic, though a comprehensive analysis has yet to be completed. The school board claims the site is safe for the school. Parents are getting organized to demand an alternative location.

◆ **Citizens Leading for Environmental Action and Responsibility (CLEAR)** continue to increase community awareness by hosting informational neighborhood meetings to discuss local health and environmental concerns. A target of these events has been the Wheelabrator trash incinerator that's been burning garbage in Claremont for over 17 years. The company publicly admits releasing mercury, lead, and dioxins from the incinerator which adds to a long list of reasons why CLEAR wants to shut down this facility. Congratulations to CLEAR for securing a grant from the New England Grassroots Environment Fund to help with its efforts!

## NEW JERSEY

Local parents in Mahwah have begun looking for answers for why over fifteen middle school students are sick with illnesses that include nosebleeds, skin rashes, gastrointestinal disorders, and Tourette Syndrome. The parents have convinced the school board to examine the school for potential causes, including mold growth, poor ventilation, the use of toxic cleaning products or pesticides, poor water

## Flame Retardants: A Burning Issue

A number of states have recently passed policies phasing out a family of toxic chemicals called polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), widely used as flame-retardants in electronics, clothing, furniture and other consumer products. Like PCBs and dioxins, these chemicals are very slow to break down, and can bioaccumulate as they move up the food chain, becoming highly concentrated in humans.

Polybrominated diphenyl ethers have become widely dispersed in the environment through incineration and landfilling of discarded products. Levels found in people's bodies, including women's breastmilk, are rising steadily. Laboratory animal studies show that PBDEs can cause severe brain and nervous system damage, especially in the first months of life.

Last year, the European Union (EU) banned two of the three most common PBDE chemicals (penta- and octa-BDE). The state of California similarly banned these two PBDEs beginning in 2008. Since then, other states have followed suit including Washington, Maine, New York, and Hawaii. In addition, several manufacturers have agreed to voluntarily phase out these two chemicals nationwide. California and New York are also looking at the possibility of phasing out the third type of PBDE, known as "Deca-BDE," which the EU has already banned for use in consumer electronics.

quality, and soil contamination. Elevated levels of mold, bacteria and viruses were found in a report done for the teacher's union in 2002. The school district did their own testing which refuted these findings. Parents are trying to sort out what's really going on and what's causing these illnesses, and plan to hold the school district accountable.

## NEW MEXICO

The **New Mexico Environment & Health Coalition** and the **Science & Environmental Health Network** held a successful Precautionary Principle Symposium and workshops in July and August in Santa Fe to develop precautionary-based policies on sustainable agriculture, green buildings, small business practices and other issues.

## NEW YORK

Is it a victory or a cheap buyout, residents of Endicott, "birthplace of IBM", are asking. After having contaminated the groundwater in this village 20 years ago, IBM Corporation is trying to cut its losses by offering \$10,000 to nearly 500 homeowners if they agree to give up future rights to sue for property damage. IBM installed ventilation systems in 480 homes in 2002 to try and control the buildup of trichloroethylene (TCE) in the basements of homes. TCE was evaporating from the groundwater, seeping up through the soil, and building up as toxic vapors in the basements of homes. A resident of 31 years and a member of **Resident Action Group of Endicott (RAGE)**, Edward M. Blaine said, "My gut reaction is that it sounds like a buyout." Anyone who does accept the offer will retain rights to sue for personal injury, but many people feel trapped in virtually un-sellable homes and fearful of the long-term impact on the health of their families.

◆ The **Partnership for Onondaga Creek** have turned up the heat in their efforts to stop construction of a sewage treatment plant in an African American neighborhood in Syracuse. After months of effort, POC succeeded in convincing the US EPA to investigate both the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation and Onondaga County for potential violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 regarding the proposed treatment plant. POC succeeded in getting letters of support for the investigation from U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton, Congressman James Walsh, State Senator Charles Schumer, NY Assemblywoman Joan Christensen, and Dave Valesky, the Democratic candidate for the 49th NY Senate district. NY Senator Nancy Hoffmann refused to sign even after four members of POC were arrested for not leaving her office until she either signed the letter or took an ethical position on the matter. The group is concerned about the dislocation of over 25 families, the demolition of homes, the lack of involvement of the community, and the potential health risks posed by the facility.

◆ Congratulations to **United Neighbors Concerned About General Electric & Dewey-Loeffel Landfill (UNCAGED)** who is being recognized for its grassroots work in protecting local health by both the Nassau Public Library and State University of New York library who are compiling information to start an archives on the group. For years, UNCAGED has led community efforts to address contamination caused by the Dewey-Loeffel Landfill, filled by General Electric with thousands of pounds of PCBs, heavy metals, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). UNCAGED is currently pushing for completion and testing of two unfinished "containment efforts" at the landfill and working with Residents Against Mining (RAM) to stop a proposed mining operation only 2.6 miles from the landfill.

# ACTION LINE

## NORTH CAROLINA

The **Swamp Watch Action Team** continues its efforts to stop international metal shredding giant Hugo Neu from building a 170-acre, 350-foot high landfill of auto fluff in the Cape Fear Lowlands in the vicinity of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County. This area is home to beautiful white sand beaches, two aquifer outcroppings, and the Green Swamp, whose species diversity is topped only by the great rain forest of Central America. SWAT wants to preserve the area and protect their homes against certain contamination that will result from the auto fluff operation.

## NORTH DAKOTA

After years of resistance, Monsanto finally agreed to pull the plug on Roundup Ready Wheat. Congratulations to the **Dakota Resource Council (DRC)** for all their hard work in safeguarding the wheat market for farmers and consumers! Roundup Ready Wheat is a genetically modified (GM) variety of wheat that can tolerate spraying of the herbicide Roundup, also produced by Monsanto. Much of North Dakota's wheat is sold overseas and many foreign markets don't want GM wheat and will not buy it if approved in the U.S. Cross-pollination and contamination of conventional seed stocks would make growth of non-GM wheat virtually impossible within only a few years. DRC held numerous meetings around the state, informing farmers and consumers of the dangers of GM wheat and drawing national attention to the issue. "Monsanto couldn't continue to ignore the global marketplace," said Todd Leake, chair of DRC's Food Safety Task Force.

## OHIO

**Citizens Against Mega-Dairies, LLC (CAMD)** recently learned of a proposed 2,100-head dairy concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO). CAMD immediately began spreading the word about this plan and within a few months had 550 people attending meetings. Speakers from academia, government and local family farming communities educated the public on the hazards of mega dairies including contamination of groundwater caused by disposal of millions of gallons of untreated, liquid manure into the ground and surface waters, air pollution caused by the release of toxic levels of noxious hydrogen, and property devaluations. The four-county region (Clark, Greene, Fayette, Madison) is already home to several CAFOs. CAMD is working hard to seek a moratorium on new and expanding mega-dairies and to ensure that agriculture takes responsibility for its actions in rural communities.

## PENNSYLVANIA

The United Steelworkers of America's Health and Safety Conference opened its doors for the first time to environmental groups. The Pittsburgh event hosted exhibits by Global Community Monitor's 'Bucket Brigade' project and Greenpeace's hair testing project that measures mercury. These events, which focused on environmental monitoring projects of fenceline communities, were aimed at increasing the collaboration of workers in future testing.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**Pickens County for a Clean Environment (PCCE)** is urging the USEPA to reassess the adequacy of the original cleanup of the Pickens Superfund site during its long overdue five-year review. Sangamo Weston, Inc filled electrical capacitors with PCBs from 1955 to 1987 and left an estimated 4.7 million cubic yards of PCB contaminated soil and sediment over 730-acres. Solid, sludge and liquid wastes were stored or disposed of in piles, landfills and impoundments. PCCE claims that there's contamination throughout the area. Old rusted capacitors have been found off the site in areas where no vegetation will grow. The group successfully convinced the EPA's community liaison officer to visit the site and collect soil and water tests that revealed elevated levels of PCBs, confirming residents' concerns. PCCE hopes to reopen the cleanup process.

## TENNESSEE

**Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM)** celebrated its success in stopping Waste Industries from constructing a 142-acre landfill in the Piney Community near Spencer. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) denied Waste Industries' permit to fill 5.9 acres of wetlands and impact 4,184 linear feet of streams. The landfill was to be built in an abandoned mine and filled with solid waste from commercial, municipal, construction, farming and household sources. Those living near the proposed site feared contamination of their drinking water wells. SOCM made themselves heard through the use of petitions, public hearings, letter writing, and old fashion organizing.

## TEXAS

Congratulations to **Save Spring** who successfully blocked a plan to build an asphalt plant one mile upwind from a special needs school and across the street from a new subdivision in Spring. The asphalt company published notice of a public meeting on its permit application in a town newspaper forty miles away from the proposed site. Consequently, no one from Spring was aware of the meeting or the proposed permit and there was no comment from the community when the state approved the application. When residents caught wind of the development they cried "foul," quickly formed a group, educated themselves about the health threats posed by asphalt facilities, and organized. It wasn't long afterwards that the company withdrew its permit application, citing community pressure. But the group is still keeping an eye out, in case the situation redevelops.

## VIRGINIA

When the City of Falls Church decided to build a new middle school two years ago, they formed a citizens advisory committee to seek input on healthy, high performance building options. The committee sought technical advice from CHEJ, as well as the Healthy Building Network, and Rebuild America. In June, the school board

accepted the committee's recommendation to replace the standard PVC roofing membrane with a TPO membrane. Not only did the substitution save the school district \$15,000, it also set an important precedent for choosing PVC-free building materials. The new middle school will also boast linoleum flooring instead of vinyl composition tile, and low-emitting materials such as paints, adhesives, sealants, and composite wood.

## WEST VIRGINIA

**Friends of the Mountains (FOM)** held a memorable protest at Massey Energy's annual shareholders' meeting in Charleston. Over 10 member organizations, including the **Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition**, came out to show how they felt about Massey's terrible environmental record. Employing some brilliant dramatics, they parodied the arrest of several Massey executives by "EarthCop" who charged them with eco-terrorism crimes such as mountaintop removal mining and polluting streams with coal sludge. Colorful signs and banners were the backdrop for three angry residents who spoke the truth about Massey to its shareholders. Congratulations on such a creative and successful event!

◆ Folks in Rivesville discovered an alarming sludge dumping operation when they set out to determine the cause of some mysterious health problems. In a rural community of just 11 families, those most affected are trying to educate their neighbors and stop the city of Fairmont from polluting their land, water, and air. After one resident was diagnosed with an airborne bacterial fungus, a connection was made between the putrid sludge piles and the chronic skin rashes, diarrhea, and breathing difficulties of those living in the area. For twelve years, the Fairmont Wastewater Treatment Plant has been using the land of three farmers to dispose of its sludge. The sludge, used as fertilizer, contains heavy metals and pathogens such as E. coli and salmonella. Residents are particularly worried about their drinking water. The sludge is piled on steep hillsides up to a foot thick. The Fairmont Department of Environmental Protection recently issued a citation to the water plant because the piles are too close to a creek. Frustrated and concerned, the residents continue to gather information, talk with their neighbors, and prepare for a fight.

## WISCONSIN

Strong odors from a landfill in Franklin and a proposal to expand it by 70 acres have prompted local residents to act. The landfill, which is owned by Waste Management, started out as a pig farm and is at least 15 years old. The farmer who originally owned it began accepting trash and eventually created a "do-it-yourself" landfill. The group is just getting organized and had a successful petition drive collecting 146 signatures. The city says it's going to investigate the group's complaints. The group wants to publicize a former EPA shutdown of the landfill, demand better testing of the monitoring wells, and will continue to educate their neighbors to get them involved. Stay strong, Franklin!





# Childproofing Our Communities:

## A Campaign to Reduce Risks Children Face at School

It's Back to School Time!

Are your students prepared with paper, pencils, crayons, healthy lunches and clean air?

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004, the BE SAFE Network, the Center for Health, Environment & Justice, the Coalition for Healthier Schools, the Learning Disabilities Association of America, the National PTA and other groups released the **2004 Back to School Environmental Checklist**. This simple school evaluation tool was created by a coalition of over thirty local, state and national organizations, and poses ten questions regarding the physical school environment, such as:

- *Is the school clean, and are carpets, floors, ceilings and air intakes free of water stains and mold?*
- *Do trucks, buses and cars load or idle well away from the school?*
- *Are cleaning products and science and art supplies free of toxic substances?*
- *Does the school control pests and unwanted weeds without the use of pesticides?*

The Checklist was created to encourage parents, faculty, school staff and administrators to evaluate the impact of the school's management and operations on the health of the children. Tips on how to investigate each point, and a resource list to help improve the school environment follow each question. Groups in fourteen states released this tool in twenty-one media events on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, and it will continue to serve as a valuable resource for parents and teachers throughout the year. You can download the Checklist on: [www.besafenet.com/healthyschools](http://www.besafenet.com/healthyschools), or call CHEJ for additional information or assistance.



Taking the Next Steps

As parents and educators, we work hard to discourage smoking and drug use among our young people. We work equally hard to keep our streets safe and to protect our children from violence. Chemicals in our environment are another risk factor we can control, to protect our children from certain health and life threatening diseases.

Environmental chemicals are released from obvious sources such as oil refineries, power plants and industrial facilities, but children are also exposed to chemicals in their school and home environments. Common practices and products, such as pesticide applications, use of cleaning products, paints, diesel fumes from buses and trucks, and construction activities can cause asthma, cancer, lowering of IQ levels, behavioral problems, and fetal brain development. Improvements can be made in every school and home!

Performing the Back to School Environmental Checklist in your child's school will give you a basic understanding of the school environment. You will be able to obtain valuable information about what pesticides and herbicides are used in and around the buildings, what products are used to clean the floors, desks, and bathrooms, and more. You will visually evaluate the classrooms to see if they are clean, free of mold, dust, and odor. And, you will learn that these issues can contribute to a variety of adverse health effects.

Once you've gone through the Checklist, you might want to use the **Green Flag Program** to improve the environment at your school. Green Flag is a comprehensive, school-based environmental program that encourages schools to form an environmental team to improve the health of the school.

With the help of CHEJ staff and resources, schools can use the many Green Flag tools to evaluate their school environmental conditions, research ways to improve them, implement their ideas, and in the process, teach students about leadership, research, idea development, teamwork, and civic participation. The program was created specifically for schools, with the input of teachers, and can be used in the classroom, or as an after school project.

See our website: [www.greenflagschools.org](http://www.greenflagschools.org), for environmentally based lesson plans, fact sheets on each program area, school evaluation surveys, stories about other Green Flag School successes, environmental and health based resources, and much, much more! Or contact CHEJ's Green Flag School coordinator at (703) 237-2249 ext. 21 for more information. \*

**The Green Flag School Program: Helping you make your school healthy and safe through investigation, education, innovation and action!**

## The Killing Fields

Continued from page 3

Mission is slated to be the #1 exporter of grapefruits to the United States. However, the source of the agricultural irrigation water is located underneath a pesticide storage facility. Mission is also a winter vacation habitat for northern Texans, boasting warm weather year round. Visitors park their campers on contaminated sites, their children play on the grounds, they drink the water and eat the produce, and carry contaminated soil with them when they return home.

The TCEQ has spent more than ten million dollars on illogical and meaningless “remediation projects.” Initially, the testing and cleanup was limited to the property of the bodegas. The persistence of community leaders like Ester Salinas convinced the state to return and do more testing in the surrounding residential areas.

Tests were conducted for various pesticides and metals. Eight of 46 residential properties in the general vicinity of the bodegas had chlordane, toxaphene, lead, and cadmium above state residential health-based standards. These results led to further testing by TCEQ, though not all lots and properties surrounding the bodegas were tested. Approximately 30,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil was removed.

The contaminated soil was excavated and removed by trucks to Robstown, TX, which is 15 miles from Corpus Christi. Ester described the cleanup as secretive and more harmful than helpful. In one “remediation”, selected lots, homes, and individuals were sent letters of notice. Residents were not advised to leave temporarily as the “cleanup” occurred resulting in many illnesses due to exposure. As the bulldozers dug up the contaminated dirt, it caused contaminated dust to spread throughout the neighborhood.

A local resident secretly took photographs of the trucks removing and transporting the contaminated dirt. The pictures clearly showed that the soil was not properly covered nor contained resulting in contamination being spread on the roads and areas along the truck route.

The only warning the community received of possible danger was when the TCEQ confirmed to some families the presence of hazardous chemicals on their property, and made four recommendations:

1. Do not track outside dirt inside your home
2. Wash your hands thoroughly
3. Water your lot continuously
4. Do not eat any vegetation from your yard

This is the best the TCEQ could do to protect the people of Mission after spending over ten million dollars of taxpayers money.

The TCEQ and EPA continue to ignore the families in Mission and make it hard for people to understand what’s going on. Earlier this year, the EPA released an important finding published in an English-only paper. They said that contamination at the remediated site was found to be “several times higher than what is considered safe for human exposure.” They proposed two options to deal with the situation: cap the area with blacktop and recap the areas formerly blacktopped during the last remediation.

Ester Salinas, more determined than ever, continues to ask: “Justice to the people, where is it? There has been none, in no manner, shape, or form. There has been absolutely no community involvement. The buildings still stand. The state and the EPA throw away millions of dollars with their remediation. Who is over-seeing how this taxpayer money has been and is being spent? Why is there discrimination against the people in the Superfund areas? We demand to know why they have betrayed the people and failed to take care of the citizens and their property, knowing the severity of the situation.”

“Are we being treated this way because we are of Mexican descent? We continue to be discriminated against and to suffer and die by continuous lies. They profit from personal financial gain at the expense of the health, sanity, lands, and lives of our people.”

The community continues to fight and gain more and more public attention. A documentary is currently being filmed about the tragedy in Mission, a lawsuit has been filed against 34 companies, many of whom bought pesticides stored at the bodegas. Of the initial 3,000 community members who initially filed suit, only 1,800 remain. The other 1,200 were denied participation for failure to correctly fill out the paperwork. Ester contends that this is a compounding injustice. La Raza has also contacted the United Nations and started circulating a petition that will be sent to the UN listing the crimes against humanity caused by this genocide that bears the approval of the U.S. government. \*

*Iris Salinas is a community activist who writes for La Nueva Raza, a newspaper based out of Houston. She resides in San Antonio. For further information contact Iris Salinas at: [voiceoflaverdad@yahoo.com](mailto:voiceoflaverdad@yahoo.com) or visit [www.mission-texas.com](http://www.mission-texas.com). Cover photo credited to Iris Salinas.*

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CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations to support our work between May 29, 2004 and August 31, 2004. We wish we had space to acknowledge each and every one of CHEJ's donors in these pages because all gifts, regardless of their size, are very much appreciated.

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Robert & Stephanie Harris

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Richard Schwanke

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## **Organizational and Community Group Supporters:**

Be MTBE Free (MD)

Citizens Advocating a Safe Environment (AR)

Disposal Safety Incorporated (DC)

Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (WV)

Pro-Media Communications (NY)

Residents for Responsible Government, Inc. (NY)

United University Professionals (NY)

## **In Memoriam:**

Robert D. Debolt

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## No New Harm

*Continued from page 5*

Through these events, CCNS collected more than 225 signed postcards that were delivered to New Mexico Senators Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman, Governor Bill Richardson, and DOE Secretary Spencer Abraham. As a result of this effort, New Mexico Representative Tom Udall sent a letter to Secretary Abraham urging him to stop operations at TA-18. The Santa Fe City Council and County Commission are currently considering a joint resolution voicing their opposition to operations at TA-18.

Jay Coghlan, of Nuclear Watch of New Mexico, personally delivered the postcards to Governor Richardson during a brief meeting in which the governor expressed his support for our campaign. As DOE Secretary under President Clinton, Governor Richardson twice ordered TA-18 closed. He also ordered that the plutonium and highly enriched uranium currently stored there be moved to the Nevada Test Site.

CCNS also participated in a public symposium on the precautionary principle that was organized by the New Mexico Environment and Health Coalition. Carolyn Raffensperger of the Science and Environmental Health Network was the featured speaker on the last day of this event. She facilitated a discussion that led to the creation of an action plan for bringing the precautionary principle to New Mexico.

Although there are natural connections that can be drawn between nuclear weapons production and the precautionary principle, it remains a divisive issue. As a result, the impact of nuclear weapons production, particularly in New Mexico,

often does not get addressed when discussing the precautionary principle. However, the symposium helped CCNS, Creative Commotion and the New Mexico Environment and Health Coalition add nuclear weapons to the list of issues that the precautionary principle movement in New Mexico is addressing.

Although the Nuclear Weapons Days of Action are officially over, CCNS will continue to publicly promote the precautionary principle and the campaign to stop operations at TA-18. These efforts will culminate at the eighth annual Gathering 4 Mother Earth, hosted by TEWA Women United at the end of September. TEWA Women United represents LANL's closest neighbors at San Ildefonso Pueblo, which is adjacent to LANL. The community mission of TEWA Women United includes promoting and supporting activities that nurture and care for the well being of the earth. The Gathering is meant to search for holistic ways to secure a healthy future for generations to come. CCNS is excited about continuing the message at this important event.

The Nuclear Weapons Days of Action were a great way to give a local campaign a national focus. Our TA-18 campaign was bolstered by the support of the precautionary principle movement and, as a result, has seen increased success. CCNS will continue to work with local and national decision-makers to secure the closure of TA-18.

*Amy Williams is the Media Network Coordinator for Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety. \**



# **Election Day Can Be A New Starting Line Not The Finish Line**



## **Post Election Day Tasks To Get Off To A Good Start**

- Contact your volunteers, donors and members. Thank them for their hard work. Lay out your vision for the next eight months. Try to capture and hang onto the energy generated during the campaigns. If people are excited because “we won” – encourage them to keep on working—so your issue can keep on winning.
- If people are depressed because “we lost,” give them a sense of hope and inspiration wrapped around something new they can do. Think about “low hanging fruit”- quick win campaigns that they can immediately join.
- Set up meetings with newly elected representatives from all levels of government to brief them on your issues and goals.
- Encourage donors to increase their gifts at the end of the year or the first part of 2005. Regardless of who wins on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, organizations will need to front-end their impact on the newly elected administration and on representatives at all levels of government to build for the future.

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