Acknowledgements

Thirty six people contributed stories for **Standing Our Ground**. But the stories they wrote are the work of thousands of people across the United States who are joining together and standing their ground to protect their communities and their health. The Center for Health, Environment and Justice is proud to be connected to these people and their communities. We thank you all.

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For additional copies of **Standing Our Ground** or to receive more information on how you can be involved in Love Canal 20th anniversary events or in activities aimed at eliminating dioxin exposure, please contact

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Stop Dioxin Exposure

This is a book about the American people and the communities they live in. Its stories come from urban apartment dwellers in Newark, New Jersey, farmers in Quincy, Washington, school teachers in Pensacola, Florida and from my experience as a housewife in the Love Canal community, near Niagara Falls, New York. What connects my life to the lives of all the people and communities in this book is our common exposure to the chemical dioxin.

Dioxin is the common name given to a group of very persistent, very toxic chemicals. Dioxin has no commercial use. It is a unwanted by-product of chlorine combustion. Dioxin is formed during industrial processes involving chlorine or when chlorine and organic (carbon-containing) matter are burned together.

Garbage and medical waste incinerators are the largest sources of dioxin identified by EPA. Besides being emitted into the air, dioxins end up in the bottom ash and in the fly ash captured by pollution control equipment in incinerators. Other combustion sources of dioxin include metal smelters, cement kilns, hazardous waste incinerators, wood burning, utility and industrial coal combustion, and vehicles running on diesel fuel.

Another category of dioxin sources is chemical industry processes that use chlorine in the production of pesticides, plastics, solvents, and dyes. For instance, dioxin-like compounds are formed as by-products of the manufacture of pentachlorophenol (a wood preservative) and polyvinyl chloride plastic, commonly known as PVC.

A third source of dioxin emissions is industrial/municipal processes. Dioxin is formed in the pulp and paper industry when chlorine or chlorine dioxide is used to bleach pulp and paper. Dioxin contamination can be found in paper products, paper mill sludge, and in waste water and air emissions from these plants. Waste water treatment plants are largely thought to be an indirect dioxin source. These facilities accumulate dioxin from many sources that discharge into the sewer system.

Dioxin has been ranked among the most dangerous of chemicals, a “known human carcinogen,” by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Dioxin has been linked to liver, lung, stomach, soft and connective tissue cancers as well as Non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

Dioxin also causes reproductive and developmental effects. Dioxin exposure damages the immune system, leading to increased susceptibility to infectious disease. It can disrupt the proper function of hormones -- chemical messengers that the body uses for growth and regulation. Male and female infertility, endometriosis, birth defects and diabetes have all been related to dioxin exposure, at levels far below those that cause cancer.

Exposure to dioxin and the health problems that result from this exposure link all of the people and communities in this book. But dioxin also links the people in these communities to everyone else. The dioxin that begins in the incinerators in Detroit and the pulp mills of Maine ends up contaminating the food that all of us eat.

According to United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), over 90 percent of human exposure occurs through diet, primarily through foods derived from animals. Dioxin in air settles onto soil, water, and plant surfaces. It accumulates in grazing animals. People then ingest the dioxin contained in meat, fish, dairy products, and eggs. The June, 1998 issue of *Consumer Reports* included dioxin test results on meat containing baby food. The tests found that a baby who eats one 2.5 ounce jar of any meat containing baby food receives nearly 100 times EPA's daily "safe" dose of dioxin.

Every person has some amount of dioxin in their body. This is because dioxin, like DDT, does not readily break down in the environment. It also doesn't break down in our bodies, so it accumulates over time. Continual low-level exposure leads to a "build up" in tissues. Because dioxin accumulates increasingly up the food chain, human breast milk is among the most contaminated of all foods. A breast feeding infant’s exposure to dioxin is 50 to 100 times higher than an adult’s dietary exposure.

In 1994, in its draft reassessment of the health effects of dioxin, the EPA found that some adverse effects of dioxin exposure occur at levels only slightly higher than the amounts currently found in the general population. In June 1998, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that, "Subtle effects may already occur in the general population in developed countries at current background levels of 2 to 6 picograms/kilogram body weight. They therefore recommended that every effort should be made to reduce exposures to the lowest possible level."

"Reduce exposures to the lowest possible level." What does that recommendation mean? Does it mean we stop breast feeding our babies and only eat fruits and vegetables and grains? Or does it mean we learn from the people of the South Bronx Clean Air Coalition who reduced our exposure to dioxin by shutting down the medical waste incinerator in their community and the members of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition who reduced our exposure by stopping the construction of a chlorine using paper mill. Every grassroots victory described in this book, victories that came from people working together to protect their families and communities, is also protecting the rest of us from more dioxin exposure.

But where is the government? Isn't it government's job to protect our food, air and water? Shouldn't our government be leading the effort to "reduce exposures to the lowest possible levels"? In 1994 the EPA released their already overdue draft reassessment on the health effects of dioxin. The final report should have been done in 1996. Now two years later, we are still waiting. Instead of protecting us from dioxin, the USEPA officials try to protect themselves with bureaucratic excuses and vague promises.

While we wait for the dioxin reassessment, people are still living next to 300,000 tons of dioxin-laced waste in Pensacola, Florida. While we wait for the reassessment, dioxin-laden sludge is still being spread on farm land. While we wait, new PVC plants are being sited in Louisiana's Cancer Alley.

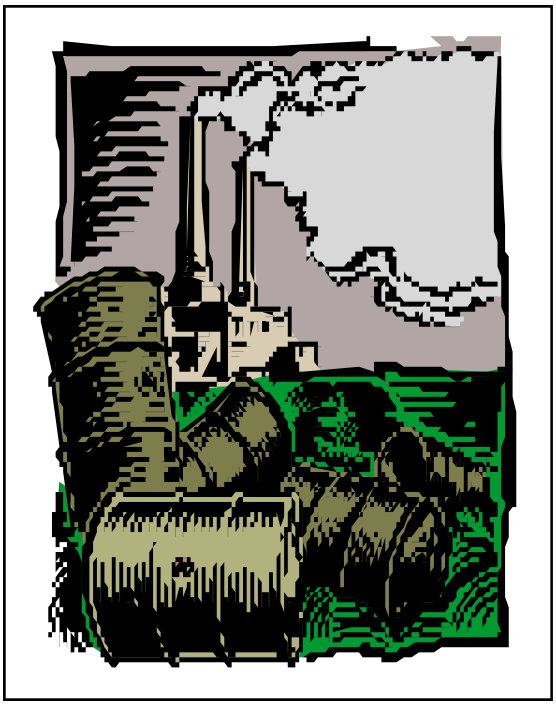
All of the people in this book share a common exposure to the deadly chemical dioxin. But they also share a common gift -- the spark that drives you to stop trying to accept the unacceptable and makes you start fighting back. It is unacceptable that communities like Columbia, Mississippi and East Liverpool, Ohio are picked as sacrifice zones for dangerous chemical manufacturing and disposal. It is unacceptable that our meat and eggs and dairy products and even our breast milk is contaminated with dangerous levels of dioxin. And it is unacceptable that our government is dragging its feet on releasing the report that would document the dangers of dioxin.

Twenty years after Love Canal, we are learning that while some of us live in contaminated communities, all of us are being contaminated. We could evacuate Love Canal but we can't evacuate the world. We must learn from the people in this book how to stand our ground to take back our communities, our health and our environment. We must stop accepting the unacceptable.

Lois Marie Gibbs
Falls Church, Virginia
July 15, 1998

Alsen, LA

Fighting for Justice



Alsen, a very old, rural community in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was invaded by the chemical industry in the 1950's. Life in our community hasn't been the same since. Over the years we have waged countless battles against chemical companies that emit dioxin and other dangerous pollutants into the our air, our water and ultimately, our food. In 1964, Tim Alexander opened a borrow pit for the dumping of toxic chemicals from nearby industries including Dow, Exxon Chemical, Allied Chemical, Rubicon Chemical, and Shell Chemical. The pit, 80 acres of contaminated soil, is now listed as two Superfund sites.

In the mid 1960's, Rollins Environmental Services, Inc. also came to town. They were given a nearly $1 million tax break to build a hazardous waste incinerator which has destroyed the health and the environment of our community. While it had been a struggle for the community to close this facility down, we were determined to not give up. In February 1995, with the help of the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, three community members took the case to court. We asked the judge to lift the tax break and shut the incinerator down. Ten months later, Judge Janice Clark announced her decision to deny the tax break to Rollins. It was not long before Rollins began to lay off employees and was forced to operate with a skeleton crew. Rollins closed its doors in 1997 and the residents of Alsen celebrated the long awaited victory.

But our fight for a clean environment wasn't over yet. In January, 1997, the Mayor of East Baton Rouge Parish wrote a letter to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, giving his blessings for a new landfill to operate in our community. We were angry and demanded the Mayor meet with us. After many unsuccessful attempts, we finally got the Mayor's attention; we burst into his office unannounced with WBRZ TV's cameras rolling to demand a meeting. There was no way he could ignore us now.

The struggle for the community of Alsen continues. We are still fighting that landfill as well as a proposed construction and demolition waste facility. Everyday we are reminded of the poisons in our air, water and food from the countless chemical manufacturing facilities and oil refineries that border our community. Our quality of life continues to deteriorate. When will justice prevail for the community of Alsen? The North Baton Rouge Environmental Association will keep fighting until that day comes.

Juanita Stewart
North Baton Rouge Environmental Association
P.O. Box 781
Baker, LA 70704

Cleveland, OH

A Hot Political Potato

The Greater Cleveland Coalition for a Clean Environment was organized in September, 1994 to defeat Mt. Sinai Hospital's plans to build a $3 million dollar incinerator in our predominately African American community. In December 1994, we were successful in this venture.

A few people felt that the job was not finished, and that we needed to remain together to monitor our community's environment. We began to look around, and what we found was that Cleveland Clinic had been polluting our community for years, by incinerating not only medical waste, but also radioactive waste. Medical waste incineration is a major source of dioxin and mercury contamination of the environment. This famous medical institution is burdening our community with dangerous dioxin, mercury, and radioactive emissions. The Cleveland Clinic needs to be concerned about its neighbors as well as its patients.

We worked diligently to get an interview with Cleveland Clinic, yet had little success. When they finally did agree to meet with us, they were very dictatorial in their approach: "We have set a meeting for you for Tuesday at five. You are only to bring two people, and none should be a journalist." We recognized the one-sidedness of the situation, but agreed to go, only to have the Clinic cancel on the day of the meeting. The clinic repeated this behavior several times.

For too long, the Greater Cleveland Coalition has been on hiatus, and I suppose that the Cleveland Clinic feels that we have forgotten about them. But we haven't. We have reorganized, we have learned from the past, and we won't be fooled by the Clinic's tactics.

I spoke to a city official regarding the expansion of the Cleveland Clinic and their incineration of medical and radioactive waste. His response was, "That's a hot political potato. If anyone closes those incinerators, it will be a community group like the Greater Cleveland Coalition for a Clean Environment." What more incentive do we need?

The Cleveland Plain Dealer, which never reports anything negative about the Cleveland Clinic, reported in January, 1997 that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission called Cleveland Clinic the worst polluter in the county. The NRC had warned the clinic several times before, and on this occasion, the Clinic was fined the "large" sum of $5,000 for "deliberately" exposing its employees to the hazards of radiation. If the Clinic does this to its employees, how can we expect it to respect the community?

The Greater Cleveland Coalition is alive and will again be a mover and a shaker in the environmental community. As the founder of this organization, and currently assuming the role of Chair, I invite all interested parties, especially those who reside in the Cleveland community to join with us in our fight against polluters. We meet every third Tuesday at the Martin Luther King Library, 1962 Stokes Boulevard, at 5:00 pm.

Kathleen Geathers
Greater Cleveland Coalition for a Clean Environment
1485 East 107th St
Cleveland, OH 44106

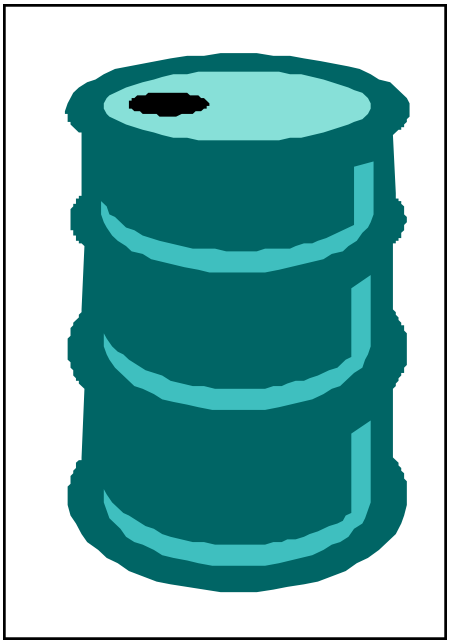
Columbia, MS

Home Town USA
The Story of Columbia, Mississippi

Our Story, Briefly Told

We are a community-based environmental justice organization that was formed in 1992 to win justice for the people who are suffering as a result of the major explosion at the Reichold Chemical Plant in Columbia, Mississippi.

The Explosion



In 1977, Reichold's plant, which was located in the midst of our predominantly African American working class community, exploded and burned. At the time, the plant was manufacturing, among other things, wood preserving compounds made from pentachlorophenol. This compound is often contaminated by dioxin, a by-product of its production.

The fire destroyed the plant, and Reichold quickly abandoned the site. They left behind over 4,500 drums of chemicals. Some were left to sit on flats, others were buried on the 81 acre site.

People who lived near the site were only evacuated for the day that it took to control the blaze. Neither the company, the local government, nor any other agency checked to see if residents had been contaminated or needed medical treatment.

Dirty Water

During the following years the drums left on the site leaked, allowing chemicals to seep into the ground. Subsequent floods spread the toxins onto surrounding farms, the river, swimming holes, and streets.

Residents' early attempts to get the Environmental Protection Agency to take action were unsuccessful. Finally after considerable efforts by the local Civil Defense Director, the EPA declared the area a Superfund Site.

During the period of virtual silence on the part of federal and state authorities, there were several fishkills, 200 cattle died "mysteriously," and the ground literally caught on fire.

Bad Blood

For a brief period during the 1980's the Reichold site was occupied by Stogner Trucking Company. Tests run on Stogner's employees revealed that all workers at the site had elevated levels of toxic chemicals in their blood. To this day residents who live near the site continue to suffer from alarming rates of cancer, premature death, respiratory disease, immune deficiency disorders, and skin diseases.

Furthermore, more buried chemical drums were recently discovered, and there has been considerable evidence that our water supply has been poisoned. Our fight is far from over.

Towards Justice & Truth

In March, 1992, Charlotte Keys spearheaded the effort to form Jesus People Against Pollution (JPAP). JPAP was born out of the need to openly address and find solutions for two big tragedies in our small Mississippi city. The first is Reichold's pollution of our community and the devastating effects it has had upon our families and neighbors. The second is the cover-up by local and federal officials, who have attempted to conceal the danger this community is in and the effects of the toxins we have inhaled and ingested over the years.

What We Seek

Children today, in poor communities, are loaded with toxic poisons that cause learning disabilities, hyperactivity, skin rashes, severe headaches, and many other health problems which are being ignored by the polluters and government officials. This injustice must stop.

Our goal at JPAP is to find a just and reasonable response to this crisis and to serve as a beacon for the scores of other southern communities that find themselves similarly endangered and misled.

Charlotte Keys
Jesus People Against Pollution
PO Box 765
Columbia, MS 39429

Columbus, OH

We do not fear our enemies more than we love our children

For eleven years, the Columbus trash plant belched black smoke over the capital of the State of Ohio. Little did anyone know what else was coming out of the stacks. Not until 1993, when citizens started asking questions and doing file reviews at the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency was it revealed (by the citizens) that the plant had been tested for dioxin three times. All of the data showed extremely high levels of dioxin. The local grassroots group PARTA (Parkridge Area Residents Take Action) discovered that in 1992 a stack test revealed dioxin emissions amounting to one kilogram of dioxin TEQ (total equivalence - a method of comparing the toxicity of different dioxin-like substances) being released per year from just one of the plant's six stacks.

After filing complaints with the Ohio EPA and the USEPA, the group held meetings with local citizens as well as state and federal elected officials. PARTA came to realize that the system was taking too long to take action on the trash plant. We wanted the plant closed and we would not take no for an answer. As part of our strategy,

PARTA decided to contact William Sanjour of the Solid Waste Division of the USEPA. After a long and sometimes heated discussion, Sanjour was convinced to write a memo to EPA Administrator Carol Browner about the dioxin emissions from the plant. On February 12, 1994, the day Mr. Sanjour's memo hit the local media, all hell broke loose. It was great! Every one of the local elected officials wrote to Browner demanding an explanation for Sanjour's memo.

It might be hard for most people to believe, but the USEPA was there for us. Of course, it would have been very hard for the EPA to explain why it was proposing a 30 nanogram limit for dioxin for new incinerators, while letting the Columbus plant spew 596 times this amount of dioxin. The EPA knew that if it really believed what the draft of its own dioxin reassessment revealed, it had to move on the Columbus plant. In August, 1994, the USEPA filed a unilateral order against the Columbus trash burning power plant, requiring the plant to be retrofitted with new pollution control equipment within two years. However, the cost of the retrofit was too great. On November 2, 1994 a unanimous vote by the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio closed what was possibly the largest known single source of dioxin in the country.

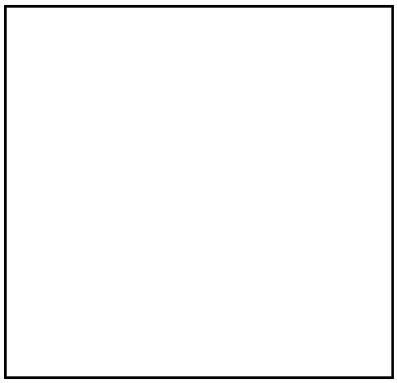
The people of Central Ohio can breathe easier for a while - that is, until the plant is sold to another company that wants to burn trash. Will dioxin exposure ever end? You're damn right it will, if we strive to create a unified force from the varied voices demanding a safe environment for all. Our children deserve the best efforts on their behalf.

Teresa Mills
Neighbors Protecting Our Environment
2319 Parkridge Court
Grove City, OH 43123

Convent, LA

Shintech

We, the St. James Citizens for Jobs and the Environment, would like to take you on a journey through our community. It is a community like yours, but it is a community at risk. It is a place we call home and the place Shintech, Inc. would like to call home, too. Shintech, a U.S. subsidiary of the Japanese company Shin Etsu, wants to build a massive polyvinyl chloride (PVC) manufacturing complex in the small St. James Parish town of Convent, Louisiana. This facility, if built, will be one of the largest PVC manufacturing facilities in the world. The manufacturing of PVC creates the industrial by-product dioxin, causing yet another threat to the health of the people and the surrounding environment.



The welcome sign in our town reads, "St. James Parish -- St. James Proud -- Keep it Clean," but unfortunately our community is anything but clean. This small rural town is struggling not to become one of the historic communities wiped off the face of the map, a "toxic ghost town." Massive, unbridled chemical industry development has transformed our beautiful and scenic River Road region into an unrecognizable sacrifice area called “Cancer Alley.” We are determined not to let Convent become another sacrifice zone for what some call “progress,” as Cancer Alley spreads.

Convent is a historic, rural community, nestled along the winding Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Our community is 80 percent African American and 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Sixty-one percent of the population is unemployed, and 50 percent of those over 25 do not have a high school diploma. Within a four and a half mile radius of the town center there are ten chemical and petrochemical

plants which release sixteen million pounds of toxic air pollution. The people of Convent cannot turn to the bountiful harvest of the land or the abundant catch of the rivers, lakes and bayous as they used to, for they are polluted and any yield they do produce is unsafe for human consumption. Convent has some of the highest cancer mortality rates in the nation. Men living near or working in these chemical plants are being diagnosed with prostate and testicular cancer and low sperm counts. Our area schools, many in the immediate vicinity of the chemical industries, are experiencing epidemic numbers of children with severe learning disabilities. and behavioral disorders. Not satisfied that this is enough, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, our elected officials, and Shintech want to add thousands of pounds of toxic releases to our community.

Chemical industry development, which was billed by the politicians and self-serving industry officials as the solution to poverty and the way to a better life, has proven instead to be the exact opposite. The dire poverty and high rates of unemployment in the shadows of the ten existing chemical plants give testimony to the dismal failure of this economic development vision.

I am sure by now it is clear why St. James Citizens for Jobs and the Environment are opposed to the Shintech proposal. We are a bi-racial, diverse group of grassroots activists who have lived together as neighbors all our lives. We want a safe, clean, healthy, and prosperous community. Our group formed over two years ago in response to the grave threat posed by Shintech's proposed plant. And with the help of various other organizations, we have stopped Shintech in their tracks. We have forced the Environmental Protection Agency, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and our elected officials to address the procedural and regulatory questions they would prefer not to ask. In addition, these public agencies cannot make any decisions regarding this facility without a full assessment of the environmental justice implications of granting the permit.

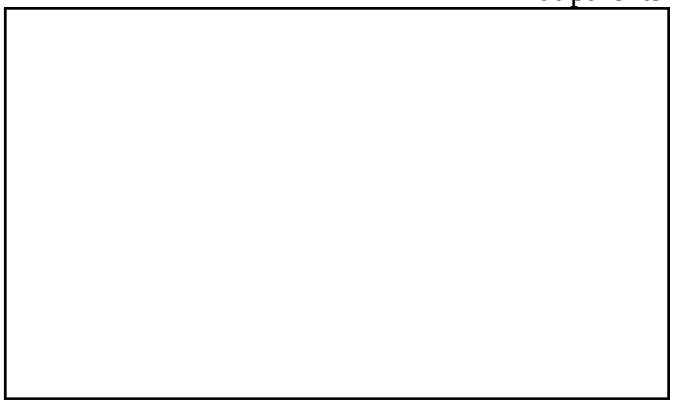
However, our battle is not over until Shintech goes home, and our community and others acheive environmental justice. Until there is justice for all, there is justice for none.

Patricia Melancon
St. James Citizens for Jobs & the Environment
PO Box 331
Convent, LA 70713

Detroit, MI

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress”

The strength of this sentiment expressed by Frederick Douglas in 1857 has much relevance today, especially in places like Detroit. In Detroit, it can be seen by looking down the street at an illegally demolished building amidst a neighborhood that doesn't get cleaned up; at a school whose young students breathe the air from the country's largest municipal waste incinerator located just down the street; at abandoned and contaminated industrial sites; and at parents watching children sicken, not knowing that they are suffering from lead poisoning.



In 1994, Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ) was established to deal with these threats to our lives where we live, work and play. We knew that for a long time, people of color and the poor were bearing the brunt of environmental damage. DWEJ is a coalition, in part, of community-based organizations, neighborhood groups, and concerned residents who come together from across the city to address the common problems of otherwise isolated citizens. Our goal is to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all people, regardless of race or economic status, and guarantee that those affected by economic and environmental decisions have their say in making them. We seek to understand and improve the health, economic and youth impacts of our environment, as well as the roles and responsibilities of government, industry and community.

The Challenge

Until now, no other community organization has demanded a presence at the table where decisions are made that have great influence over the entire city and perhaps the region. In fact, such a thing was unheard of in Detroit. Too many years have been wasted reacting to moronic decisions made without our input.

For decades, Detroiters have put the fate of this city and their lives in the hands of strong political leaders.

If Detroit is to become the "World Class City" that we all envision, the community must take part in the decisions affecting economic development. In Detroit, brownfields are a major problem. These are abandoned industrial (or other) sites that are too contaminated to reuse economically. They also pose serious threats to our health. Redeveloping these brownfields is a key to guaranteeing the future viability of Detroit's economy and environment. Just two weeks before it was complete, DWEJ learned that Detroit was establishing a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority. This entity would have great control over almost every parcel of land within the city limits. The Administration's proposal recommended that the seats on the Authority would include department heads from within the city and a representative from a corporate development agency. Not to our surprise, the community was to be excluded from decision making. In just two weeks, we had to mount a major campaign to educate, advocate, and change the minds of the City Council to vote against the Mayor and include community in the Authority.

The Stand

Because the Brownfield debate emerged out of the environmental justice movement, it was imperative that the environmental justice community be an integral part of the Authority. In the chambers of City Hall, DWEJ waged a battle against the campaign of disinformation geared toward City Council, by bringing real facts and community representation to the table. We made liars of those who said that the community was too ignorant to participate in the decision-making process. In the end, we won four out of the nine seats originally slated for the Administration and its corporate partners.

The Victory

We count this as a major victory and a great step towards cleaning up contaminated property, as well as ensuring land-use that gives consideration to needed jobs, our health, and the future of the community. For the first time in Detroit's history, residents are truly empowered to engage in dialogue that can resolve the problems of the past with a commitment to sustainability. DWEJ has made its mark, but the fight is not over yet.

Donele Wilkins
Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice
12101 Mack St.
Detroit, MI 48215

East Liverpool, OH

Shut it down, Tear it down & Move it out!

For fourteen years, we have been fighting to prevent the construction and operation of the world's largest commercial toxic waste incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio. The Waste Technologies Incorporated (WTI) incinerator, owned by Von Roll, a Swiss company, is located on the banks of the Ohio River in a residential neighborhood. The incinerator stack is level with a 400-student elementary school that sits on a bluff less than 1,100 feet away. East Liverpool is an economically depressed community of conservative, hardworking, blue-collar people, poor people, and people of color. All of the town's 500 African American residents live in the vicinity of the incinerator.

Both Bill Clinton and Al Gore have expressed concern over WTI's location. Al Gore called WTI an "unbelievable idea," saying "A lot of people don't know how high the stakes are." Even the regional EPA director who permitted the incinerator, Valdas Adamkus, admitted that WTI never should have been built where it is!

This isn't a tragedy in the making; the tragedy has already begun. I initially became concerned when I learned that WTI would be permitted to emit 4.7 tons of lead every year. Any amount of lead released into the environment is cause for concern, but it becomes criminal when you consider that it will be raining down on 400 schoolchildren next door. In a state-funded health study of East Liverpool schoolchildren, 69 percent of those tested had no mercury in their urine in March 1993. By September 1993, after WTI dumped 29 pounds of mercury into the air during two days of a test burn, and then continued to operate for six months, almost the same percentage of children now did have mercury in their urine!

An EPA document, made public during a 1993 court case, described EPA's failure to assess food-chain exposures at

WTI. The document stated that risk due to contaminated beef in the vicinity of WTI can be 1000 times greater than those considered in the inhalation-only risk assessment. Based on this increase and the prior finding that inhalation of dioxin would pose a cancer risk of 1.3 per million, there would be 1300 additional cancers in the area caused by dioxin exposure from WTI!

Making a post election promise in December 1992, President-elect Clinton and Vice President-elect Gore, in a prepared press release, said that WTI should not operate until questions of safety and legality were answered. Using the EPA's own risk criteria, a federal court ultimately ruled that even one year of WTI operation posed a substantial and unacceptable risk. Ohio Attorney General Lee Fisher made a legal conclusion that WTI was built and is operating the incinerator without a permit, in violation of the law.

Yet Carol Browner's EPA has worked aggressively to remove any and all obstacles from WTI's path, becoming the first EPA ever to allow a commercial hazardous waste incinerator to proceed to commercial operations immediately after failing its test burn.

In its assessment of the risks posed by the WTI incinerator, completed in 1997, EPA blatantly ignored sound scientific methods, many limitations of the data used in the assessment, and the criticisms raised by its own peer review scientists, and used the risk assessment to justify its decision to "certify" the test burn conducted by WTI. This certification is one of the last hurdles before a final operating permit can be issued for the WTI incinerator.

EPA signed off on the incinerator's test burn one day after the scientific peer review comments were due. However, only three of the seven scientists who were asked to review the document were able to submit comments by the deadline. All three expressed concern that their comments were not thorough because they did not have enough time to review, digest, and provide substantive comments on the risk assessment. But EPA was apparently not interested in hearing what its peer reviewers had to say about the final draft of this risk assessment.

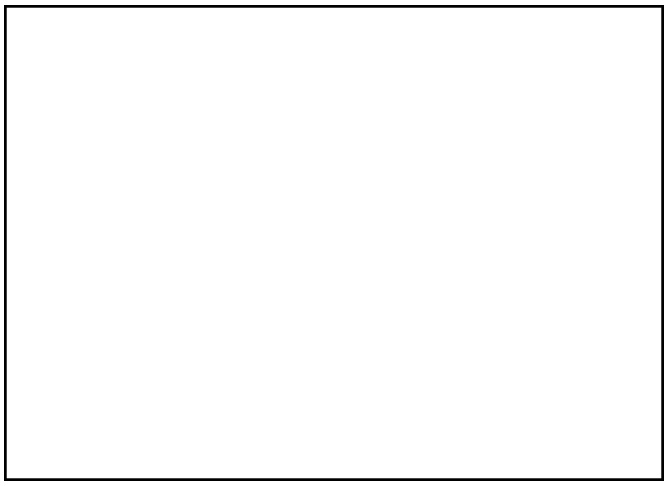
WTI is the epitome of everything that is wrong with the environmental regulatory process. Little in the way of facts, sound argument, or documented violation of law has had any effect. The EPA has tried to manipulate science to provide the illusion that WTI is safe. Because of the financial interest behind WTI, politics has suppressed science.

Terri Swearingen
Tri-State Environmental Council
Rd 1, Box 365, US Route 30
Chester, WV 26034

Hamtramck, MI

Larry, the Silver-Tongued Lizard in a Suit

In August 1995, the Hamtramck Medical Waste Incinerator was operating under its third owner in as many years and was promising to complete dioxin testing by mid-September. I knew little about dioxins and incinerators, but "the worlds most toxic substance" had become a buzzword. Then I heard the facility was to be sold again, this time to City Management, a regional waste hauler and landfill operator with well-financed political ties to both Wayne County and the Governor.



When I called City Management, I was told that this was a public relations matter and was switched to Larry Jackson from Marketing (a silver tongued lizard in a suit). Upon introducing myself as a concerned citizen and environmental health activist I was given the canned pitch on how wonderful the new owners were and how they would make this a shining example of the way a medical incinerator should be run. I asked if dioxin testing was scheduled. I was mildly amused and much dismayed when he explained that "dioxins would not be a problem because they were not allowed to receive dioxins, therefore dioxin standards or emissions did not affect them."

More dismayed than amused indeed, because medical waste incinerators burn medical waste and in doing so create dioxins! Mr. Jackson's reply was both clever and diabolical. Clever in that it provides a hint of factual information and diabolical in twisting those threads of truth into a dangerous deception. It was a failed technology in the hands of people willing to lie and place profits before public health. Realizing my quest for the simple truth had impaled itself upon the complexities of half-truths, I turned to the citizens of our community to organize towards the closing of this facility.

The Good People of Hamtramck

Hamtramck is an ethnically diverse, urban enclave surrounded by the City of Detroit amidst the heavily industrialized southeast Michigan sprawl. Economically speaking, things are better since the recent upswing, but the community as a whole is disadvantaged, with certain areas burdened by high rates of English illiteracy and unacceptable levels of poverty. Not surprisingly, the medical waste incinerator is located in such a distressed neighborhood with residential multi-family housing immediately across the street from the rear gates of the facility.

The people of Hamtramck will not sit idle, waiting for opposing bureaucrats and corporate lawyers to decide our future. We organized HEAT (Hamtramck Environmental Action Team) to specifically address this and other pollution sources in our area. We know that this medical incinerator, although having passed its recent dioxin tests, has in the past and will continue to emit unacceptable amounts of dioxins and metals into our community. We also know that there are preferred alternatives to incineration that will not add dioxins to our air. We understand that the environmental injustice that allowed this incinerator to enter our community has enabled the siting of other pollution sources that directly burden our children and elderly. We also live less than two miles downwind from the Detroit incinerator, America's largest municipal waste incinerator.

A Time for Action

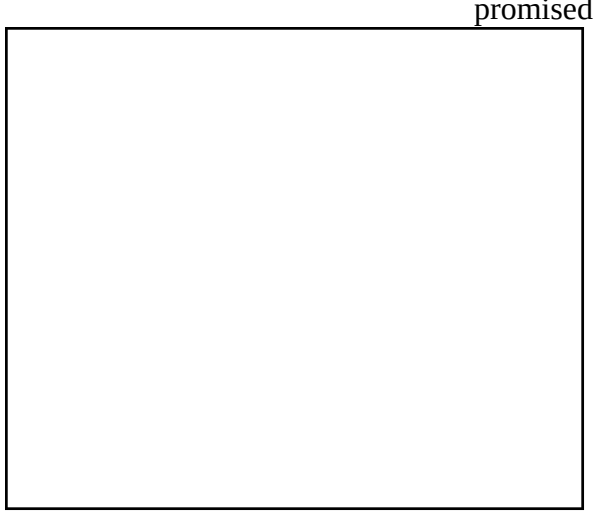
HEAT, with help from Health Care Without Harm and the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor, is turning up the heat on medical incineration with an organized effort to bring this issue to even a larger community audience. Volunteers are conducting a health survey of families in the immediate neighborhood of the incinerator to identify specific health problems that could be caused by the facility. We already know that we have high morbidity rates in several areas and plan to introduce the findings the first week of August at a town meeting coinciding with the 20-year anniversary of Love Canal. We will continue to educate a wider audience as to the dangers of dioxin and to show that medical waste incineration is a failed and dangerous technology.

Rob Cedar
Hamtramck Environmental Action Team
1999 Towbridge
Hamtramck, MI 48212

Harvey, IL

Our Personal Story

The Human Action Community Organization (HACO) was founded in 1970 and over the last 28 years has worked at the grassroots level to address the social justice issues faced by the residents of Harvey, Illinois. In 1989 we got our first exposure to the environmental movement when a municipal solid waste incinerator was proposed for our town. At first it sounded too good to be true. We were promised jobs and anticipated revenue for our impoverished, crime-ridden, nearly bankrupt community. All of the factory jobs had dried up in the late 70's and early 80's and our once "boom town" had become a "doom town". We were ripe for polluting industries to come and set up shop. And because of a state law providing a subsidy to incinerators for the electricity they produce, incinerator proposals were flooding into Illinois.



Since we knew very little about the environmental movement, one of our neighboring organizations, Harvey Highlands Neighborhood Organization, organized a community meeting and invited Greenpeace, People for Community Recovery and Citizens for a Better Environment - people who had more experience and knowledge about incineration and associated health impacts. Before long, we were convinced that this facility was not a good idea for our community: the health risks were too great and not worth the risk. A coalition was started and we adopted the slogan "Ban the Burn." We began educating and mobilizing communities around the health and environmental impacts of incineration.

After a widespread grassroots campaign, the retail rate law (which provided the subsidy) was repealed in 1995. This makes Illinois less attractive for new incinerator projects, but we still have to deal with the impact existing incinerators have on our health and environment.

One our most recent fights came when we learned about a proposal from a medical waste disposal company, Industrial Fuels and Resources. They proposed to build a $300 million incinerator which would burn medical waste (1700 tons a day) and contaminated soil brought in from six states. Before the company went out of business and the owners received jail time for several improprieties, they sold the land and the siting permit to Medical Disposal Service. This was the opportunity we were looking for. Could a company sell their siting permit or should the new owners have to start the siting permit process all over again? We began the process of appealing the permit. In September of 1996, the State Appellate Court upheld the upheld a lower court's ruling to deny the permit to Medical Disposal Service. We felt a big relief and a bittersweet victory.

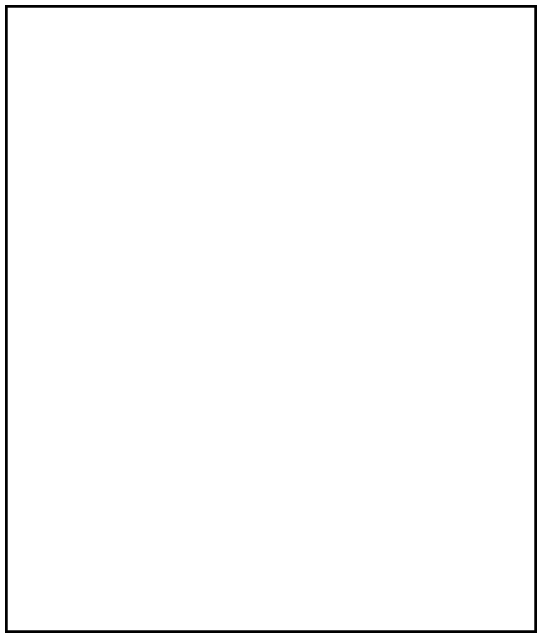
The need we now face is to make the struggle a little better for communities like Harvey, so the fight against a medical waste or any other kind of incinerator would not be so financially, physically and mentally draining. Most of our work was done on a volunteer basis. The only thing that kept us going at times was that spiritually we knew that the work we were doing would benefit thousands of lives. The politics, the games, the lies and deception were so very difficult to understand. It took untold hours of calls, meetings, conversations and presentations to educate the public as to what was happening in their state and their communities. The sacrifices that many of us had to experience included the loss of our personal assets, marriages, children, health and well-being. My hope is that someday communities will not have to go through such hardships simply because they don't want a polluting facility in their backyard or in anyone's backyard!

Eraina Dunn
Human Action Community Organization
16028 South Halsted Road
Harvey, IL 60426

Huntington, WV

Going, Going, Gone...

One minute after midnight on December 17, 1997, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), declared victory over Parsons & Whittemore, Inc. The road to victory, however, was long and arduous. This battle against what would have been the largest pulp and paper mill in North America was fought on every conceivable front - research, public education and outreach, media events, public hearings, rallies, legal manuevers, public forums, fund-raising events, coalition-building, support from the faith community, and non-violent civil disobedience.



While OVEC took the lead in organizing on this issue, we would not have succeeded without major support from a significant community of like-minded folks, not only in West Virginia, but throughout the region and nation. There are so many heroes and heroines of this epic. We won because we were organized. After holding several meetings in the affected community, we realized that we had an "economic blackmail" situation. The "power brokers" who controlled most of the jobs in that area clearly supported the project, and made it clear what opposing the mill might mean to anyone who held a job at the local supermarket, drug store, bank, etc. Organizing statewide and beyond West Virginia's borders was absolutely necessary in order to be successful.

Several major areas of concern made our statewide and regional organizing, as well as coalition-building efforts, easier - the health impacts of dioxin exposure, the clear-cutting of our region’s forests, the hundreds of millions of dollars in state tax and loan "incentives,” Parsons & Whittemore’s failure to hire local union members, and the aura of secrecy that shrouded the project

from beginning to end. For each of these concerns we first educated ourselves and then others. Sticking to the truth was absolutely imperative. And the facts spoke eloquently for themselves.

For instance, take the important issue of dioxin exposure. Our message to the public was clear and concise. There is NO SAFE LEVEL. The human health impacts of dioxin exposure were stressed over and over during our fight, especially the impacts on the unborn, which was helpful in coalition building.

Having fun and being creative played a key role in keeping this issue in the public's and media's eye. It also provided opportunities for volunteers to get actively involved. For example, in order to raise much needed funds to support our efforts, we staged an outdoor concert dubbed "Pulp Stock." The event galvanized volunteers and served as a wonderful way to educate and inform the public, as well as have fun. When the Regional Administrator of the EPA was fired by Carol Browner, in part for supporting citizens on the need for additional dioxin testing in the Ohio River, we turned it to our advantage. The former EPA official, turned road warrior, was OVEC's keynote speaker at Pulp Stock!

Working with a statewide coalition of environmental groups made it possible to hold a major rally at the governor's mansion. Organizing for the rally - titled, "West Virginia - Not For Sale!" - involved mailing 4000 postcards, a phone bank which made 800 calls, strategically placed newspaper ads, and a two month "Stop the Pulp Mill" billboard campaign. Our coalition efforts resulted in 1,000 people attending the event, a significant gathering that no politician in West Virginia could ignore!

One final point to make about what worked to stop the pulp mill — commitment to the long haul. We believed in what we were doing and, no matter what the final outcome, we knew that we had stood strong and made a difference in the lives of people who were for us and against us. We had been in the battle and on the front lines.

Janet K. Fout
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
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Photo Credit - *Copyright*, Chuck Wyrostok

Lake Charles, LA

Enough is Enough

Lake Charles is a small city located in southwestern Louisiana, in Calcasieu Parish. There is a great abundance of natural gas and salt under this community and many miles of highway and waterway to transport goods and waste products anywhere in the world. For this reason, there are 50 permitted major industrial petrochemical facilities currently operating within a 25-mile radius.

Lake Charles is home to more vinyl production that any other city in the United States. While the vinyl industry denies that there is much of a connection, recent reports show vinyl plays a large role in creating and increasing the world-wide dioxin burden throughout its life cycle. Greenpeace contracted with an accredited laboratory to study samples of wastes obtained from local vinyl producers PPG Industries and Condea-Vista. Dioxin levels at the PPG facility rivaled Times Beach, Missouri - a dioxin laden ghost town, evacuated because of contamination. PPG and Condea-Vista have both admitted to leaks of the suspected human carcinogen ethylene dichloride (EDC) totaling in the hundreds of millions of pounds. EDC has been detected in the Chicot aquifer at 76 times the federal Safe Drinking Water standard. The Chicot aquifer is the sole source of drinking water for Southwest Louisiana and Southeastern Texas.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) published a compilation study in 1997 on the entire Calcasieu estuary. This report showed that over 116 contaminants have been found in the area's waterways. Three companies in particular are named in the report for

being principally responsible for the contamination: PPG, Condea-Vista and Conoco. These three companies surround our tiny community of Mossville on three sides. Mossville, located just outside Lake Charles, is an African American community of about 600 people with most being 19 years of age or younger. The average income level in Mossville is a little over $8000 per year. High rates of endometriosis, lupus, asthma and attention deficit disorder are reported. These illnesses are linked to exposure to dioxin and endocrine disrupting chemicals.

In a community that is already disproportionately impacted, we are faced with a new proposed facility. Westlake Vinyl Corporation is seeking a permit to build a vinyl production megaplex less than half a mile from an elementary school. It will also leave more than 100 families south of the site trapped with no evacuation route. The thought of yet another polluting facility in our town has helped organize and unite communities across Lake Charles to stop the expansion of the toxic industry.

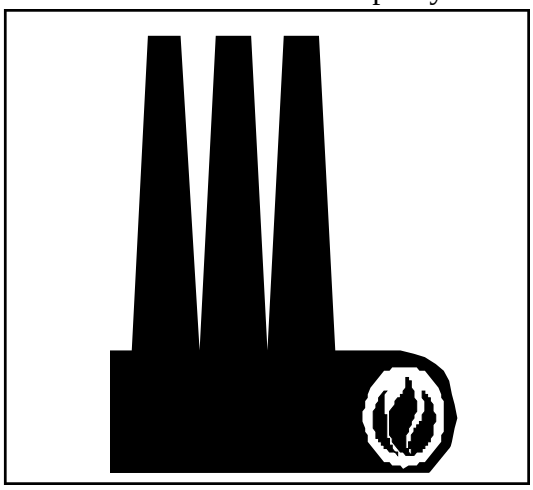
Black folks and white folks have joined together to create the Dioxin Free Lake Charles Campaign. Groups active in the effort include: Calcasieu League for Environmental Action Now (CLEAN), Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN), and the Mothers of Mossville (MOM). The main goals of the effort include stopping Westlake from building its proposed vinyl megaplex and relocating the community of Mossville out of harm's way. The long term goal is to seek real methods for real clean-up so that we can reclaim our hictoric old community.

The first steps include conducting a symptom survey by the University of Texas - Galveston directed by Dr. Marvin Legator. Residents will go door-to-door documenting the trends of illness in the community. Too often we told that we are not being exposed to chemicals and that if we are, the chemicals are not dangerous. Even if industy admits the chemicals are dangerous they always insist that the chemicals never blow or flow past their chain link fences into our yards and homes. We will take what we learn from the survey and use it to organize the community, educate the public and gain national media attention. Lake Charles is home to more vinyl production than any other city in the United States. Enough is enough!

Beth Zilbert
Calcasieu Leauge for Environmental Action Now
1607 Griffith Street
Lake Charles, LA 70601

Lock Haven, PA

The Fight Against On-Site Incineration



The Drake Chemical Company operated their factory in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania for over 30 years, producing specialty chemicals for dyes, pharmaceuticals, pesticides and herbicides. The plant is in the center of the city of Lock Haven, across the street from homes and a park. Drake Chemical closed the plant, leaving behind nine acres of contaminated soil. Contaminants included beta-Naphthylamine, a potent bladder carcinogen; volatile organic compounds; and several other chlorinated chemicals. The chemicals were found to be leaking into groundwater and a local creek, leading to the inclusion of the site on the Superfund cleanup list in 1982. The EPA cleanup involved moving drums, sludges and liquids, containing the substances leaking from the site, and fencing the property. The last phase of the project is to dispose of more than 300,000 tons of contaminated soil. In 1995, EPA announced how it proposed to do that. Their choice was an on-site incinerator.

Arrest the Incinerator Remediation (AIR) has been fighting this “remedy” since it was proposed. We don’t want to be forced to live with the consequences of this dangerous technology. We know that the incineration will expose Lock Haven residents to dioxin and that any amount of dioxin exposure is too much. We also know that temporary, “on-site” incinerators have lots of problems with leaks and emissions. We are not asking EPA not to clean up the site. We are asking them not to burden us with any more pollution as part of their cleanup. Incineration of contaminated soil is a “solution” that is as bad or worse than the problem it is supposed to solve.

AIR has fought for more than three years to stop the incineration at Drake. We have challenged the EPA's decision in the federal courts, only to be told that citizens don't have the right to sue the federal government, even if there is evidence of irreparable harm, until a project is complete and the damage is done. The court would not consider our case on the merits of incineration.

AIR has found our own experts to challenge the "risk assessment" EPA did for the incineration. Our "Real Review" of EPA's peer reviewed risk assessment document showed that EPA was not truly interested in the environmental and public health impacts of incineration. Their assessment was designed to minimize the risks, so that the incineration remedy they had already chosen would not hit any roadblocks.

AIR has worked with EPA's Ombudsman, Bob Martin, to expose the problems in the process of selecting the cleanup remedy. But EPA was in such a hurry to get the incinerator operating that they ignored their own Ombudsman's recommendations, along with years of community protests. They couldn't even be bothered to wait for their own peer reviewers to finish with the risk assessment, before they announced when the incineration would begin.

The incineration at Drake Chemical started on March 4th, 1998. Since that time, our fears about its safety have been realized. The "thermal release vents" have opened nine times, sometimes for as long as several hours. These openings release smoke, soot, and other pollutants into the air. People in Lock Haven are realizing that the incineration is a threat to their health and they don't want to be the victims of EPA's devotion to incineration. AIR plans to keep on fighting this EPA "cleanup" plan that is doing so much harm to our health and environment.

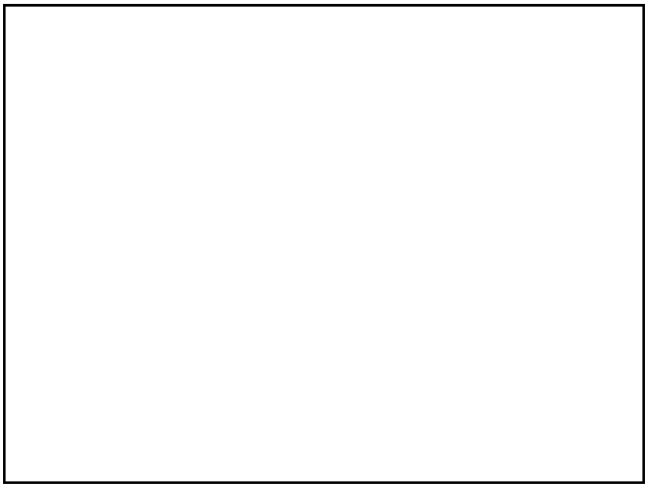
Vicky Smedley
Arrest Incineration Remediation
RR 4, Box 53A
Jersey Shore, PA 17740

Love Canal, NY

We Can't Evacuate The Planet

From the early 1940's until 1952, an abandoned canal in Niagara Falls, New York, was used by Hooker Chemical (now owned by Occidental Petroleum) as a dumping ground for 21,800 tons of hazardous waste. Included in these wastes were 13 million pounds of lindane, four million pounds of chlorobenzenes, and about a half a million pounds of trichlorophenol used in the manufacturing of herbicides such as 2,4,5-T.

In 1954, an elementary school was built on the perimeter of the canal; the playground was built directly above the dump. Over 400 children attended the school. Houses and apartments built around the dump became homes for about 900 families. Barbara Quimby grew up at Love Canal. She remembers playing on the dump that they called "quicksand lagoon." She and her friends would poke sticks into and skip rocks across the black sludge that surfaced. Mothers had to call Hooker to ask how they should treat the chemical burns their children received from playing at the site. One child was burned over 70 percent of his body when he placed chemically reactive "hot" rocks in his pocket. They caught fire when they rubbed against each other as he played.



In 1977, an investigation of the site found that "fume odors from the site are evident at all times." The study also found that, over the years, drums of chemicals nearest the surface of the canal had become increasingly corroded and exposed, resulting in a massive leakage of contaminated liquid from the canal into the neighboring area. One of the chemicals leaking from Love Canal was dioxin.

Residents were told in 1978 that because dioxin adheres to soil it would not travel through groundwater and therefore there was no cause for alarm. This assurance was quickly discredited when cleanup workers discovered that, when mixed with chemical solvents, dioxin does move freely through soil with groundwater. Additional testing was then done throughout the community. Dioxin was detected blocks away from the dump in soil more than three feet below the surface.

It was then discovered that the cleanup activities spread dioxin-tainted dust throughout the neighborhood. Vegetation, from hedges and flowers to 25 year old oak trees, died throughout the neighborhood. As if trying to prove that the air was dangerous, a bird fell right out of the sky and died at the foot of a state environmental investigator who was walking the site, "listening" to residents' concerns about the dead vegetation.

The health problems suffered by Love Canal residents were horrifying. In a nine-block section of the community, nine out of sixteen babies born from 1976 to 1980 had some type of birth defect. Miscarriages, cancer, and central nervous system problems were all found at high levels at Love Canal.

Luella Kenny lived in the northern end of Love Canal, next to a creek. Her seven-year old son Jon died and she believes his death was from dioxin poisoning. The creek where Jon often played was found to have 31 parts per billion of TCDD, the most toxic form of dioxin.

In 1980, a $15 million fund was established by the federal government to purchase all the homes in the neighborhood and to assist renters in relocation. Almost 900 families moved from the community.

Love Canal was "cleaned up" by building a trench around the canal and placing a clay cap over the top. Dioxin and the hundreds of other chemicals that leaked out of the canal still remain throughout the abandoned neighborhood. But that is not the end of the story.

The state of New York is now resettling parts of Love Canal. Families with limited options for owning a home of their own are moving into the northern end of the neighborhood, near the old homes where Luella Kenny and her neighbors once lived. Health authorities say that Love Canal is now "habitable." What they will not say is that the neighborhood is safe.

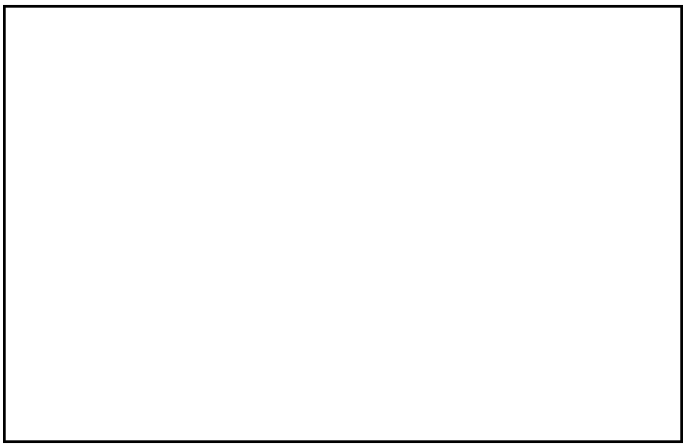
Lois Marie Gibbs
Center For Health, Environment & Justice
P.O. Box 6806
Falls Church, VA 22040

Merrimack Valley, MA

Victory in Merrimack Valley

As someone fortunate to participate in an incredibly ambitious and powerful grassroots campaign against incineration, I can attest to a growing belief in the ability of citizen activists to do the impossible -- to take on the trash industry and win. We have shut one incinerator. Another announced that it will eventually close. But our work is not done.

The Merrimack Valley of Massachusetts is a region north of Boston, near the border of New Hampshire. The Valley is home to a concentration of incinerators unrivaled anywhere in New England, if not the country -- three trash incinerators and New England's largest medical waste incinerator, as well as a small hospital incinerator. Two of the trash incinerators, in Haverhill and Lawrence, are owned by Ogden Martin. The third trash incinerator, located in North Andover, is owned by Wheelabrator. The medical waste incinerator, also in Lawrence, is owned by Browning Ferris Industries (BFI).



These incinerators spew a brew of dangerous toxins -- dioxin, mercury, lead -- into one of the sickest communities in the Commonwealth. The City of Lawrence has a pediatric asthma rate two-and-one-half times the statewide average and a rate of lead poisoning that is four times the state average.

The campaign has been driven by a remarkable cadre of doggedly tenacious and hard-working activists. Communities have banded together to form the Merrimack Valley Environmental Coalition (MVEC), comprised of the Lawrence Environmental Action Group (LEAG), the Haverhill Environmental League (HEL), People for the

Environment (PFE), Merrimack Valley People for Peace, Concerned Andover Residents for the Environment (CARE), and the Tewksbury Recycling Committee. MVEC was formed in 1995, as part of a successful campaign to prevent Ogden Martin from burning sludge at its Haverhill incinerator. Also integral to the campaign has been the Merrimack Valley Project, a coalition of religious, labor, and tenant organizations, as well as the newly formed Lawrence Environmental Justice Council.

I believe the activists I work with are motivated by their realization that reckless and greedy corporate behavior can bring unnecessary harm, and even death to our friends, neighbors, and loved ones. I have seen this at work in Ed Meagher, co-chair of People for the Environment, who lost a son to respiratory illness. I have seen it at work in Roberta Whitney, an Andover resident who speaks so passionately about the painful knowledge that she breast-fed her children whith dioxin-contaminated milk. I have seen it at work in Joan Kulash, who brings an inspiring combination of exuberance and anger to the campaign.

Highlights of the campaign include: a media event last October, where we announced that the name of the solid waste incinerator in North Andover (NESWC) had been changed to the "NESWC Dioxin Factory"; a People's Hearing on Incinerators in the Merrimack Valley last November; a DEP hearing in Haverhill in April on proposed incinerator regulations where 200 people demanded that the incinerators be closed; a meeting this June with the state's Environmental Secretary Trudy Coxe, where we wowed her with our presentation of legal opportunities to close the NESWC incinerator; the Democratic state convention this June, where our intern Matt Wesler wore a cow costume and we handed out flyers headlined, "Dioxin: It's What's For Dinner"; and the release of our report, *The Case for Closure*, featuring over 30 statewide and local groups endorsing our "Call to Action" to close the Lawrence and North Andover incinerators.

With this kind of activism, you get results, and we've gotten results. On June 5, Ogden Martin closed its Lawrence trash incinerator. Soon after, BFI announced that it is considering closing its medical waste incinerator, as part of a nationwide transition to non-incineration treatment technologies. Our rallying cry now: "NESWC is next!"

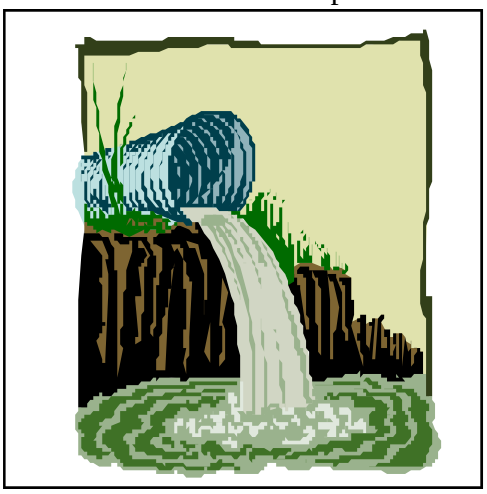
My favorite slogan, though, is from the French student revolutionaries of the 1960's: "Be realistic. Do the impossible." And so we dedicate ourselves to this difficult, but very rewarding and very necessary fight.

Eric Weltman
Toxics Action Center
37 Temple Place
Boston, MA 02111

Missoula, MT

Stone Container

When people think about Montana, they imagine snowcapped mountains, alpine meadows blanketed with wildflowers and pristine trout streams. The city of Missoula, the cultural heart of Montana, lies at the apex of five valleys and at a glance embodies the above description. To the passing visitor this seems like an unlikely place to find dioxin contamination. But unfortunately this beautiful valley suffers from some of the most severe weather inversions in the country which trap air pollution for days, sometimes weeks, at a time.



A major contributor of dioxin and other organochlorine emissions is a pulp mill owned by Stone Container. The mill is one of the largest in the world and produces a product called "sky-white" liner-board which is used for the flat sides of corrugated cardboard. The mill produces dioxin in three ways: by using elemental chlorine to bleach its pulp, by incinerating chlorinated sludge and by incinerating waste containing PVC plastic (on average, ten tons of waste per day) in its waste fuel boilers. From 1990 to 1994, the mill was cited for 1,400 air and water quality violations by the State of Montana and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA's latest toxic release inventory (TRI) data indicate that Stone Container is the largest polluter in the state of Montana dumping, among other things, the largest number of carcinogens into Montana's waters - a total of 4,200 pounds.

Addressing environmental pollution at the mill has been complicated by a deliberate campaign by the corporation to pit the mill’s 600 workers, members of the United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU) Local 885,

against environmentalists and concerned community members. In 1994, when an environmental coalition collected signatures for a petition demanding the mill clean up its pollution, the company coerced the union into organizing a boycott of local businesses that signed the petition. A great number of Stone Container workers believe that any further restrictions or regulations placed on the mill will cause it to close down. Since the mill is one of the largest employers in the county and pays some of the highest wages in the area, workers' support is a source of strength for Stone Container as it fights to maintain its right to conduct business as usual.

Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE), a grassroots environmental justice organization, is working to eliminate dioxin and other organochlorine emissions in communities across the state. We are working to convince Stone Container to stop using chlorine to bleach their pulp and instead switch to one of the non-chlorinated methods of bleaching. We are also working to convince the mill to find a safer way to dispose the waste containing PVC plastic. We are concerned about the exposure of our community, including the mill workers, especially during the numerous weather inversions when the pollution generated from the mill is trapped in the Missoula Valley for days. WVE doesn't accept the "jobs v. environment" argument that Stone Container uses as an excuse not to invest in new, chlorine-free technology. Stone Container can continue to provide Missoula with good-paying jobs while cleaning up its act.

Bryony Schwan
Women's Voices for the Earth
P.O. Box 8743
Missoula, MT 59807

Editor's note:

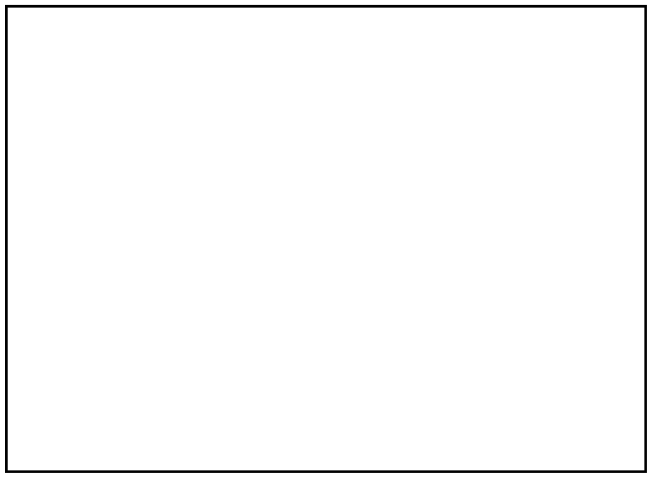
In late 1995, Montana CHEER, Native Forest Network, and Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers filed a lawsuit against Stone Container in federal court, detailing numerous air and water quality and reporting violations at the mill. On March 11, 1998, after two years of negotiations, the citizens reached a comprehensive out-of-court settlement with Stone. The settlement requires Stone to analyze the mill's bleaching process in such a way that could lead to a totally chlorine-free process, work to prevent the burning of chlorinated plastics, and develop a pollution prevention plan for the mill.

Newark, NJ

Ironbound Fights for Long Overdue Cleanup

Background

The Diamond Alkali Superfund Site is a former pesticide manufacturing facility located in the Ironbound section of Newark, New Jersey. From 1951 to 1969 the Diamond Alkali Company owned and operated the facility which manufactured Agent Orange, an herbicide used during the Vietnam War. This site is now host to the world's largest concentration of dioxin. In 1983 the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) conducted sampling on the property and on the banks of the Passaic River which borders the property. High levels of dioxin, DDT and other hazardous materials were found and the USEPA declared the area a Superfund site. In 1990, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the USEPA and Maxus Energy Corporation (the current site owner) entered into a legally binding agreement to remediate the site.



What's Happening Now

In June 1997, the USEPA did more extensive testing at the site. Some samples showed dioxin levels as high as 50,000 parts per billion (ppb). This is 50,000 times higher than the one ppb level which triggered cleanup at Times Beach and other sites. Dioxin has been found in soil as deep as 12 feet down, and the estimated volume of contaminated soil is 70,000 cubic yards.

For over ten years, the USEPA has held community meetings to discuss the remediation process for the Superfund Site. They considered three general remedies; containment, off-site incineration, and on-site incineration. But no children's health impact studies have ever been done in the Ironbound community.

The community has always been adamantly opposed to containment because it is not permanent and requires constant monitoring and maintenance, and ultimately renders the property useless. The only other choices, according to the USEPA regulations, would be on-site incineration or off-site incineration at the nation's only dioxin incinerator located in Kansas. Of the 3, the community favors off-site incineration.

In June 1998, the USEPA advised the community that off-site incineration was not an option because the soil contained too much debris. Therefore, according to the EPA, the only option is on-site incineration. A mobile incinerator would be placed on the site and the dioxin-laden soil would be burned for 24 hours a day, for a period of six months. The community is dissatisfied with this option. Ironbound is already disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards. The community is host to New Jersey's largest incinerator, numerous chemical companies and hundreds of contaminated sites. A new incinerator would add to the already degraded quality of life for the residents.

Health Impacts

Dioxin has been classified as a known human carcinogen, and linked to altered glucouse tolerance, decreased testes size, soft tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease, immune system depression, low testosterone levels, impaired child development, liver dysfunction, cancer, and other health effects. But no health studies have ever been done in the Ironbound community.

Children are much more sensitive then adults to air pollution, toxins, and other environmental hazards, which places them at an even greater risk. On May 21 1998, the White House announced a new pilot program initiated by the USEPA, the Child Health Champion Campaign. The Child Health Champion Campaign is a plan to empower communities to take steps toward protecting their children from environmental health threats and help them identify local environmental risks. The USEPA identified 11 pilot communities for the project nationwide and the Ironbound community is one of them.

For the last 15 years nothing has been done to ensure the health and safety of the children in the Ironbound community. The residents of Ironbound will make sure that the EPA keeps its promise and does become a champion of our children’s health!

Anna Estevez
Ironbound Community Corporation
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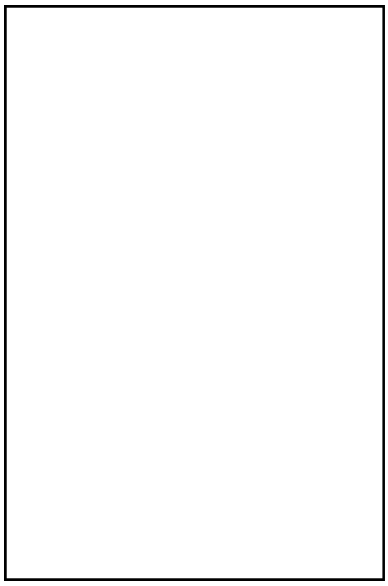
Newtown, GA

The Newtown Story

Can you imagine living in a neighborhood that is bordered by a railway system that carries dangerous chemicals, a major scrap metal and junk yard, an oil refinery, and numerous other industrial facilities? Can you imagine what would happen if your neighborhood had only one way in and out and there was a chemical spill, train derailment, tornado or other disaster? Can you imagine what would happen if your local government did not have an existing evacuation plan in case of such a disaster? Can you imagine your house sitting on land that was once a landfill and your children playing on that land? This is what the people in Newtown face every day.



Newtown is a low to moderate income, African-American neighborhood in Gainesville Georgia, located just outside Atlanta. Following a deadly tornado that ripped through Gainesville in 1936, segregated housing for black residents was built on a landfill beside the railroad tracks. In the 1950's, the women of the community formed the Newtown Florist Club; they cared for the sick and bought flowers for residents' funerals. Through the turbulent 60's and 70's, the Florist Club members became vocal leaders for civil rights and community improvement.

For more than 40 years the residents of Newtown have watched industry encroach upon the neighborhood and now it is at our back door. This small community of 143 houses is home to 13 of the 16 major industrial facilities in Gainesville, which are responsible for over 75% of the dangerous chemicals released into the city's air, water and soil. There are also more than 50 smaller facilities which are not even required to report their toxic releases in the area. Neither the government nor its agencies have done a

thorough examination of the air, land and water in the area to determine whether these chemicals are contributing to the illnesses experienced by the residents. Instead, we at the Newtown Florist Club have taken matters into our own hands.

In 1990 we began canvassing our neighborhood, documenting families' medical histories. We were shocked to learn that many people, most of them on the same street, had died from some form of throat, lung, or colon cancer, lupus or chemically-induced heart disease. Today, the numbers are even higher. As members of the Florist Club, we have become environmental activists; lobbying state and local government officials and organizing the community to uncover the source of our health concerns. We have sponsored two Environmental Justice Workshops for activists from all over the southeastern United States. We also established a multi-denominational/multi-ethnic ministerial group to address mutual concerns regarding the environment, youth and social issues. Our most recent project has been to publish our book; "The Newtown Story; One Community's Fight For Environmental Justice."

We will continue to utilize a multi-pronged approach of education and organizational training to address environmental justice issues. With the help of organizations and people in adjoining communities, the Newtown Florist Club will be able to help a larger group come together and fight for environmental equality. The Newtown Florist Club has been working for nearly a decade on environmental issues. Over the years, some gains have been made and out of our suffering we have gained the motivation, the desire, and the capacity to share with others who have been affected in the same way.

Environmental contamination is an invisible killer that creeps in quietly. We want the world to know what is happening in Newtown. We are sharing our story in the hope that one day people will not die from exposure to toxic pollutants because of the color of their skin, because of where they live, or because they are poor. We invite you to join us and share our struggle.

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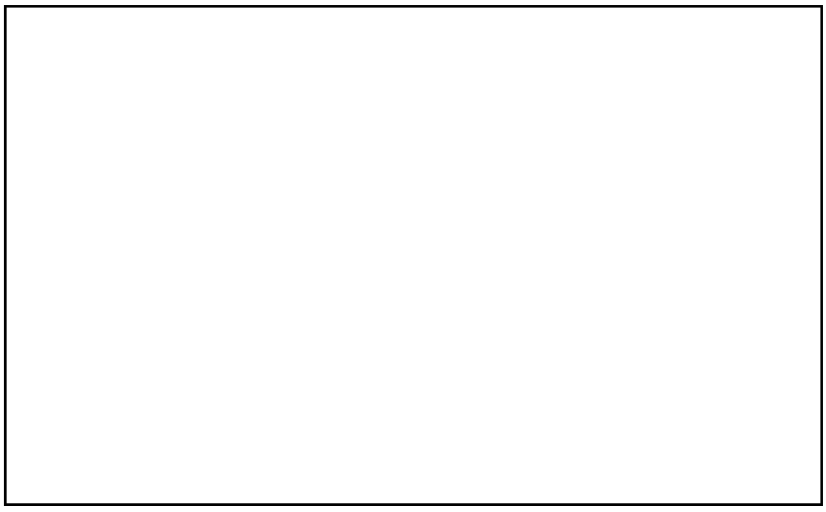
Pensacola, FL

Mt. Dioxin

Escambia Treating Company (ETC) occupied 26 acres in the center of four African American neighborhoods in north-central Pensacola, Florida. ETC operated from 1943 to 1982, treating utility poles and foundation pilings with creosote and pentachlorophenol (PCP). When it shut down, the company left behind 40 years worth of waste, including an unlined landfill, an unlined containment pond, unlabeled leaking barrels, over-turned electrical transformers, crumbling asbestos insulation and widespread air, soil and groundwater contamination.



The ETC site and the residential communities are separated only by a fence. For years, after heavy rain, the waste ponds overflowed into the streets and nearby yards, because until 1984 there was no drainage system. Former employees tell of being dispatched to the neighborhoods after heavy rains to pump out creosote and PCP that pooled in residents' yards.

In April 1991, nine years after the facility closed, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) appeared on the scene. Under its emergency removal authority, EPA began to excavate the contaminated area and stockpile the wastes onsite. This was the birth of what is now known as Mt. Dioxin. It was formed when years of accumulated wood treatment waste (containing PCP, creosote, dioxin, benzene, arsenic, and chromium) as well as asbestos and PCBs were shoveled out of pits and piled in huge mounds on the site.

Now, Mt. Dioxin and the residential communities are separated only by a fence. In our front yards are flower boxes, bikes and baby carriages - giving the appearance of a well-kept family neighborhood - while in our

backyards we have driven support poles into the ground to prevent our backyards from falling into the dioxin pit.

The reckless nature of EPA's activity was almost as frightening as the contaminants themselves. The levels and volume of contamination were not determined before excavation began, no emergency plan was coordinated with local civil defense officials, and no measures were taken to protect nearby neighborhoods. It was very surreal - workers in moonsuits were dredging up toxic soil less than 15 feet from children playing in their own yards.

Predominantly long-term homeowners, we have worked all our lives, paying down mortgages, paying taxes, trying to build some security. Many residents are retired. We were so proud to have new homes when we moved here - we never could have imagined they would become worthless because of industrial chemicals. The area also includes a large public housing facility and some rental homes. Once these were very nice neighborhoods, and once they were among the very few Pensacola neighborhoods where African Americans were allowed to purchase new homes. We never knew our health was being threatened; we were told not to worry about the odors and runoff from the plant. But we have found ourselves trapped in poisoned homes.

Many nearby residents and former workers were already suffering with cancers, immune disorders, respiratory disease, and other chronic afflictions. When the removal of the contaminated soil began in 1991, choking fumes and poisonous dust caused respiratory distress, persistent skin rashes, and burning eye irritation. Even worse, there may be permanent damage which won't show up for years. EPA's actions were clearly making people sicker. But EPA insisted that it was just an "odor" problem.

Citizens Against Toxic Exposure (CATE) first began meeting in 1992 in an effort to stop the digging due to widespread health complaints. We were joined by former ETC workers and other concerned citizens to demand relocation, expansion of the ETC site to encompass the entire are it has contaminated, and other protective measures.

After years of organizing, CATE won permanent relocation for all 358 families in October 1996. But EPA didn't actually move any families until a year later. And CATE continues to fight for a fair price for our homes, as the majority of the families remain in their homes, still waiting for the government to act to protect their health.

Margaret Williams
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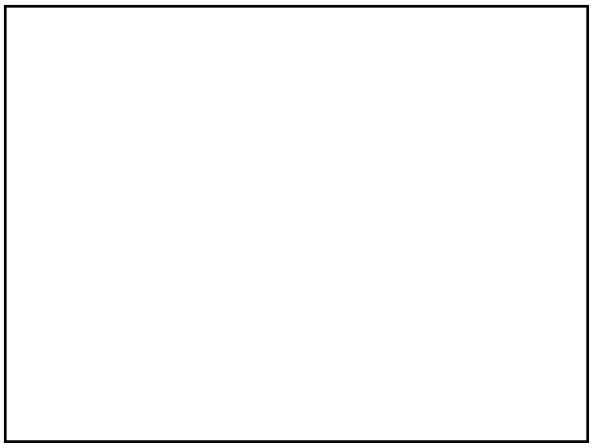
Phoenix, AZ

Not Even Stun Guns Can Stop This Fight

I used to have a pretty normal life until my older sister died. She was sixteen and I was nine. My mom started going to a lot of meetings because our community, Maryvale, Arizona, was being investigated because so many children had died. And we found out that the wells in my neighborhood were contaminated, which could have caused Amy's death. I went to a bereavement group with other children who had lost a sibling. We enjoyed getting together but we didn't like crying. So we started Children For a Safe Environment around my kitchen table.



One of the first issues we took on was the ENSCO's proposed hazardous waste incinerator in Mobile, Arizona. We had to educate ourselves about hazardous waste, fast, because every time we showed up at a protest the press would come straight to us kids and start asking questions. I think they thought the only reason we were out there was because our parents sent us. But we quickly earned respect from the press.

During this time I thought we were doing a great thing, trying to keep three hazardous waste incinerators from burning in a small, minority community. The news liked us, the people liked us, and my teachers would whisper to me to keep up the good work. But there were a couple of teachers who told me that there were no colleges that would take me if I kept it up. My mother was told she should not run for PTA President because she had been seen on the news yelling at the governor (who is now on his way to prison.) And then, they took away her Girl Scout troop after she protested at the state capitol because they said she was not a good role model.

We attended public hearings, meetings and candle light vigils. We made so many signs, flyers, and phone calls, and we even spent Thanksgiving doing a mailing instead of having dinner with our family. During the ENSCO fight I learned about phone tapping, stun guns, getting arrested, and sound bites. It was not at all uncommon to come home from school and have two or three news cameras in the front yard. One thing I learned was that if you keep up the fight you can win, even if many people are against you. We won after two years of hard work. I thought at that time that our lives would go back to normal.

But then the phone rang and a woman said,"They want to put a hazardous waste plant near my child's school and I don't know what to do." And so it goes on and on. Once you're in it, you're in it for life. Over the years we have helped shut down medical waste incinerators, several landfills, a transfer station, and lots of dirty industry. We have been threatened with lawsuits, some of our parents have lost their jobs, many of our friends were stun gunned at a public hearing and then taken to jail.

I believe that every young person deserves a clean environment, no matter where they live, what race they are, or how much money their parents make. But we will have to work to get there. We are the future and we must all start paying attention to that public notice announcing a new permit, that building spewing smoke next to our schools, and what is being dumped in our landfills. Children For a Safe Environment will pay attention to these things and continue to fight to clean them up, because if we don't, it will come back to haunt us.

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Quincy, WA

Hazardous Fertilizer

For several decades, the practice of turning toxic waste from heavy industries into fertilizer went unnoticed by the general public and virtually unregulated by the government. In 1997, a group of determined farmers and Mayor Patricia Martin in Quincy, Washington helped to uncover this scam. The issue first arose when the farmers realized they were all facing similar problems, including crop failures and sick and dying livestock.

Fertilizer ...

It helps grow the world's food supply.
It makes our flowers bloom.

Does it poison us with dioxins and other toxic chemicals?

The farmers and Mayor Martin brought their story to Seattle Times reporter Duff Wilson, and after months of research, the series "Fear in the Fields" hit the front page of the Seattle paper and media outlets across the nation. The Seattle Times series revealed that toxic wastes from cement factories, incinerators, pulp mills, steel factories and other industries are being made into fertilizers. These wastes can contain an array of toxic chemicals, including dioxin, lead, cadmium and mercury. The story also brought to light that these "recycled" fertilizers are virtually unregulated in the United States. In fact, fertilizers in general are not subject to standards or monitored for their contents, other than those that are beneficial to plant life.

The dioxins that can contaminate the wastes are a concern for the health of farmworkers and farmers who handle these products, communities where these products are applied, and consumers who eat the food grown with these products. Most of our dioxin exposure comes from our food, specifically meat, dairy products and fish. When grazing land is treated with these wastes, the cow’s food is

contaminated, leading to contaminated food for us. Those who benefit the most from this practice are large industrial polluters who avoid the high cost of disposing of their wastes while farmers, farmworkers and consumers lose out.

In response to the Seattle Times story and public outcry about dioxin in fertilizer, the Washington State Department of Ecology did testing on the fertilizers from known dioxin sources. What they found was extremely disturbing. The testing revealed that dioxin in wastes from paper mills and steel mills used for fertilizer were five to 100 times higher than the cleanup standard for dioxin at toxic waste sites in Washington State. The state called for more investigation and the environmental and public health community called for a ban on turning dioxin laden wastes into fertilizer. Washington passed a law requiring labeling and set some weak standards, but not for dioxin. The industry and state got what it wanted--more study of dioxin in fertilizer but no real action!

Environmentalists and public health advocates argued that banning the use of hazardous waste in fertilizers is an opportunity to prevent additional dioxin exposure. But the state avoided the issue when it passed its law. If the Dioxin Reassessment had been finalized the state would not have been able to defer action so easily. Many of the state's arguments against action centered around the fact that the Reassessment had not been issued. They largely ignored the evidence contained in the draft Reassessment, particularly that the general population already exceeds the "acceptable daily intake" of dioxin by a factor of up to 500. They also ignored evidence that suggests dioxin and related compounds may enter crops through uptake from soil, deposition on leaves and absorption of dioxin vapors from air onto the plant. This was a clear case where the state would not make policy without a final word on dioxin from the Environmental Protection Agency and the environment and the public will suffer because of it.

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Rosamond, CA

The Tale of Mobile Smelting

The small town of Rosamond, California is infamous as the gateway to Edwards Air Force Base, where the Air Force has its premier flight test center and where the Space Shuttle lands. It also bears the distinction of having the worst childhood cancer cluster in California. In the space of a few years nine children contracted cancer. Seven died. Five of those children died of medulla blastoma, a brain cancer so rare it would be unlikely that any child in Rosamond would ever contract it, much less five. Upon extensive investigation, it was found that Rosamond was home to 24 toxic sites spewing out a wide variety of hazardous air pollutants.

Mobile Smelting was one of those sites. A copper smelter about five miles out of town, it burned PCB transformer fluid and copper wire in an attempt to recycle the copper. It was a 5 acre site stacked high with metal scrap and other junk.

After community protests at the site and a letter writing campaign spearheaded by Desert Citizens Against Pollution (DCAP) the government began to take an interest in the issue. State tests showed huge amounts of dioxin were being produced from the burning of the copper wire and the PCBs. State health risk assessors said it was one the highest risk sites they had ever seen and quickly moved to identify other copper smelters in California where this activity might be taking place.

After a three year battle, finally Mobile Smelting was closed permanently and listed as a state Superfund site. The cleanup involved recycling the scrap metal and packaging the 20 tons of smelter ash in bags. The bags were stored in a trailer on the site.

The cleanup went smoothly. But the time came to decide what to do with the 20 tons of ash, which was the largest known stockpile of dioxin in the country. The state wanted to send it to the hazardous waste incinerator in Utah. Citizens opposed the burning of the ash, saying that new technologies would become available in a few years that could destroy the dioxin without releasing it into the environment.

Citizens worked with activists and the media in Utah. After pressure from the Utah activists and stories about the dioxin-laden ash in the Utah news, the incinerator refused to accept the waste, claiming that California never told them that the ash was contaminated with dioxin.

The next target was the infamous dioxin incinerator in Coffeeville, Kansas. The citizens of Rosamond had decided that this waste would not be burned and allowed to pollute another community. They commenced the second phase of their campaign to stop the burning of the ash.

They published a form letter and became evangelists, getting hundreds of people to send in a protest letter during the public comment period. The message of the community was: Don't poison another community with dioxin by burning the ash.

When the state persisted in its plans to ship the ash, the community members began to plan for direct action. They prepared to block the states threatened transport of the ash at the site. They planned for umbrellas, ice chests, lots of drinks, sun screen, and for enough time to outlast the state: instead of bringing chairs, they planned to bring beds.

At a meeting with state officials, DCAP’s leader Stormy Williams said, "You might be wondering why some of our other members are not here today." The people from the state expressed their interest and Stormy told them that they were home gearing up their trucks and station wagons to go to all the garage sales over the weekend. When the state representative asked why, Stormy said, "We want to be comfortable during the upcoming blockade, so we are buying beds."

The ash was never shipped, and to this day it remains in its cargo container outside the polluted town of Rosamond, testament to the undaunted will of a community group. Technologies are currently available to destroy the waste without releasing dioxin into the environment.

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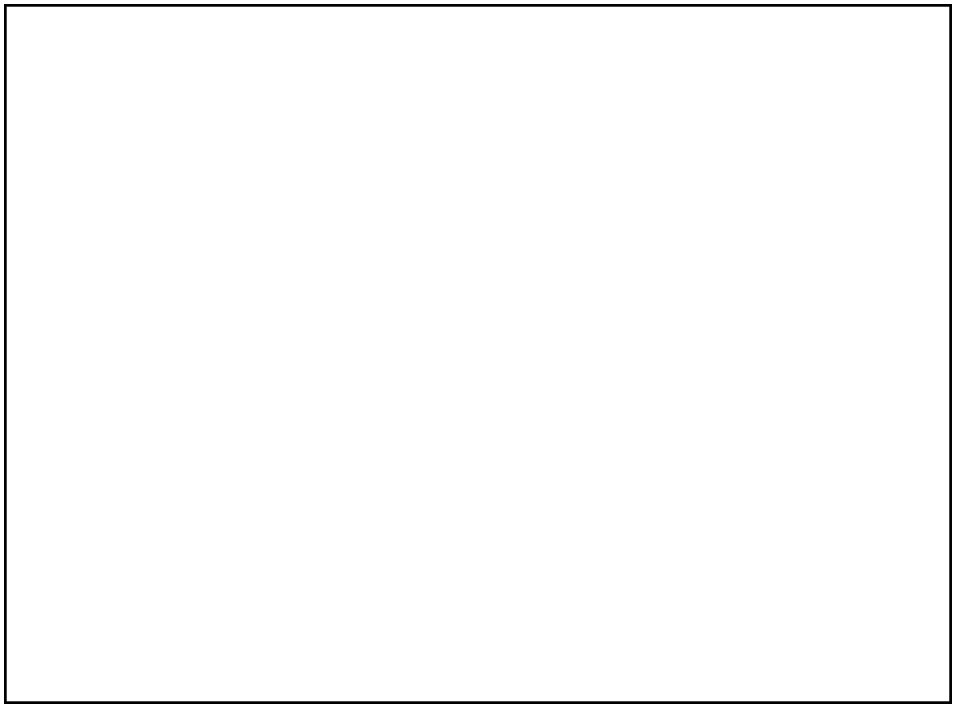
South Bronx, NY

What It Took to Win

On July 7, 1997 the Browning-Ferris Industries/Bronx Lebanon Hospital Center Regional Medical Waste Incinerator “voluntarily” closed its doors, after threatened court action by the New York Governor and State Attorney General. This incinerator burned 48 tons of medical waste from three states every day.



After hearings, dozens of protests, tens of thousands of signatures on petitions, a highway blockade, street fairs, a boycott campaign, and thousands of prayers since we began this fight in 1991, we won! Why after hundreds of violations did the government suddenly decide that it would no longer tolerate this unsafe and unnecessary facility? In the hope that it might be of some use to other communities, we are writing about what it took for the South Bronx Clean Air Coalition to win.

The South Bronx is a low income neighborhood, whose residents are mostly people of color. The largest ethnic group is Puerto Rican. It is a community with poor health, which has been particularly devastated by AIDS, but which still maintains a rich culture. Part of that culture has been a history of struggle, with many battles through the years over civil rights, healthcare, schools, and housing. But the South Bronx also has a history of inaction and total corruption on the part of our politicians, virtually all of whom backed this incinerator.

Getting the Community Involved

In the battle to close the incinerator, the most important thing we did was to get the word out in the community and bring people together. All of the invaluable help, advice, esearch, and allies that we have gained over the years came to us because people saw a community in motion. No expert in the world can win your struggle for you if the community is not coming together to speak out. We wanted the community to own the victory through their involvement, to make it stronger for the future.

One important way we did this was through the participation of children and adults who were concerned about children's health. We had very strong involvement, particularly of the parochial schools in our area. Parents, principals and teachers were very worried about increased school absenteeism from asthma, and complaints that outdoor recess made children feel ill. We spoke in classes and the kids responded with beautiful poems and posters. The involvement of children kept the issue of why we were fighting close to our hearts.

It really helped us to have the support of community institutions like the Voter Participation Project of the Community Service Society and several churches. These institutions provided us with places to meet, contacts in the community, the trust a community has in clergy, powerful public speakers, and spiritual counsel.

The value of persistence can't be overestimated in our success. Despite the inevitable ups and downs, arguments, discouragements, and burnout we stuck together. By the end of this battle we certainly felt like a pit bull terrier with our teeth dug into the heels of the powers that be. No matter what they did, they could not shake us loose. Wherever they went, we showed up. They wanted this fight to end more than we did, and because we persevered, we won.

We sustained the struggle with the energy, caring, faith and determination of people in our communities and the support of a movement. We built on the past, and hopefully what we built can be a bridge to a better future, for people in the South Bronx and communities in struggle everywhere.

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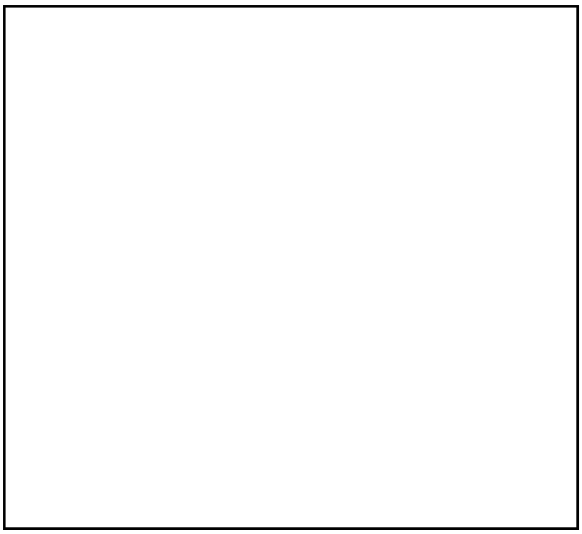
EPA: Every Permit Approved

In Stanly County, North Carolina, one can stand on a rolling hill and see pastures of grazing cattle, tumbling brooks and abundant wildlife. Residents here pride themselves on the vegetables they grow in their neatly kept gardens. Yards are well groomed and reflect the pride of the community. But just beyond the Aquadale Elementary School, the smokestacks come into focus. Hazardous waste is burned there, in kilns originally constructed to burn coal. Contaminated blocks produced by these kilns are used to build homes, businesses, bridges and government buildings across the south.



In 1952, Carolina Solite began purchasing land in Stanly County for its aggregate manufacturing plants. Originally, Solite used coal to fire their kilns. Residents considered this facility as asset to the community. But in the early 1980's, Oldover, a subsidiary of Solite, was deeded two acres of land to build a hazardous waste tank farm. Oldover now supplies Solite's kilns with chlorinated solvents and other hazardous waste to use as primary fuel instead of coal. Solite's choice to burn hazardous waste for profit transformed them from a community asset to a liability. It wasn't until December, 1988, almost 10 years later, that citizens became aware of the change in Solite's operations.

Solite is regulated as a Boiler or Industrial Furnace (BIF). This category allows kilns burning hazardous waste to claim that they are "recycling," and abide by regulations that are less strict than a hazardous waste incinerator. The ash from Solite's hazardous waste incinerator has been tested and found to contain dioxin, furans and heavy metals. Tests performed for the state in January, 1997 concluded that the dust from the bag house had high concentrations of dioxin. But this dust is protected from regulation because "materials are not solid waste when they can be shown to be recycled by being used or reused as

ingredients in an industrial process to make a product." Solite takes advantage of this loophole by sharing their dioxin, furans and heavy metals with consumers with their lightweight cinder blocks. Solite adds the toxic ash from their bag house to the aggregate, and then refers to it as "blockmix."

The blockmix is transported from the incinerator site to one of Solite's five block plants. In many cases, the blockmix is dumped on the ground and exposed to the environment. The state Division of Environment and Natural Resources does not require Solite to test, monitor, or report fugitive emissions from these piles of dangerously toxic substances. Neither workers nor consumers are made aware of the ingredients in this product.

In July, 1997, the North Carolina Division of Air Quality terminated Solite's permit after finding that for years, Solite had submitted false information which the state deemed critical to public health. And as recently as June, 1998 Solite could not demonstrate that they complied with toxic emission standards. Yet the company has a new permit, which allows over six million pounds of annual air pollution, including nearly one ton of mercury and unknown amounts of dioxin.

Because of lack of enforcement and weak or non-existent regulations, it has been made profitable to pollute at Solite. To citizens concerned about Solite, the years have proven that EPA does not stand for Environmental Protection Agency, but for Every Permit Approved!

The people who live near Carolina Solite are committed to stopping the burning of hazardous waste. In 1989, Anson County CACTUS and the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League began a campaign to correct this threat to our health, livelihoods and our environment. Door to door outreach, distribution of newsletters, along with countless hours of research have replaced family time. Groups such as Stanley Citizens Opposed to Toxic Chemical Hazards (SCOTCH) and North Carolina Waste Awareness and Reduction Network (NCWARN) have filed suits to protect citizens. Lawsuits, threats of repercussion, and attempts to discredit concerned citizens have become the norm. But we remain focused and diligent. We believe in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "We shall have to repent in this generation, not so much for the evil deeds of the wicked people, but for the appalling silence of the good people."

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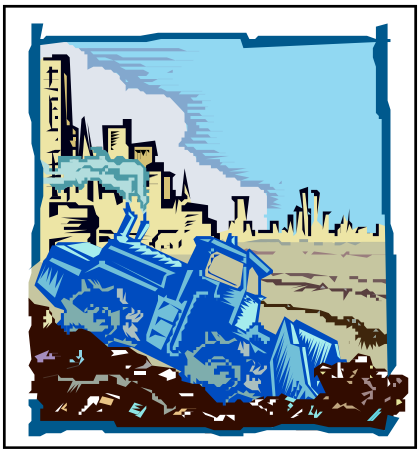
Tallahassee, FL

40 Years of Environmental Injustice

The Wingate Road Municipal Incinerator Dump covers 61 acres in Fort Lauderdale. The site includes an incinerator, offices, and a 40-acre disposal area. It is owned and operated by the City of Fort Lauderdale. The incinerator and disposal areas were used from 1955 to 1978. Residential wastes, commercial wastes, and incinerator residue were disposed of at the dump. The facility received 480 tons of waste a day and operated seven days a week.



Cooling water was pumped into the incinerator from on-site wells and then was discharged into an unlined lagoon. Ash residues mixed with sludge material from the lagoon were spread onto the ground in the disposal area. And according to a resident of the area, hazardous waste may have been dumped on the site. Approximately 44,000 people, primarily African-American, reside within a mile of the site, and an estimated 353,000 people draw drinking water from municipal wellfields within three miles of the site.

The soil, subsurface soil, and groundwater are contaminated with various compounds including dioxins, DDT and other pesticides, lead and other heavy metals, toxaphene, polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), mercury, benzo(a)pyrene, and acetone from former waste disposal practices at the site. Direct contact with or accidental ingestion of the contaminated soil pose a potential health threat. Health studies show a higher than average incidence of eye, breast and prostate cancers among community residents.

The proposed remedial action - capping - allows the contaminants to remain in place. This action was selected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency because it is less expensive than cleanup. This remedial action may also have been approved for the Wingate site because EPA believes that the adjacent African-American/low-income/low education neighborhoods lack the knowledge and skills to effectively oppose the remedial action decision.

Further, EPA has done a poor job of informing the residents of the nature and efficacy of the proposed remedial action. It is not enough to simply conduct public meetings and present technical data. Most residents have had no prior experience with these type of proceedings and are intimidated by the forum and the technical nature of the message. Although EPA provides technical assistance grants to allow communities to employ their own expert to review and translate the technical information, the technical assistance grant (TAG) in this case was not awarded until after the close of the public comment period, thereby precluding any effective use of the technical advisor. In addition, the technical assistance grantee has been slow to produce results.

On May 2, 1997, Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation filed a petition with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, asking the Region IV Administrator to withdraw the TAG from the current grantee. Also, in the petition LEAF requested that the record of decision be reopened to allow adequate public participation by the citizens. Further, LEAF prepared a new TAG application for the community group and filed this application with the petition for withdrawal. On September 24, 1997, EPA denied LEAF's petition and returned our application. LEAF wrote EPA asking for reconsideration of its decision in light of some erroneous factual conclusions relied upon by EPA. EPA refused to reconsider its decision. LEAF filed suit against EPA on January 13, 1998 to obtain judicial review of the EPA decision. In addition, LEAF and residents are pursuing other actions, such as investigating innovative technologies for site cleanup and providing medical care to community residents. The Wingate Road Municipal Incinerator Dump has impacted this community’s health for long enough.

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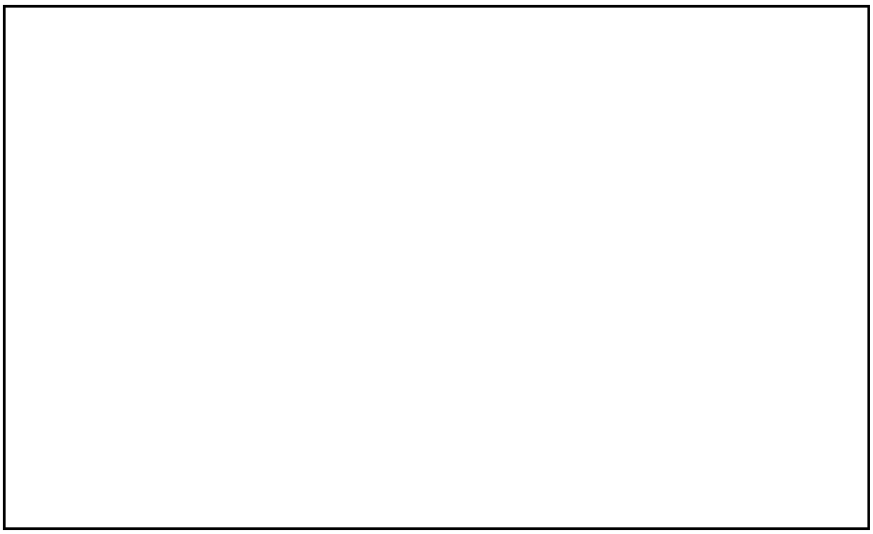
Times Beach, MO

The Christmas Message

Times Beach, Missouri was a small suburban community situated on the Meramec River, 17 miles west of St. Louis. Times Beach had been a flood plain used for farming, and by the early 1970's, “the beach,” as the natives called it, had a population of 1,240 people and two growing mobile home parks. It also had over 16 miles of very dusty roads.

To control the dust, the city contracted with waste oil hauler Russell Bliss to spray the roads during the summers of 1972 and 1973. This was thought to be a bargain at only six cents per gallon of oil.



Ten years later, on November 10, 1982, a reporter for a local newspaper informed our city clerk that Times Beach was possibly among the sites sprayed with waste oil containing dioxin. This news was followed by a call from the USEPA confirming the reporter’s information. We were told it would be as long as nine months before any soil testing could be done.

Chaos broke loose. The residents immediately recalled that the roads had turned purple after being sprayed. The spraying had resulted in an awful odor, and the death of birds and newborn animals.

No one in our immediate area was familiar with dioxin or the possible effects of this chemical. When information on dioxin did come in, none of it was comforting. The EPA finally announced testing should be done immediately because of the number of people exposed. The residents had taken up a collection and contracted with a local

laboratory to do private testing, since we did not want to wait months for the EPA to do its testing. It seemed to us that the EPA accelerated their testing program only after they learned we were conducting our own tests.

On December 5th, a day after the first round of sampling was completed, the community suffered the worst flood in its history. Many barely escaped with their lives.

On December 11th, residents still burdened with the worries about their flood-damaged homes leaned that another of their fears had been confirmed. The results of the private testing had been made public. Dioxin was definitely present, but the levels and extent of the contamination were not yet available.

Twelve days later, residents received what we now call our Christmas message. "If you are in town it is advisable for you to leave and if you are out of town, do not go back." Those brave souls who continued with cleanup from the flood found some of their family members breaking out in rashes; others became ill. Some of us were sure the rashes were caused by dioxin, but others felt they came from a combination of mud and cleaning fluid.

It was August, 1983 before the first offers were made to begin the buy-out of residents. The offers were low, and threats of condemnation within 30 days if offers were not accepted caused resentment on our part. Homeowners spray-painted their offers on their homes as TV cameras focused on them. Offers eventually improved. In 1991, after almost 10 years of debate, the state of Missouri, the EPA, and Syntex, the company determined to be responsible for the contaminated oil agreed on incineration as the cleanup method for Times Beach and 26 other sites in eastern Missouri.

The Times Beach incinerator was supposed to be in operation for about seven months. The project actually lasted almost 16 months and had many accidental releases which put unknown amounts of toxins into the environment.

The incinerator is now gone and the area is now called Route 66 Park, but the story is hardly over. In August 1997, less than six weeks after the Times Beach incinerator stopped operations, the discovery of dioxin on a road in another eastern Missouri town was announced. Activists who have been watching government bungling and cover-ups for years know that their work to clean up dioxin in Missouri isn't over yet.

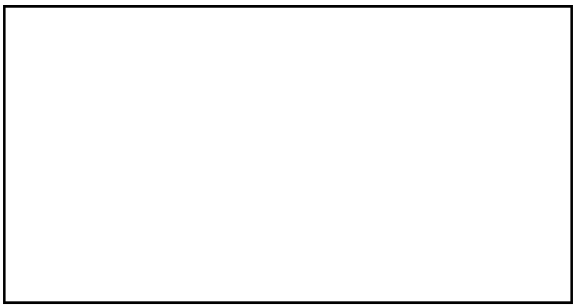
- Marilyn Leistner, The Orange Resource Book, 1995

Fred Striley
Dioxin Incineration Response Group
231 Walden Ct.
Eureka, Mo 63125

Warren County, NC

An Open Letter To The Citizens of Warren County

In the summer of 1978, PCB-contaminated oil was illegally dumped on the shoulder of 210 miles of roads, through 14 North Carolina counties. Ward Transformer Company was later charged and convicted of illegal dumping. The state was left with the dilemma of removing the chemicals and finding a new storage place for the contaminated soil. That winter, the state proposed to site the contaminated soil landfill in Warren County.



Warren County took the state to court on two different occasions in order to protest the siting in their predominantly poor, black county, which was not ecologically suitable for a landfill. Finding no clear evidence, the federal courts rejected the suits.

In 1982, the state began trucking the contaminated soil to the site in Warren County. Residents and civil rights leaders attempted to stop the trucks with six weeks of peaceful civil disobedience, which resulted in 523 arrests. Warren County became a national news story because of the toxic burden it faced.

In response to the strong vocal protests in Warren County and nationwide, Governor Jim Hunt wrote an open letter to the community stating "that Warren County was chosen for the site solely on the basis of technical reasons" and promised to detoxify the site "when and if the appropriate and feasible technology is developed." The following year, the General Assembly also committed the state to detoxify the landfill "as soon as the technology for doing so is available."

Ten years later, state officials announced that up to 1.5 million gallons of water were trapped in the landfill. They agreed to meet with citizens of Warren County to decide what would be the best means to detoxify the site. As a result, the Joint Warren County/State PCB Working Group was formed with members representing local citizens, the state, and two statewide environmental organizations.

For the past four years, the Working Group has studied the landfill and various detoxification methods to determine the safest and most effective way for the state to deliver on it's promises. Independent science advisors have concluded that it is not only technically feasible to detoxify the site, but is also necessary due to the potential for contamination to leak out of the landfill. It is clear that now is the time for the Governor and the General Assembly to fulfill their promises and fund detoxification.

We hope you will support our conclusion and work with us to lift this toxic burden now. Help us keep North Carolina clean and green and bring justice to Warren County.

Sincerely,
The Joint Warren County/State PCB Working Group
Dollie Burwell, co-chair
Henry Lancaster, co-chair

Postscript from North Carolina Waste Awareness and Reduction Network

Since this letter was published in April, 1998 the same Governor who forced the PCB dump on this community has made a move to fulfill his promise. Governor Jim Hunt has asked the North Carolina Legislature for the first $15 million of the estimated $24 million needed for the clean up.

But the legislature quietly moved to bring in a quick, secret bid to save the state a little money. Their plan is to dig up and ship PCB and dioxin-contaminated soil to Utah for burning or burial - a scheme which would expose communities on both ends of the journey and many in between.

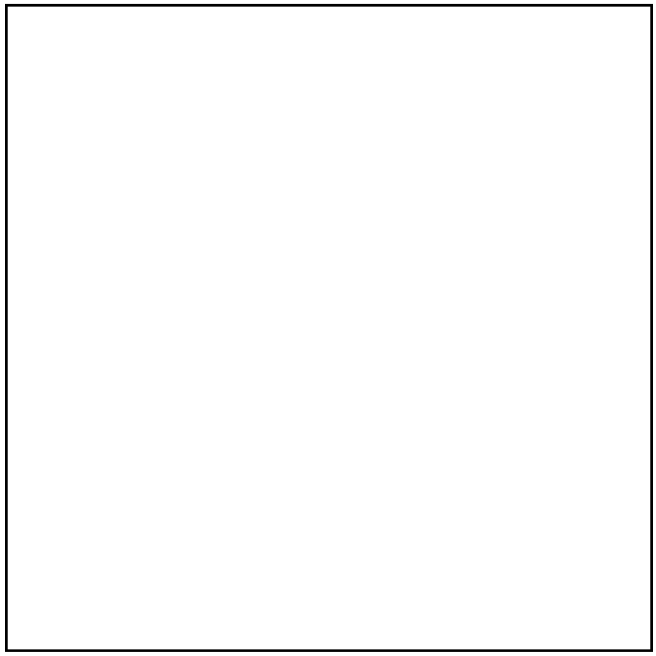
North Carolina politicians need to know that many eyes are looking for justice in Warren County.

Jim Warren
North Carolina Waste Awareness & Reduction Network
PO Box 61051
Durham, NC 27715

Winona, TX

MOSES

My name is Phyllis Glazer and I am President of Mothers Organized to Stop Environmental Sins (M.O.S.E.S.), a grassroots, non-profit organization founded by persons living in and adjacent to Winona, Texas. Born out of a tragic circumstance, M.O.S.E.S. formed when many in the Winona community believed that fugitive emissions and gases from a commercial hazardous waste injection well were harming area residents. Hundreds of people that worked and lived in the area were concerned that their health and their family's health was being compromised by American Ecology's Gibraltar dump site.



Believing the lives of children are at stake, M.O.S.E.S has spent years organizing pickets, attending public hearings, calling on legislators and regulators, talking to the press, and taking dozens of residents to Washington, DC by bus. We were even invited to the White House. Our goal has been to make the government regulators do their job -- protect the children of Winona. Told from the start that we never had a chance, M.O.S.E.S. and its members can now say that speaking out and exercising our first amendment rights to assemble and petition our government are worthwhile.

One year ago, after 16 years of operation, American Ecology announced that it was closing its doors and discontinuing operations! We wish that the story ended here, but the Winona tragedy simply illustrates the toxic

poisoning that continues to happen to thousands, if not millions of children who live in affected communities across our nation. Facilities handling and releasing toxic chemicals like dioxin typically target poor and minority communities. In addition, political decision makers continue to rank environmental concerns lower and lower on their list of priorities.

“Progress” does not necessitate poisoning America's children. Practical, economic solutions for reducing and eliminating many toxins from our industrial processes already exist. As long as the horrific damage to children from toxic exposure remains unknown, this tragedy will continue. The public and our elected officials urgently need to know the truth. For these reasons, M.O.S.E.S. has made ambitious plans to put the national spotlight on our nation's children. We will continue our efforts to educate the public and continue to hold key decision makers accountable to the tragic and unnecessary harm befalling our nation's children.

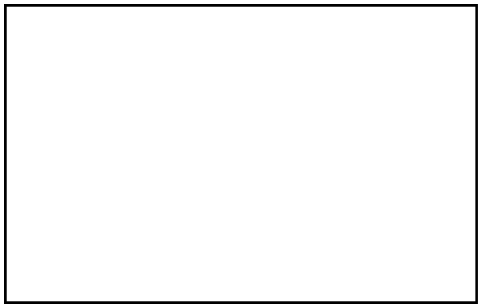
Phyllis Glazer
MOSES
13231 Wittmore Circle
Dallas, TX 755240

Photo Credit - *Copyright,* Tammy Cromer-Campbell

California

Zero Dioxin Alliance

The fight to end the production, emission and exposure to dioxin has become one of the most important environmental battles in California. Polluters and government agencies are on the defensive as they try to tell the public,"Don't worry, only acceptable levels of dioxin are being emitted." Through education and action, the environmental justice movement has responded by declaring that the only acceptable level of dioxin is zero. Greenaction is involved in the grassroots struggles against polluters spewing dioxin into our environment, and in efforts to get governmental and regulatory agencies to support a zero dioxin policy. Significant progress in the zero dioxin campaign has been made, but clearly there is a long way to go and much work to be done. By strategically linking environmental and health issues with environmental justice and racism struggles, we have been successful in building a strong and diverse movement that is starting to impact corporate and government policies.



California Zero Dioxin Alliance

The call for "zero dioxin" has been embraced by a diverse and rapidly growing grassroots movement, bringing together close to 50 groups, including community, environment, health impacted, religious and labor organizations. In 1997 a People's Hearing on Dioxin, Health and Environmental Justice was held, attracting more than 200 people. Representatives from local, state, and federal regulatory agencies were on hand to hear informed and passionate testimony. People living near chemical plants and refineries that emit dioxin, low-income people who fish in the bay, nurses, physicians, and cancer survivors all joined together to tell how dioxin impacts their lives. The alliance is working hard to hold these government agencies accountable to protect public health and the environment from dioxin exposure.

Victory Closes Chevron Chemical Company Incinerator

A major victory in the fight for zero dioxin was won in 1997 in Richmond, California, a low-income community of color. The West County Toxics Coalition was joined by allies from environmental and women's cancer groups in the successful campaign to shut down the Chevron Chemical Company incinerator. The incinerator was a major source of dioxin and other deadly chemicals. While the closure of the incinerator was a major victory, the Chevron refinery continues to be a dioxin source. The Zero Dioxin Alliance will continue to pressure Chevron to end all dioxin emissions and exposure.

Stopping Incineration of PVC Medical Waste

The low-income community of color living near the incinerators operated by Integrated Environmental Systems (IES) in East Oakland has become a major battleground in the campaign for zero dioxin and environmental justice. IES operates the only commercial medical waste incinerator in California and they emit dioxin and other toxic chemicals and metals which endanger the health of the community. The company claims their incinerators are "state of the art" and that only "acceptable levels" of dioxin are emitted. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (the government agency responsible for air quality in the region) has continued to ignore the latest scientific evidence documenting the dangers of exposure to even small amounts of dioxin.

People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO), Greenaction and other allies are escalating the Campaign for Zero Dioxin to push for an end to burning of the poison plastic PVC in IES' incinerator. The work of many organizations to educate government agencies and health care institutions on the need to phase out the use of PVC is starting to get a positive response.

Holding the EPA Accountable on Dioxin

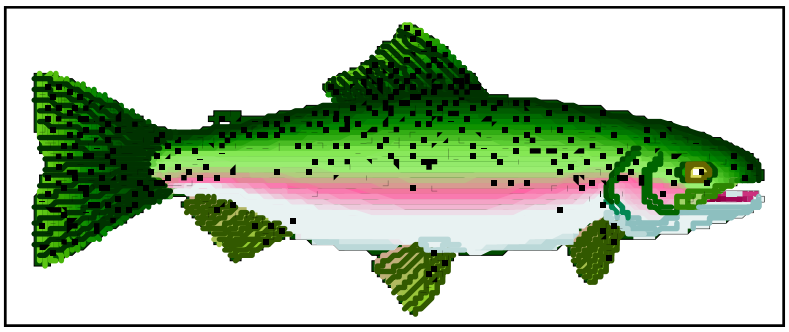
The movement continues to pressure the EPA and other regulatory agencies on the need for zero dioxin policies and to hold them accountable as they fail to act to protect our health and environment. At a national EPA meeting in Oakland in June, Greenaction helped bring together grassroots community groups from all over the country to call for decisive government action on dioxin and other issues. Louisiana grassroots groups fighting the expansion of the PVC industry in their community joined with East Oakland residents fighting the incineration of PVC, a wonderful example of uniting for zero dioxin, health and environmental justice.

Bradley Angel
Greenaction
915 Cole St
San Francisco, CA 94117

Maine's Battle to Eliminate Paper Mill Dioxin

Since dioxin from paper mills was first discovered in Maine waters more than ten years ago, citizen groups in Maine have advocated for strict standards and worked to publicize the consumption warnings for fish and lobsters caught in Maine waters. These efforts culminated in the formation of the Coalition for a Dioxin-free Maine in early 1996.

Maine's Dioxin Coalition includes a broad range of groups including the American Association of Retired Persons, League of Women Voters, Maine Green Party, Maine People's Alliance, Maine Public Health Association, the Natural Resources Council of Maine, and many other health, religious, environmental, fishing and consumer groups, In addition the Coalition has worked closely with the Penobscot Indian Nation on dioxin issues affecting the nation.



In April, 1996, due in large part to the pressure put on Maine's leadership by these citizen groups, Governor Angus King announced that seven bleach-kraft paper mills had agreed to the goal of "eliminating the discharge of pollutants**,** including dioxin, to Maine waters."

Legislation proposed by the Coalition, which would have phased out the use of chlorine-based paper bleaching by the year 2002, sparked the Governor to introduce a competing, weaker measure. Unfortunately, the Governor's proposal, which did get passed into law, will not eliminate dioxin discharges, because even at non-detectable levels there can be billions of dioxin molecules in each gallon of paper mill wastewater. The Governor's bill also will not move the mills towards "closed loop"/low-flow processes, which would vastly reduce the 40 million gallons of polluted

bleaching wastewater discharged into rivers each day by Maine's seven bleach kraft mills. In addition, loopholes in the fish testing requirement could limit its effectiveness.

During the spring of 1997, the two dioxin proposals generated a highly visible statewide debate in major newspapers, in the state Legislature, and among people throughout Maine. To build the case for dioxin elimination and chlorine-free technologies, coalition members wrote dozens of letters to the editor, held meetings with other organizations, gave slide show presentations, produced and distributed more than 50,000 brochures and reports, and ran a hard-hitting guerrilla radio campaign. These all laid out the health, economic, technical and environmental arguments for totally chlorine-free (TCF) conversion.

Coalition members and others participated in news conferences and focused public attention on the quality and marketability of TCF paper, the inability of Native Americans and other anglers to catch and eat uncontaminated fish, public opinion polling that indicated citizen support for dioxin elimination, and a stealth campaign by the chlorine dioxide chemical industry to mislead Maine citizens and legislators

In April, 1997, more than seventy Mainers from all walks of life declared their support for the coalition bill during eight hours of hearings held in the largest hearing room in Augusta. Physicians, mothers, environmental activists, business owners, teachers, anglers, and members of the Penobscot Indian Nation testified eloquently in favor of banning dioxin and converting the pulp and paper industry to TCF processes.

Maine's legislature missed an important opportunity to really make a difference to the health of Maine’s people and wildlife and the long term health of our rivers by refusing to adopt the TCF bill. However, even though the Dioxin Coalition bill was defeated, our campaign still made major advances in public awareness of the dioxin issue and have formed an exciting coalition which will continue to work to eliminate dioxin exposure in Maine.

The Coalition still believes strongly in TCF as the solution to the paper mill dioxin problem and we will continue to advocate for TCF whenever we can. We will also closely monitor the implementation of the Governor's law to ensure that the mills comply with its standards.

Anne Hagstrom
Natural Resource Council of Maine
271 State Street
Augusta, Maine 04330

North Carolina

The Clean Air For Children's Health Campaign

In recent months toxic air pollution ignited protests in North Carolina communities. Citizens in mountain counties organized to stop an asphalt plant from opening and shut down another plant which was making their children sick. Neighbors of a foam plant in the foothills found evidence of toluene diisocyanate in their blood. On the coast, hog waste lagoons released volatile organic compounds into the air and caused rural neighbors to seek relief. What began as scattered and diverse community actions is taking a giant step forward. The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League's Clean Air For Children's Health Campaign is a growing statewide movement to stop toxic air pollution.

> "Toxic air pollution emitted from industrial smokestacks happens with the consent of regulatory agencies, but without the consent of the people who live downwind."

Clean air campaigners included Pineola Concerned Citizens, Citizens Against Pollution, Flat Creek Concerned Citizens, Neighbors for Environmental Safety Today, Anson County CACTUS, Conservation Council of NC, and many others. The groups united to oppose DuPont, Duke Energy, RJ Reynolds, Weyerhaeuser, Carolina Asphalt Pavement Association, International Paper, and other major air polluting industries.

What Was At Stake?

Existing laws allow too much pollution to escape from industrial sources, but industries in North Carolina wanted to replace state air toxics rules with *maximum achievable control technology*, also known as MACT. The federal Clean Air Act created MACT to set a technological standard for pollution control, based on the best performing 12% of existing industrial facilities. However, in North Carolina MACT is a euphemism for deregulation of air pollution. The new rules would have exempted thousands

sources including asphalt plant heaters, industrial boilers, and combustion turbines. Toxic air pollutants emitted from hog waste lagoons and gas stations would have remained unregulated.

Nine days before Thanksgiving 1997, citizens jammed a public hearing room in Raleigh. Hundreds of people traveled great distances on a weeknight to tell state officials that deregulation is unacceptable and that their children's health is more important than corporate profits. Bobby Briley of CACTUS, speaking against deregulation, said, "We don't need to go backwards." Troy Clark, resident of Pineola and an Avery County Commissioner, said, "Industry should have the community at heart, not the pocketbook." The hearing officers were stunned by the silent testimony of one elderly woman who dropped a handful of fake dollar bills on their table illustrating the interests of the corporations pushing deregulation.

The Clean Air Campaign continued to turn up the heat after the November hearing with calls to the Governor's toll free number and letters to elected representatives and state regulators. People amassed a twelve hundred page hearing record in support of the existing health rules and in opposition to loopholes and exemptions. Citizens pressed county governments for local clean air ordinances and resolutions opposing deregulation.

On March 11th and 12th, 1998 the NC Environmental Management Commission made its decisions. They kept the toxics program intact. They rejected an exemption which would have removed over 300 of the largest sources of air pollution from the program.

Next Steps

Toxic air pollution emitted from industrial smokestacks happens with the consent of regulatory agencies, but without the consent of the people who live downwind. The ultimate goal is zero emissions. The Clean Air for Children's Health campaign succeeded in changing the frame of the debate from "eliminate excess regulation - protect industry" to "stop deregulation - protect our health."

Having lost an all-out assault on the air toxics rules, industry has new schemes to dismantle them piece by piece: cases of economic hardship, exemptions for uninhabitable areas, and claims of technical infeasibility. But the Clean Air Campaign continues.

Lou Zeller
Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League
P.O. Box 88
Glendale Springs, NC 28629

Food

You Are What You Eat

Because dioxin is a by-product of industrial processes, rather than an actual product used in agriculture, most people do not associate it with food. However, by eating meat, fish and dairy products and drinking milk, we are also ingesting dioxin.

Dioxin is an unintended by-product of industrial processes that involve chlorine, or processes that burn or use chlorine with other organic matter. Medical, garbage and hazardous waste incinerators, cement kilns, chlorine bleaching paper mills, and plastic manufacturing, such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC) are major sources of dioxin.

Once emitted into the air, dioxin particles can travel more than 1000 miles from their source, landing on hay fields or grazing pastures. There, it may be eaten by beef or dairy cattle or other grazing animals and get stored in the animal's body. When released in a plant's wastewater, this dioxin builds up in aquatic organisms, which, in turn, leads to high dioxin levels in fish and other wildlife. Since dioxin is fat-soluble, it is not easily broken down and it accumulates in the body. When we eat a hamburger, fish or piece of cheese, we are also ingesting some of the dioxin from the animal. Ninety percent of our dioxin exposure comes from the food we eat.

While the farmers and fishers are not the ones contaminating our food, it is the farmers and fishers who are, unfortunately, suffering. There have been media reports advising people to decrease or eliminate meat, fish and dairy products in their diet as a way to protect themselves. I agree that individuals have a right to take on

whatever dietary measures they feel are necessary in order to protect their health, but I also urge consumers to stand up for their right to a food supply of their own choosing that is free from contamination. Not everyone has the economic luxury to give up meat, fish or dairy products. Nor, in my opinion, should anyone be forced to give up these foods which may play an important role in their culture or religion, simply because someone else has poisoned them.

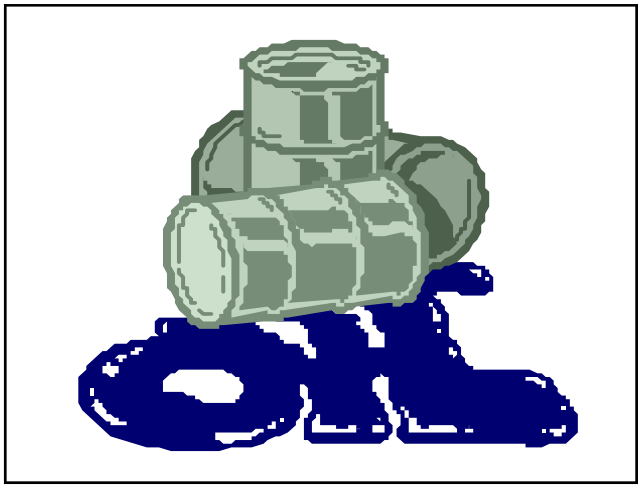
To me, Joy Allison is the quintessential example of why we need to eliminate dioxin from our food and from our environment. Joy had the misfortune to be the real-life example of what the EPA calls the "maximally exposed individual" (MEI), a supposedly hypothetical category used in risk assessment. Joy and her family lived on a fifth generation family farm in Chester, West Virginia. Her farm was just across the Ohio River from Waste Technologies Incorporated (WTI), the largest hazardous waste incinerator in the world, located in East Liverpool, Ohio. Dr. William Farland, Director of the Office of Environmental Assessment for the USEPA (who is also supposed to be finishing the dioxin reassessment), testified at a public hearing that the "maximally exposed individual" for WTI would be a farmer living near the incinerator who ate his own beef and vegetables. Joy and her family raised and ate their own beef, fruit and vegetables and she fought tirelessly to protect that livelihood.

I remember asking Joy to speak at the "dioxin in food" panel I was organizing for the Third Citizens Conference on Dioxin, in March 1996. She had to decline, because she was already too sick with breast cancer. Joy died on June 3, 1998. I can't prove that dioxin killed her, but I know it didn't do her any good. I don't want any more farmers or home gardeners to have to be sacrificed as MEIs before we get dioxin out of our food supply.

Jackie Hunt-Christensen
Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy
2105 1st Avenue, South
Minneaplois, MN 55404

Oil Refineries

Make Refineries Cleaner, Greener from the Grassroots Up!



The National Oil Refinery Action Network (NORAN) is a grassroots coalition of activists, workers, responsible shareholders, and organizations sharing information and resources to reform the petrochemical industry on a national level. We aim to do this by increasing the effectiveness of local and regional network members and winning national pollution prevention commitments. NORAN is a project of Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) of California, formed out of decades of battling irresponsible oil companies that have been polluting the region for over 100 years. CBE was armed with the technical and organizing know-how to win major environmental victories, but the group soon learned that the best technical arguments can be easily defeated by clever public relations schemes and divide and conquer techniques that pit workers against neighbors.

Grassrooots action against big oil is now frequent in communities in Lousiana, Texas, Illinios, Indiana, Montana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other states. Amoco neighbors in Whiting, Indiana, are networking with their counterparts in Texas. Shell neighbors demanding relocation from the "death zone" in Norco, Louisiana, are conversing with refinery neighbors in Corpus Christi and Beaumont, Texas who are fighting the same struggle. Tulsa, Oklahoma activists battling Sun Oil are telling their Philadelphia counterparts about the companies' abuses, while neighbors of British Petroleum plants in Lima and Toledo, Ohio are linking up for the first time.

Here is an brief look at the situation in two oil industry "sacrifice zones," in the voice of the people on the front lines:

Groups Fight Oil Industry With Civil Rights Suit
By Rev. Roy Malveaux

In the part of Corpus Christi, Texas known as “refinery row,” 20,000 people live in the pollution path of 13 refineries. Widespread contamination of these neighborhoods resulted from leaking above ground tanks and almost daily chemical releases. Community groups, led by People Against Contaminated Environments (PACE) have been fighting back with a new strategy of lawsuits based on civil rights violations. The community is demanding to be bought out at a fair market price and a relocation expense of $10,000 per person. The Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in Houston is handling the lawsuit for the community led by Professor Grover Hankins, a former US Justice Department official. Refineries having been buying out some people for as a little as $17,000, which could leave them homeless in the future.

Environmental Racism Is Alive in Memphis
By Larry Smith

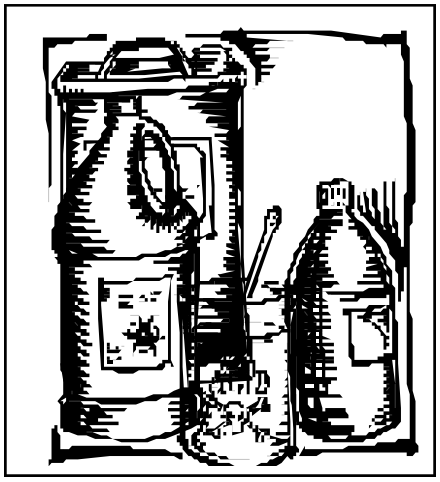
In Memphis, Martin Luther King Park sits next to a huge oil refinery known as MAPCO, across the street from a lead smelter, and looks over an industrial harbor full of leaky barges dripping oil. The park was established originally because during the days of segregation, blacks were barred from most public parks. So Memphis finally remedied the situation with Martin Luther King Park. However, if you are black, you not only live next to nasty places like the refineries, but you have to recreate next to them, too.

The legacy of this park lives on today. Children play on swing sets under the shadow of toxic clouds leaving the refinery and blowing over the park. MAPCO has also contaminated the surrounding ground water with thousands of gallons of gasoline. It has carried on a half-hearted cleanup effort for years. MAPCO management has refused, for obvious reasons, requests to test for contamination outside their fence. These facts, coupled with the daily stench flowing from the refinery through the park and nearby houses, make racism hard to ignore.

Denny Larson
The National Oil Refinery Action Network
A project of
Communities for a Better Environment
500 Howard Street
#506, San Francisco, CA 94105.

Stop the Secrecy

By the mid-1970s, the herbicide 2,4,5-T was being used extensively over hundreds of thousands of acres throughout forests in the Pacific Northwest. The herbicide 2,4,5-T was contaminated with the most toxic form of dioxin, 2,3,7,8-TCDD. Communities in these forests began to notice strange things: deformed chickens were born, deer died with swollen livers, hairless coyotes appeared, and women miscarried. People started talking and organizing groups to stop the spraying in the forested watersheds of Washington, Oregon, Northern California and Idaho.



In November 1977, 17 of these groups came together near Portland, Oregon and formed the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP.) Their vision: to establish an effective, dynamic grassroots organization that would change pesticide policy forever. This vision, and our continuous connection with the people who are impacted by pesticides every day, has guided NCAP.

Over the last 20 years, NCAP has successfully guided the development of comprehensive models of pest management for state and local agencies. NCAP models de-emphasize the use of pesticides and emphasize an ecosystems approach to pest management. NCAP has always believed that pesticide use would not be curtailed without the simultaneous introduction of viable alternatives. NCAP's policy and public education programs work to build public involvement into pesticide use decision-making, emphasize prevention of pest problems, not just a reaction to symptoms, and champion the public's right to know about the ingredients, effects, and risks of pesticides.

Pesticide use in our community is far too casual and the health and environmental effects of pesticides are far too easily dismissed. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, an estimated 2.2 billion pounds of pesticides were used in the U.S. in 1995. Not surprisingly, these chemicals end up poisoning more than they are supposed to, leaving toxic chemicals in our water, air, food supply, and bodies, often with devastating consequences. Dioxin is one of these toxic chemicals.

Various chlorinated pesticides and herbicides (such as 2,4,5-T, hexachlorophene, 2,4-D, and others) can be contaminated with dioxin during their production. Dioxin is released to the environment during the use of these products. The use of hexachlorophene and 2,4,5-T has been discontinued because of their harmful effects, however 2,4-D is still widely used. On U.S. crop production alone, in 1995, there was an estimated 42 million pounds of 2,4-D applied.

The Environmental Protection Agency identified about 150 pesticide compounds which could become or are suspected of being contaminated with dioxins and furans. However, the EPA is unwilling to release specific information about dioxin contamination levels in these pesticides. Thus, they are continuing to shield the pesticide industry, which keeps information about hazardous dioxins from the public. It is time to put a stop to this secrecy!

Exposure to dioxin is a critical issue. Dioxin-like compounds are some of the most toxic and potent cancer-causing agents ever evaluated. Until proper restrictions are made on dioxin compounds and pesticide products containing dioxin, communities around the United States and the world will continue to be negatively impacted.

While NCAP can claim major victories over the past twenty years, our work with individuals and communities in understanding and reversing the pervasive problems of pesticide use must continue. In strong alliance with concerned individuals and groups, NCAP will provide hard-hitting information on pesticide problems, opportunities for using alternatives, and effective strategies for change. Our resolve will not falter until our work is done.

Pollyanna Lind
Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides
P.O. Box 1393
Eugene, OR 97440

Sludge Magic

The 1992 federal ban on the ocean disposal of sewage sludge has created a major waste disposal problem, by failing to mandate safe alternatives for sludge disposal. Sewage sludge (the solid remain from wastewater treatment) was toxic enough to cause damage to the ocean ecosystem, leading to the ban on ocean dumping. Since the ban, sludge has been promoted as a so called "fertilizer" or soil amendment for farmland, grazing land, public parks, mine reclamation and home gardens and landscaping. Sludge products are often processed with garbage, pesticide-laden yard wastes, cement kiln dust, and ash, which can contain dioxin. EPA and the Water Environment Federation (WEF), the main lobbying arm for sewage treatment industry, have joined forces in a public relations campaign to promote public acceptance of land application of sludge. The campaign has been orchestrated by Powell Tate, a high powered Washington D.C. based PR firm, and is responsible for introducing a new euphemism for sludge - "biosolids."

It's not sludge - It's "biosolids"

Dioxin is not monitored in sludge or sludge products. Yet the levels of dioxin in sludge can be a hundred times higher than background levels in rural areas. Livestock grazing on plants treated with sludge will eat the pollutants on the plants along with large quantities of soil. Long time dairy farmers across the country have experienced sick and dying cows, reduced milk production, and personal health problems when sludge was added on or near their farms. But there is no mechanism in the sludge regulations to report these problems. Affected farmers have resorted to filing lawsuits when no state or federal agency would investigate their claims. The practice of land applying sludge has transferred liability from municipalities and

industrial dischargers who create the sludge, to the farmer or landowner who uses the sludge. In addition, people who eat the meat or drink the milk from cows that graze on sludge contaminated land run the risk of increasing their own body burden of dioxin.

But it is not only the use of toxic sludge that causes problems. The manufacturing process is also dangerous to our health. Children in the South Bronx are experiencing asthma at epidemic rates. As well as hosting numerous waste facilities, the South Bronx is home to a sludge heat processing plant that handles 70% of New York City's sludge. The community has complained about odors for some time and has made the connection between sludge transport and processing with health problems. An analysis of dust in ventilation ducts at a school within blocks of the plant showed high levels of heavy metals and particulates. And the symptoms experienced by children and teachers, including respiratory problems, asthma, nosebleeds, nausea, and eye irritation, are consistent with contaminants identified from the plant.

The risk assessment for EPA’s sludge policy is based on incomplete science, short-term experience and a shaky set of assumptions. According to EPA whistleblower David Lewis, the science used to support the few sludge regulations that do exist was so bad it was referred to within the agency as "sludge magic".

Now is the time for a new approach. Public participation must be required in any sludge management decision. Full public disclosure of the risks and benefits of this so-called cost effective "beneficial use" policy will enable the public to make informed health and safety decisions. Labeling of the contents of sludge derived products must be required as well as the labeling of food and grains grown on sludged lands. We must avoid a "quick fix" sludge disposal solution. A sludge policy which comes at the expense of our food is not as “cost effective” as land application proponents claim.

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Walking the Walk

Politicians are often heard giving speeches to convince the public of their commitment to protect our children from toxic chemicals, but their actions have proven just the opposite. Polluter profits are their main concern, for children do not vote, and do not provide PAC dollars that influence legislation implementing the cleanup of toxic chemical waste in the air, water and land.

> Everyone has a responsibility to be informed and act on behalf of our nation's children

In 1996, President Clinton announced that " No child should have to live near a toxic waste dump. No child should have to drink water contaminated with chemicals. No child should have to eat foods poisoned with pesticides." Sounds great, but talking is far different from walking, and Kids Against Pollution (KAP) wants our elected officials to start walking the walk on behalf of our nation's children. According to the Clean Air Act, the standard for particulate matter must be set at a level adequate to protect public health within a "margin of safety". This margin is intended to compensate for what Congress recognized as the incomplete state of our knowledge about the adverse effects of air pollution. For example, childhood asthma is reaching astronomical levels in urban and rural areas, as well. Now that we know more about how air pollution effects children, it is time to

protect those most at risk. The latest revisions to the Clean Air Act protect children from ozone and small particulates. This is a step that needs to continue to protect children from air pollution.

Large quantities of endocrine-disrupting chemicals have been released into the environment through industrial processes. Many of these chemicals can disturb development of the endocrine system and of organs that respond to endocrine signals in prenatal and postnatal life. The effects of exposure to these chemicals, such as dioxin, are irreversible. New research shows that dioxin disrupt normal hormone development in fetuses. Pregnant and nursing women exposed to dioxin, may pass it on to their infants through the placenta and breast milk. Dioxin is being linked to developmental delays of the nervous system, loss of learning ability and immune problems.

What is more important than the health and safety of our children? Children are first exposed to dioxin at critical developmental stages of life by unsuspecting mothers. A majority of children are nearing the maximum “body burden” in only their first year of life. We will have to fight for our children now to remove this danger to their well-being so they may grow up healthy and toxic-free.

Kids Against Pollution is committed to educating the public on children's health issues that are caused by environmental pollution. As politicians turn their backs on children, the voters will hold them accountable, but only if they know what is at stake. Everyone has a responsibility to be informed and act on behalf of our nation's children.

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Prevention

We Know Enough to Act

The precautionary principle was tailor-made for a problem as difficult and threatening as dioxin. The principle, as formulated by a group of scientists, activists and lawyers at a 1998 conference, says, "When an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically." The principle is triggered by two things: scientific uncertainty and the potential for harm. Growing evidence on the hazards of dioxin demands precautionary action to prevent exposure to humans and other living things (even though absolute proof of harm has not been established).

The most significant activity around the Precautionary Principle in the United States has occurred in the Great Lakes Region. The Great Lakes have been threatened for years by the discharge of persistent organic compounds, including dioxin, into its waters. In the Sixth Biennial Report on Great Lakes Water Quality, the International Joint Commission (a bi-national body established to protect waters along the Canadian-US border) noted the damage caused by persistent and bioaccumulative substances in the Great Lakes Basin and the critical need to address them. They also recognized that attempts to manage such chemicals based on the notion of assimilative capacity (an ability of humans and the environment to render a certain amount of contamination harmless) in the environment, had failed miserably. As a result, the Commission issued a call to “sunset,” or phase-out, all persistent toxic substances in the Great Lakes Ecosystem, because they cannot be managed safely. As such the IJC restated a version of the precautionary principle:

> "Such a strategy should recognize that all persistent toxic substances are dangerous to the environment, deleterious to the human condition, and can no longer be tolerated in the ecosystem, whether or not unassailable scientific proof of acute or chronic damage is universally accepted."

Applying the precautionary principle to dioxin prevention

The only real preventive approach to reducing and eliminating dioxin exposure is to address those production processes and materials which produce dioxin. The goal should be zero exposure to dioxin, which would likely mean zero emissions of dioxin. For example, better control technologies on incinerators might reduce the amount of dioxin being released into the environment (an acceptable short term goal) but will never eliminate exposure.

A prevention approach to dioxin would first look at reducing or eliminating large sources of dioxin, such as municipal and medical waste incineration. This approach could be considered moderate precaution. However, if this approach causes dioxin-producing materials to be transferred elsewhere, perhaps to landfills where they can catch on fire (and burn without any controls), it cannot be considered either preventive or precautionary.

A stronger version of precaution, a materials approach, would attempt to address the main sources of chlorine, the ultimate source of dioxin. This would lead to a focus on chlorinated pesticides and solvents, pulp and paper production, and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastics. Addressing chlorine is the only way to virtually eliminate dioxin (especially in industrial processes). Otherwise, we will always be chasing sources, debating how much dioxin is safe, and attempting to measure the emissions from each source instead of taking precautionary, preventive action.

It is clear that we must apply precaution to dioxin. We have some remaining uncertainty about the magnitude of the harm and the range of potential impacts, which should continue to be studied. However, we know that harm results from dioxin exposure. We also know enough about the harm and potential future impacts of dioxin exposure to demand that action to prevent dioxin exposure occur immediately. The wait and see approach advocated by those in industry, and some in government, will result in continued exposure to this powerful toxic substance. We do not need to wait for a reassessment or for clear definitive proof of harm before acting. We do not need to wait for our children to fall ill. We do not need for more dioxin to be picked up and carried on the wind currents and deposited in every part of the world. We do not need to wait for more contaminated breast milk.

We know enough to act. We can demand and take precautionary action. Now.

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