

# User's Guide To Experts



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# User's **Guide** To Experts

Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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# Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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## **Mentoring a Movement**

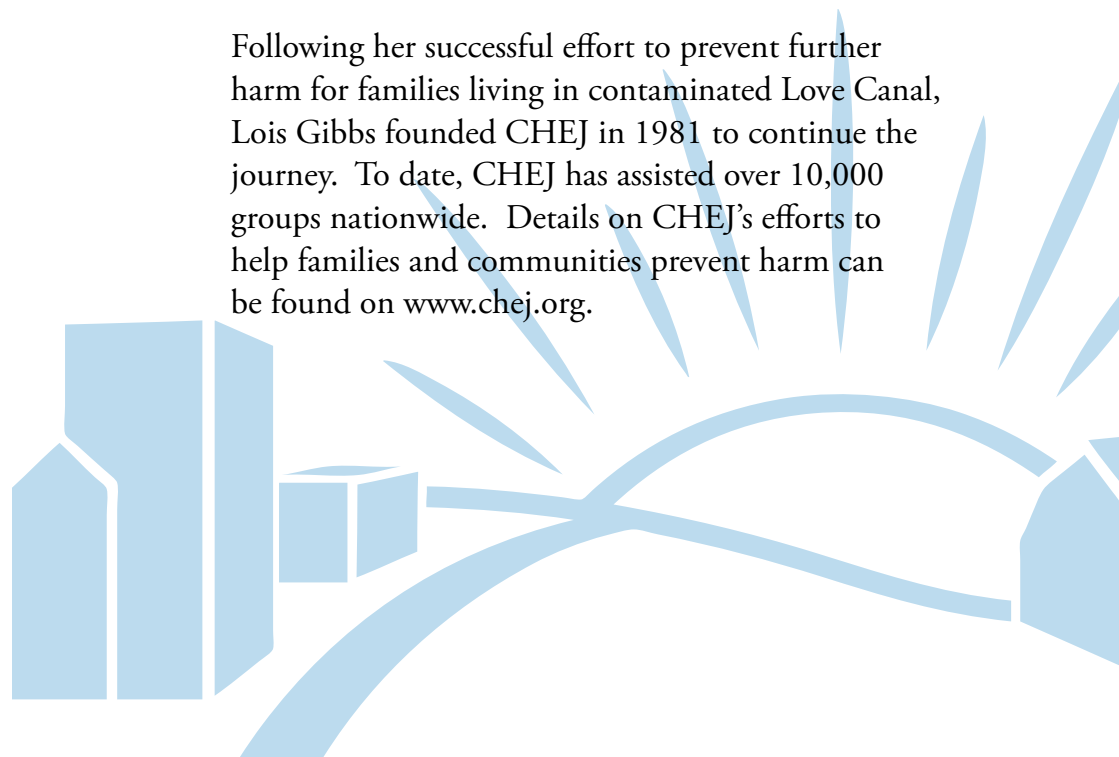
## **Empowering People**

## **Preventing Harm**

### **About the Center for Health, Environment & Justice**

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

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



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

*“What this country needs is more one-armed (experts).” — Harry S Truman, reacting to the experts’ favorite phrase, “...on the other hand...”*

You have many things to consider before you hire an expert. If you jump into hiring an expert without careful thought, you could be making two very expensive mistakes. First, you could hire an expert from the wrong area of science or with the wrong background. Second, you could be wasting money because you don’t really need an expert at all.

**Think about:** WHY do you want to hire an expert? What will he/she do to help your organization accomplish its goals? How will he/she fit into your strategies? Can you or someone else in your organization do the work that you’re hiring the expert to do? Can you afford this expert? Can you adequately supervise and manage the expert’s work?

**Ask yourselves:** how will opponents react to the expert? Do your opponents have any power over the expert you want to hire? Will your opponents now stop giving you information because now your group has someone to help you understand it? How will your community react? Will members of your group feel that they can sit back and let the expert fight the battle for them?

Hiring an expert is not as easy as you might think. It’s not the “easy” way to solve your problems. Many

groups have believed that all they have to do is hire the right expert, and the expert speaks the truth, which everyone believes. The policymakers are swayed by facts and logic and the problem is solved. This is a fairy tale!

More than any of us cares to admit, experts often complicate the situation further, rather than resolving it. And this will almost surely happen if you don’t use the experts properly.

The purpose of this paper is to raise the issues around the hiring and using experts. Here, we raise common myths, misconceptions and mistakes, and offer some tested advice on how to avoid them. We’ll also discuss some ways to use a good expert. Finally, we’ll be talking about YOU, an expert who literally sits right under your nose.

Let’s begin by examining some of the reasons groups commonly give for needing to hire experts:

### **To Provide the Group With Scientific Background and Information**

There are many ways your group can get the same information without spending money on an expert. There are lots of groups across the country that can

give you information on the toxicity of chemicals, groundwater flow, toxicity levels and standards, health surveys and many other technical topics.

Generally, any background information not obtainable through these resources probably doesn't exist! Everyone working in the hazardous waste business will tell you that there is a lot more the experts DON'T KNOW about the science of toxic chemicals than they do know.

### **To Have the Expert Speak For the Group**

NEVER, hire an expert to speak for your group! Experts should be used to support what you say, but never be the spokesperson. Some community leaders feel an expert who speaks for the group will lend credibility to it. This is inaccurate: the only one who gets the credibility is the expert — you lose credibility because you come off looking like you can't speak for yourselves. If it's credibility you want, let the expert play that supportive role. First, make your own case. Then, use the expert to say, "They're right and I can prove it."

Nothing is more powerful than people who live at the site speaking out for themselves. Ask yourself, who's more impressive: Mrs. Dee Oxin who'll talk about the miscarriages she's suffered from exposure, or your expert, Mr. A. Thority, who'll describe laboratory studies on toxicity? Who's going to motivate the audience? Who's going to be on the 10 o'clock news?

You and your neighbors are the experts on your community. Your expert's main value lies in reinforcing your MAIN MESSAGE, which is best said by you and your neighbors.

Experts only understand their own narrow area of expertise and should not be used outside of it. For example, when you buy a house, you hire an inspector to check it out. You don't then ask the building inspector to take those findings and negotiate with the seller over the final purchase price. That's your job and nobody can do it better!

This same principle applies to public hearings and court cases. The expert should only speak after you

do, to support your statements and needs — never to testify INSTEAD OF YOU.

### **To Win the Issue By Having the Expert Present a Convincing Case**

Do you honestly think that can win your issue JUST by presenting the truth? If we had a perfect world, this might be true, but this is far from a perfect world. Your experts will not win your issue for you. For every strong, well-documented statement your expert makes, your opponents will find other experts to say the opposite. Then, you have a case of what we call "dueling experts" rather than a clear-cut victory.

But even if, by some fluke, your expert is not challenged by your opponent's experts, you still won't win. All you've done is prove that you were right.

**Example:** A study was done which showed that there was an abnormally high number of children being born with birth defects who lived near some of the "high tech" dumps in the Silicon Valley, California. The release of this information did not force a cleanup to happen; the local government policy-makers and industrial "responsible parties" didn't automatically come down with an attack of conscience. Instead, it took organized efforts of the residents, acting through their groups, to bring pressure to force improvements in the water supply. This fight continues, as of this writing, with local residents using the experts' information as a tool in their organizing.

In most cases, the science, which proves cause and effect, doesn't exist. Only rarely has this connection been. Similarly, there is little understanding and generally no concrete consensus on this subject. For example, in 1978, scientists believed that dioxin basically didn't move through soil. However, it has since been proven that dioxin will in fact move through soil when it is mixed with solvents.

**Another example:** experts once believed that clay compacted to 10<sup>-7</sup> cm/sec would hold chemical wastes for fifty years or more. Recently, however, certain chemicals have been shown to break down the clay allowing the chemicals to move through

**Try This**

It's called the "So What"? Game. Have one or two of your members play the policymakers you're trying to influence. Have your expert or another group member play the role of the expert presenting "expert testimony" before the make-believe policy-makers. See how this expert testimony affects (or doesn't affect) the policymakers. Watch how they, as they play the role, deal with the question, "So What?" as they listen to this expert testimony. Now that you've put yourselves inside the minds of the policymakers you're trying to move, how will you change your strategy?

**Conclusion:** the science on hazardous waste is in its infancy and will take many more years to develop and provide clear answers to many questions.

**To Deal With that All-Important Question: "If You Don't Want Us To Put the Waste In Your Backyard, Where Should We Put it?"**

How come you have to come up with the answers for what to do with the waste? Your opponents will try to get you to feel like you're responsible for solving their problem for them. Figure it out: your community has been designated as the host for a waste disposal operation, planned by industry, government or both, and their response to your objections is to say: "Well, gee, this waste has got to go somewhere and we're going to do whatever it is we want to do unless, you, the citizens, give us a better alternative."

It's like one of your neighbors wants to walk his dog and let him do his business on your front lawn. You object and your neighbor says, "Well, my dog's got to go somewhere and he's going to go right on your front lawn unless you come up with an alternative." Would you take this from your next-door neighbor? Then why should you take it from industry or government?

It's not your job to do industry or government's work for them. When it comes to disposal of hazardous waste, we're looking at a major threat to public health and safety. It's industry and government's job to prove that a facility or process or material is safe—and you should not feel guilty for demanding that they, not you, come up with answers that satisfy the concerns of your community.

**To Review and Comment On Technical Reports**

This is a very good reason to use an expert! But, it's a good reason so long so you use what the expert gives you as support, rather than a substitute for your own actions. Once again, check first with the resources from the list in the back of this book before you spend good money to hire an expert. Think through what you can do for yourselves before you spend your money. Check with environmental groups in your own state to see if they can help you, as well as colleges and universities. CHEJ also does technical reviews and comments on reports for grassroots groups. Check with us too, before you spend a lot of money.

We know what you're going through. You've just been handed a 500-page report and you've been given a 21-day or 30-day deadline to make comments. You're thinking that this is an overwhelming task and like every other deadline you face, it's a crisis. You're thinking that if you don't meet this deadline, the world will probably come to an end the day after.

Two Points to all of this:

- **Demand more time!** You don't always have to accept industry or government's rules, especially on these ridiculous and unreasonable short time periods allowed for comments. After all, whose rule is this anyway? You can be sure that your opponents will continue to play this trick on you as long as you suffer through it in silence.
- **Make a plan!** So what if you get a technical expert to review your stuff for you? You're wasting your time (and money) and the expert's time, if you don't have some clear idea about



what you want to do with what your technical expert produces. Use the time while your expert is working on the report to work with co-leaders on an action strategy.

### **To Help Us Ask the Right Questions and To Teach Us How To Be Our Own Experts**

These are two of the best reasons to hire an expert. It's easy for an expert to work in isolation and later give you advice with a "this is what you want—trust me" attitude. However, you learn nothing from this except but how to depend on an expert. The expert's conclusions may be absolutely right, but you need to understand how those conclusions were reached. How can you defend those conclusions if you don't know where they came from? Later, you'll remain dependent on the expert because you haven't learned how to do it yourselves. It's doubtful that your group wants to become a permanent part of some expert's job security.

*\*\*\* Which of these six reasons above apply to you? Do you want an expert for the right reasons? If so, on to the next steps. If not, shouldn't you be out leafleting your neighborhood?*

## Chapter 2

# Who is an Expert?

*“The experts don’t have all the answers—and possibly not any of the answers.”*  
— Paul Warnke

Many define an expert as a person who has graduated from college with a degree in a specialized area. This is wrong. Graduating from college doesn’t make a person an expert—it makes them a “college graduate.” Webster’s Dictionary defines an expert as “thoroughly skilled; a person with a high degree of knowledge, skill and experience in a certain subject.” Please keep this in mind before you fall all over an expert because you’re impressed by his diploma or the alphabet soup after his/her name.

There are two types of experts we need to discuss: community experts and professional experts. Community experts are people like you. You live in the neighborhood and know more about the community than anyone on the outside. Chances are good that you or your neighbors know, for example, who dumped, what, how it was dumped, which way the water flows and which way the wind blows.” Use your own common sense and knowledge when you evaluate your need for an expert. Also keep in mind that your own community expertise is a powerful weapon to use when your opponents roll out their experts. For example, if you live in a farm community, isn’t it common sense that people

who’ve worked the land all their lives will have opinions about the ground that are at least as valid as some “hired gun” expert from some far-away university?

If you’re lucky, when you go door-to-door in your community, you may find that there are genuine, professional experts living right in your community who can help you. This is a powerful combination—a neighbor who also has the credentials.

If you must go outside of your community to hire an expert, you first have to identify what kind of expert you need. They usually specialize, so you have to make sure you match the expert to the job. For example, you wouldn’t want to hire a toxicologist to review a groundwater study. Here’s a list of some types of scientists and their areas of expertise:

- **Toxicologist:** the science of poisons and their effects.
- **Hydrogeologist:** the science of water and its movement through soil.
- **Soil Scientist:** the science of soil and its classifications.

- **Engineer:** the science of construction and design.
- **Chemist:** the science of chemicals and their interactions.
- **Risk Assessment Specialist:** the ART of determining potential risks posed by certain hazardous.

Some scientists have several areas of expertise, which they've developed either through training or experience. Multi-disciplinary experts are very useful if you can find them and terrific if you can get them to work for you at a price you can afford.

Unfortunately, these experts are the most in demand. At the very least, make absolutely sure that your expert has the minimum of what you need in the specialty area that needs to be addressed, but also look for an expert who understands most of the other areas that will have to be addressed.

### Where Do You Find Experts?

There are only a few experts who are willing and able to work with community groups. This is generally because (a) you don't have enough money; (b) experts don't like to get into political situations, unless it's worth their while; and (c) they get pressure to stay away from you from their colleagues, from the consulting firms that employ them or the colleges where they teach. However, there are a few who are willing to help.

Here are some places to look for them:

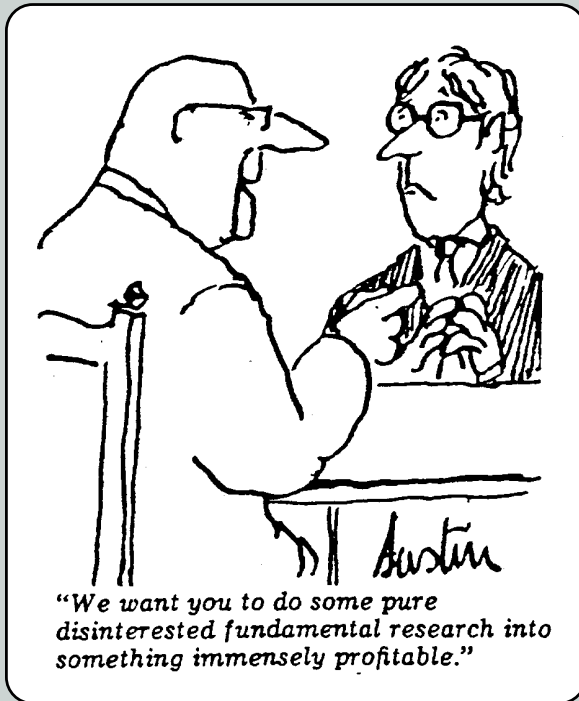
- Your own backyard. Do you have any neighbors with the expertise you need? In your next flyer or door-knocking effort, ask!
- Contact local colleges, universities, hospitals, etc. If the professionals you talk to at these institutions can't help you, ask them to give you some tips or refer you to people they know.
- Contact CHEJ. CHEJ maintains a list of experts. Also check with other citizens groups for good referrals.

- Sometimes, experts will come to you and offer their help. BEWARE! Suppose your local problem has gotten a lot of media attention, or it became known somehow that you're in the market for experts. Some experts may come to you with some wild and fancy promises. CHECK THEM OUT!

If several experts are approaching you, you could put them in competition with each other—that is, you could put your specifications for expert help up for bids. Regardless, check references, credentials, past work, etc. very carefully. Beware of “hidden agendas.” If this expert is approaching you for something other than just the money, WHAT IS IT? Do they want to exploit your issue, grab your publicity? FIND OUT, or else you might get burned.

When you recruit experts, a very delicate issue is conflict of interest. If the expert you are considering works for a consulting firm, does that firm also serve corporate clients who might be in opposition to you? This is a direct conflict of interest. An indirect conflict of interest could arise if the consulting firm gets nervous about your group and pressures their partner (your expert) to go easy, so as not to upset their other clients. Similar conflict of interest situations could come up if your expert comes out of a university or hospital where the institution depends heavily on the financial support of either the corporations or government agencies you are fighting.

Get background on your expert. Be sure your expert is free of conflicts of interest. Ask for references and check them out! Ask your expert if s/he's ever worked with a community group before. After all, you're different than a corporate client. Also, keep in mind that just because an expert might have worked well with some other group in another community, that's no guarantee that things will work out as well with you. Experts do not come with one-year warranties. You'll just have to sift all of the information you can get about the expert you're considering, add your own instincts about how you think it will work out, and make the best decision you can.



### Getting Money For Experts

If you can get an expert to work for free, you're lucky (maybe). But this rarely happens.

Talk with your expert right up front about costs and reach a crystal-clear understanding about charges and the expert's payment terms. How does the expert bill: By the hour? By the day? By the job? What's the formula for billing? What other costs are going to be passed along to you? Overhead? Printing? Postage? Phone Calls? Computer Time? Travel Expenses? Don't wait until the first bill comes in to deal with these issues.

Once you see what this is going to cost, it's time to reconsider whether you really need this expert, under the hard, cold light of this cost estimate. Given how much it's going to cost, is hiring an expert the best use of your limited money? Make a list of ways your group could spend this money and decide what's more important. If it's hiring the expert, do it! If not, don't feel you must, just because "everybody else has an expert."

Can you get someone else to pay for your expert?  
YES! Many groups around the country have done it.

Here are some concrete examples:

- **Local government:** CACTUS in Anson County, North Carolina convinced their county government that they just couldn't trust the technical studies done by Waste Management Inc. (WMI) to make the case for their proposed landfill. CACTUS kept at the county officials until finally they agreed that an expert was needed to work jointly for the residents and the county officials to keep WMI honest and agreed to foot the bill. This expert worked with CACTUS and helped them get ammunition they needed to use in their organizing. The result was that CACTUS won a solid victory over WMI and beat the landfill.
- **State government:** At both Love Canal and at Lake Charles, Louisiana, organized residents succeeded in pressuring their state government officials into agreeing to pay for experts to work with the residents.
- **Federal government:** Concerned Neighbors in Action at the Stringfellow Acid Pits in Riverside, California, forced EPA to pay their expert through the Superfund program. CNA overcame EPA's excuse that they couldn't directly fund a community group for this purpose by forcing them to channel the money through the state government.

How did CNA pull this off? Through steady and strong pressure. They made it clear to the public officials that residents have the RIGHT to participate in the decision-making process AS EQUALS. Part of that right is having the tools to participate and that's where having the expert provided through government funds came in. This reasonable argument, combined with good, solid organizing pressure tactics convinced the public officials that it was in their self-interest to give the people what they wanted.

Here are some other arguments you can use:

"We can't negotiate or participate as equals without technical assistance to help us interpret

what we're negotiating about." "If this plan (report, summary, whatever) is really right, then give us the means to check it out for ourselves—or are you afraid of what we'll find?"

- **Technical Assistance Grants (TAG):**

Since Love Canal and the Stringfellow situation, Congress amended the Superfund law making it possible for community groups to acquire Technical Assistance Grants to hire technical experts to help them interpret and understand the technical information generated at their site. Through the TAG program, which is administered by the US EPA, a grassroots community based organization of citizens living near a Superfund site can apply for a renewable grant of up to \$50,000, with which it can hire an independent technical advisor—normally a professional scientist. The TAG technical advisor can gather information at site visits, meetings, and hearings, review documents related to the site and the cleanup, meet with the community group to interpret technical information, and help communicate residents' concerns to the EPA.

A TAG grant can help a local community in many ways. It's greatest asset is that it provides funds so that you can hire a technical advisor to help you understand the many complex technical issues and data generated at a site. A TAG advisor should be able to help you evaluate the EPA site assessment and cleanup process. This assistance should help you determine whether you are satisfied with what is being done and whether it is acceptable to the community. For example, a TAG advisor could help you:

- Understand the various aspects of the cleanup process.
- Understand how well EPA or the responsible party is assessing the site.
- Determine if EPA is doing a good job.
- Determine if the testing being done is adequate to define the extent and severity of the problem.

- Determine if the proposed cleanup remedy is adequate.

There are also limitations to this program including:

- Only community groups organized near designated Superfund sites are eligible to apply.
- Only non-profit community groups that are incorporated or working towards incorporation—and whose health and livelihood are potentially threatened by waste at the site—are eligible for grants. Groups affiliated with Responsible Parties, government organizations, or partisan political organizations are ineligible.
- The EPA normally allows only one TAG for each site on the NPL. At some large or unusually complex sites, however, the EPA may make additional funds available.
- The group must contribute matching funds equal to 20% of the Technical Assistance Grant. The EPA stipulates that the matching funds can take the form of either cash or donated services or supplies.
- The grant application is long and difficult to fill out.

There are several other important concerns about the TAG program. The most important is the possibility that you'll become distracted by trying to get the grant and forget the importance of doing the basic organizing work you need to do to be successful. The agency would love nothing better than for you to spend all your time trying to get this grant and not on harassing them or going door to door to educate your neighbors about the problems at the site and what needs to be done about it. Ideally, it would be best to find someone in your group who is familiar with forms (maybe an accountant or someone who works for government) and let them toil away in filling out the application. In

the meanwhile, your group should stay focused on the important issues at hand.

- **Technical Outreach Services for Communities (TOSC):** Another federal program available to community groups to acquire technical help is the Technical Outreach Services for Communities. This program, which is funded by the US EPA, provides additional technical assistance—especially to communities who are ineligible for Technical Assistance Grants. TOSC has established a network of Hazardous Substance Research Centers at universities throughout the country. Communities dealing with any type of contamination problem are eligible to apply for technical assistance through the TOSC program. Information on the TOSC program can be obtained by contacting the EPA at 1-800-424-9346.

Overall, the value of the TOSC program to local community organizations can vary substantially. Some of the scientists/engineers in the program have been very helpful and useful to local groups while others have not been. In virtually no instance can you expect these experts to stand up and support your point of view. Often, this is a problem.

Other major issues with the TOSC program include 1) most of the scientists who participate have little if any experience in working directly with community organizations, 2) the centers are funded by EPA, so their allegiance is to the agency; and 3) TOSC scientists/engineers do not take their lead from the community. Instead, they tend to act as “independent” agents who review technical documents, but don’t engage in the inevitable contentious arguments that occur.

- **Industry-paid assistance.** Getting industry to pay is a little trickier. However, local groups in Susquehanna County, PA and in Toms River, NJ have used this approach successfully. Susquehanna County residents told WMI, “If you believe your plan is so good, then give us the money to hire the technical assistance we need to reach our own

conclusions.” WMI agreed—in fact, they really had to, since otherwise, the residents could argue that WMI really didn’t trust its own plan. As result of this help and good organizing, residents defeated the plan.

You can try using industry’s – your opponent’s – own money to beat them. In several instances, the community’s expert, hired with the company’s money, kept demanding more and more information and raising more and more considerations, that finally the company decided the process was taking to long and was getting too expensive and they pulled out.

Three major cautions:

- Don’t expect the company you are fighting to give you money for experts if you claim your undying opposition to their plan. The company the process was taking too long and was getting too expensive and pulled out. will only give you money if they see it in the company’s self-interest. If you say that you want them to pay for an expert you’re going to use to beat them, the company would have to be pretty stupid to give you what you want. You may have to be very careful about what you say to the company if you decide to pursue this option.
- If other people in your community don’t understand your strategy in trying to get the company to pay for your expert assistance, you could end up in deep trouble! The community might conclude that you’ve sold them out by accepting money from the same people you are fighting. You should also be aware of the danger of hiring an expert who might be influenced by the company that’s paying the bill. Even though you negotiate a deal with the company where the expert works for you, but is paid by the company, your expert is no dummy and will surely understand where the paycheck comes from. Will that affect how your expert behaves? It might

and you should be very careful that you have hired an expert who is more loyal to you than to the company.

- Suppose the expert's findings are a little ambiguous. The industry also has access to the expert's materials and could "scoop" you with them. For example, you could discover that the company goes to the media with full-page ads or a big news conference, giving their interpretation of the expert's findings even before you've had a chance to read and digest them for yourself.

# Chapter 3

## Now You've Got Your Expert

*Every truth has two sides; it is well to look at both, before we commit ourselves to either. — Aesop*

### Now You've Got Your Expert - Now What?

Brief your expert well. Be crystal clear about what you expect. This task of briefing and clarifying your relationship will be difficult to do if your first item of business is to dump fifty pounds of documents on your expert's desk and then insist that the expert listen to twelve hours of stories about what's happened at your site over the last fifty years. This, friends, is not the best way to start a good, working relationship, at a discount rate.

Remember, that the “meter is always running” with expert and time is money—whether it's your money or the expert's. If you're well organized before you arrive, you'll use the expert's time well. If not, you're throwing money out the window. And your expert will get turned off, because they'll be sensitive about wasting time.

Make a list. Make a plan. Make it clear before you get in your car. Before you meet with your expert, there are several things you should put together to bring with you:

- A 1-2 page history of the site. Who owns it, what was put there, when, what agencies have

been involved with the site, what happened and when.

- A map of the area. Where is the site, where are homes, schools, stores and other important buildings and population centers? Where have tests been done (and when)? Identify water flow and prevailing wind patterns. Bringing some pictures to accompany this is fine, but don't be excessive—your expert doesn't need to see a three-hour slide show in your first meeting.
- Any relevant reports. Not studies done 10 years ago. The reports should be in the area of expertise of your expert. For example, if you've hired a groundwater engineer, don't come in with a reproductive health study. If possible, try to include a summary of the report. Remember, the more you “pre-digest” this material, the less time it will take for you to brief your expert and begin working.
- A reference list of all the other stuff you have. Instead of giving the expert two boxes full of stuff that'll take a week to get through, giving the expert a list.



Now, give your expert two of the most important things s/he needs: (1) DIRECTION and (2) DEADLINE. You and your expert must have a clear understanding of what s/he is expected to do. In fact, WRITE IT DOWN. If you've paying the expert, s/he will probably give you a contract to sign.

You, in turn, have every right to specify, in writing, what you expect. Even if the expert is working for free, it's still a good idea to have an understanding in writing.

Why is a deadline important? First, experts are trained to work with deadlines. If they don't have one, they may never get around to your work, since, without a deadline, it seems like the job can wait. Second, you may need a deadline to develop your organizing strategy. If for example, you plan to release the information at a public meeting, you need to know in advance that you will actually have it. In fact, you will probably need to have the work done by the expert well in advance so that you can both plan the meeting and deal with advance publicity. If your expert comes rushing in with the report ten minutes after the meeting starts, this not only looks weird, but also leaves you in total suspense as to what's in the report.

Regardless of how much your expert is paid and who is paying, you and your group should be as certain as possible as to the nature of your relationship. If you are paying for the expert directly, you should have a contract that specifies what you are getting for your money and when.

If you have a direct relationship with the expert and the expert is donating his/her time for free, it's o.k. for you to have a friendly "letter of understanding" – not a formal "contract" – that describes your relationship in an amiable way with some concrete detail.

If you have organized to get some third-party to pay the expert, such as your county, or state government, or the company you are fighting, you're in a "gray area." It is critical that you know exactly where you stand with an expert hired under these third-party deals. To whom is the expert accountable? How do

you influence the process the expert will use? How do you establish and maintain a free flow of information? All of these points are negotiable when you organize to get a third-party to pay – negotiate for control and try to win as much as you can.

It would be great if you have a "contractual" relationship with an expert you brought on board (with someone else's money). But, think it through. When you win the victory of getting someone else to pay, you pay a price, too – loss of control.

Finally, all contracts can be revised – they're not locked in cement. Your agreement with the expert should be periodically reviewed and changed to reflect changing circumstances.

### **Now You Know What You Want. What Can Go Wrong?**

Plenty! Most of us have lots of misconceptions and myths about experts that get us into trouble. Here are some of the most common ones and some hard, cold truths:

**Myth:** "We're going to tell the expert all of the things we want done and certainly the expert is going to appreciate our needs and agree to do it."

**Reality:** Sorry, but this rarely happens. Experts don't always agree either with your approach or with what you think you need. Sometimes the disagreement will be substantive, meaning that the expert feels that in his or her judgment you don't really need what you've asked for. Other times, the expert's reasons for balking are that it will take too much time, is outside his/her expertise or just isn't doable.

Examine your expert's reason for refusing to do what you want. Maybe, the expert is right and you need to rethink your approach. Or, maybe the expert is wrong, or is just making excuses. However, don't give up just because you have a disagreement. Find out what the expert will do or can do—this is a lot more important than arguing about what the expert can't or won't do. Then, you can decide whether you want to shop for another expert, or whether this one will meet your needs.

**Myth:** “Our situation is so terrible (and we have such honest faces) that as soon as we tell our expert our story, s/he’ll agree to support our position from the jump?”

**Reality:** Most experts will refuse to automatically support your position before looking at the data. And generally, experts who will agree in advance to support you ought to be approached with caution, as they could cause you more trouble than good.

Scientists like to pride themselves on being objective, rational and guided by the facts, etc. Most would rather be roasted alive than give an opinion that might be called, “shooting from the hip.” If your expert is willing to “shoot from the hip” and draw conclusions without the facts, you should look for another expert. This one will probably be eaten up alive at any public forum where your opponents can challenge the basis for the opinions of the experts. You want an expert who is reasonable, open-minded, willing to listen to you, but objective enough to sift through the facts and be honest with you.

If your expert DISAGREES with you and with the conclusions you have drawn, you haven’t wasted your money. After all, if your own expert finds weak points in your position, imagine what your opposition will do. You can now double-check your position and make whatever adjustments are needed. And you should also work with your expert to make your case the strongest it can be. Try to make sure your expert’s right, though, before you abandon one position and adopt another.

**Myth:** “This guy’s the expert, so his recommendations must be right.”

**Reality:** Experts do not come with any guarantees, no 90-day warranties. They are as human as you and I and as prone to error, fatigue, burnout, time constraints and screw-ups.

Experts who work for consulting firms, universities and other institutions that are dependent on industry money or government contracts are also subject to some very nasty pressure from your opponents. Even though your expert might be an honest,

“straight-shooter,” such pressure can take its toll, even subconsciously, in a way that even the expert may not even perceive.

When experts are busy—and the best ones always are—they may assign an assistant to do your review. It could be a lab assistant or a graduate student, depending on where your expert works. It has happened where the assistant has made mistakes and the expert doesn’t catch them until it’s too late. You have a right to know who actually did the work and it’s not wrong for you to ask your expert if there’s been sufficient time for the expert to review the work.

**Myth:** “Our expert’s got some real strong opinions on how we should conduct our strategies,” “S/he’s the expert, so we should take that advice,” “If we don’t follow that advice, we may lose him/her.”

**Reality:** Be very cautious about the expert who tries to give you advice outside his/her expertise. Being an expert on one thing doesn’t make you an expert on everything. For example, don’t let them tell you how or how not to organize, talk to politicians, handle the media, define goals or carry out strategies. YOU are more expert in these areas than most technical experts. Further, YOU must define your own goals, strategies and tactics.

Too often, people have been given bad advice on organizing by their technical experts, have gotten hurt and it wasn’t even the expert’s fault. The expert was trying to be helpful, but just wasn’t qualified and the community leaders should have known better. For example, a Maryland group was told by their expert that they had to behave “professionally,” never to show emotion, never do direct action, such as picketing or demonstrating, and rely primarily on “rational discourse” and the expert’s testimony. Well, the opposition had better experts and a better strategy. This group had nothing going for it except an expert who poked his nose in where it didn’t belong and no action, no power, just calm, unemotional, expert-sounding talk. Now, they also have a new, leaking landfill.

A Pennsylvania group was told by their technical expert that they should not share his comments with

others in their community, that they should keep it to themselves until the “right moment” (which, of course, the expert would define). The leadership did this and when the rest of the community found this out, they were ostracized because to the rest of the folks it looked like they had sold out. They lost, too, because of terrible organizing advice from a technical expert.

**Myth:** “Our expert’s been at this for a long time. S/he’s probably seen it all and will understand what we’re up against.”

**Reality:** Many experts have done most of their work for corporate clients or within an academic setting. They may have NO IDEA how intense a fight you are in and may get scared the first time they see a hall full of angry residents up against insensitive or lying government officials or industry representatives. Don’t assume that your expert has been in some tight positions before. ASK. If the answer from your expert is that s/he hasn’t been in the middle of such confrontations, make a plan to “acclimate” the expert. Let the expert come to a meeting with your opponents so that s/he can see what it’s like. Make an advance agreement that the expert will only observe—we’ve seen some experts who’ve gotten so outraged at what they saw the opposing side say that they’ve jumped out of their seats and started arguing in the middle of the meeting. That’s not appropriate. If your expert is really “gun-shy,” you may have to set up a system where your expert doesn’t have to go into such situations and submits all materials and makes all presentations in writing.

**Myth:** “We have to give the expert a free hand. After all, s/he’s the expert and we have to go along, even if we don’t agree.”

**Reality:** WRONG! Your expert is your employee—even if the expert is working for free. You should not let your expert operate like a “loose cannon on the deck.” Try to make it clear that your expert must take direction from you. And, finally, if your expert does not perform as you wish, you can fire the expert. In most situations, it’s better to have no expert at all, than a bad one.

## What To Do With a Technical Expert’s Work

Once you have comments and recommendations from your expert, you must get that information out to your community in plain, understandable language. In most cases, write a fact sheet or brief summary of the contents in language your community, local policymakers and media can handle. DON’T ASSUME that everyone else understands what you understand. The rule of thumb is KISS: “Keep It Short and Simple.” Test what you’ve written on somebody else before you spend your money on printing something that’s too complicated for the general public to understand. Try to use terms and examples that ordinary people can relate to based on their own experiences. For example, if you are discussing “levels of detection” instead of talking about how your opponents only looked at levels in parts per million when they should have looked at part per billion, go on to explain that this is 1,000 times more sensitive a test. Explain further that even at the parts per billion level, there are lots of potent chemicals that can have a serious effect on the human body.

Explain the technical terms in plain language. “Teratogenic,” for example, should be clearly explained as meaning “a chemical that causes birth defects.” Be clear, be simple and relate your message to people’s own experience.

## Fitting Experts Into Your Strategy

**Step #1:** Look at what you’ve gotten from your expert. What does it mean? Sit down with other leaders in your group and make a plan.

**Step #2:** Publicity and public education. Make a simple, plain language summary of what you’ve gotten from the expert. Get your plan underway to get this information out to the public and into the media. What are the most important findings? What’s going to have the greatest effect on public opinion? Decide if you need to hold a news conference or stage a “media event” and then do it. Be sure to get your information out to your community through a flyer/fact sheet.

**Step #3:** Use what you've got to get more people involved. If you have good, new material from the expert and you've gotten some public attention, then you should be faced with a stirred-up community that wants to know more. Make it easy for them. Call a public meeting to share this additional information AND to get more people involved in the action strategy.

**Step #4:** Now you've got expert information, public attention, more people, and lots of energy. Isn't it time to go after your opponent with what you've got? You could:

- Hold a "Peoples' Hearing." You can call your own meeting to show off your expert's findings in front of your opponents and give people in your community a chance to ask your opponents, "now what are you going to do about it?" and demand some specific answers.
- Go to the next public meeting sponsored by government or your opponents and try to confront them with this new information.

Just remember that the reason you went through the trouble of getting the expert was to get another tool to help you win! You increase your chances of winning when you (a) make the best use of every resource you have and (b) take the initiative.

### Your Opponents' Counter-Attack

Your opposition is not going to give up and agree with you just because now you have an expert that backs you up. Here are some of the ways your opposition might react:

- They might try to ignore you. They are most likely to try this if you release your expert's findings in a low-key way. Your opponents know that the attention and memory span of the general public is woefully short and they might decide to try to ride out the controversy, hoping that people will either overlook what you've got or forget it quickly. This will probably happen, unless you follow up and work at keeping the issue alive.
- They may attack the quality of your expert's work. They could say your expert doesn't have the right credentials, or lacked the right information, or your expert used outdated information. They could just say you're expert's wrong, or that "there's certainly room for disagreement and different judgments."
- They could attack your expert on a personal level. They could try to discredit your expert by spreading all kinds of vicious rumors, accusing your expert of being (a) a radical, (b) a homosexual, (c) promiscuous, (d) an atheist, (e) mentally defective or (f) any combination of the above, plus any other nasty thing they can come up with. You know best, perhaps, how low your opponent will go. Your opponent may try to find out something that is true about your expert—it's happened where companies have hired private detectives to investigate in such cases. Or, your opponents could just try to spread lies. Obviously, none of this has anything to do with whether your expert is right or wrong, but it could hurt you all the same.
- They could invite your expert to join the "process." In the Sixties, the term for this was "co-opting." They could invite your expert to sit on panels, committees, commissions and so on. They could try to run your expert ragged. For your opponents, it's a "win/win" situation. If your expert agrees, they can try to burn him/her out. If your expert declines, they can say, "See—they only want to agitate, not cooperate." This also increases your expert's time on the job, which increases his/her fees. This could become an issue depending on who's paying the bills.
- They can try to set your expert up in a "duelling experts" game. This game typically involves getting your expert into an endless, technical, boring debate with their experts. It's a game that's stacked in favor of your opponents, because, as you've probably already found out, for every

expert your group can find and afford, they can get a dozen. Your opponents can also make it very financially appealing for their experts to compromise their integrity.

How do you prepare for your opponent's reaction? The first reaction—ignoring you—is easy: they can only ignore you if you let them. If they try to ignore you, just press harder and be more imagination about how you get your point across in your community.

If you have any reason to expect that your expert will be attacked, either professionally or personally, talk it through with him/her first. Ask your expert if this has ever happened to him/her before? What did s/he do about it? To protect your efforts against attacks on your expert's professional integrity, be sure that you have followed all of the prior steps of hiring the right expert and make sure that the expert does the job right. Here's where you can get the benefit of having hired an unbiased expert.

As for personal attacks, you can either (a) ignore them or (b) say, "So what?" These personal attacks have nothing to do with the issue and are an attempt by the people who oppose you to focus attention away from the real issues.

"Dueling Experts" is a very common trap and deserves a lot of advance planning. Your opponents would love to get your expert debating forever with theirs. They know the main result of this will be to put most of the community to sleep. Then they'll just go ahead and do what they wanted to do anyway.

You've probably seen how the first step leading towards "Dueling Experts" plays out in meetings you've already attended. The meeting is called too order and the expert or experts are introduced "here's Dr. Toxic, an eminent scientist in his field who holds seventeen degrees in every imaginable scientific discipline, who's published articles in

every possible scientific journal, who's published dozens of books, who's been an advisor to kings and emperors, who's done all that's ever been done and knows ever thing that can be known. And he's here for you, to answer all of your questions."

Dr. Toxic takes the stage. He begins with a long, boring and totally incomprehensible lecture, shows a long slide/tape show, takes and deflects two questions, shows and a movie, takes and deflects two more questions, turns the meeting over to the moderator for adjournment, leaves, sends in his bill and smiles all the way to the bank.

Sure, we're exaggerating, but you know what we mean. The basic idea "is to focus your attention on this expert whose job is to confuse and deflect you, distracting your attention away from the political policymakers.

They're hoping to either intimidate you into silence or seduce you into spending huge amounts of time and energy coming up with your own data to refute Dr. Toxic. This is where you're tempted to have your expert refute Dr. Toxic, leading to "Dueling Experts." If your expert gets into more details about the science, soon no one will have any idea what either expert is talking about. All the while, you are losing your base of support in the community, as the general public's attention is focused on these scientists.

The best way to deal with the "Dueling Experts" problem is not to play. Dr. Toxic's job is, minimally, to distract you from focusing your attention on the policymakers. And, if you let Dr. Toxic get away with it, he'll try to engage either you or your expert in an endless and pointless debate over the "data," while the policymakers go ahead and do what they wanted to do anyway.

By the way, just as you can expect your opponent to challenge your expert's credentials – you can and should challenge their expert's credentials.

## Chapter 4

# Are You an Expert?

*When you know a thing, to hold that you know it, and when you do not know it, to admit that you do not - this is true knowledge. — Confucious*

### Are You an Expert?

Many of the people in CHEJ's network are selftaught experts. Some rate very highly as experts, both in terms of their knowledge and in their style of using their expertise. However, some self-taught experts can be as bad as the worst PH.D. The worst case is the self-taught expert/leader who insists "we shouldn't do anything until we've done all of the research." We call this being "handcuffed by the facts." Further, how about the leader/expert, who won't share information with the rest of the group, won't let others help out and refuses to teach others research skills. Bad leader/experts can also aid and abet Dr. Toxic's "dueling experts" game by insisting that the best way to fight your issue is to debate your research against their research. Nearly every group in our network that has tried this has failed at it.

We meet leaders occasionally who walk around with SUITCASES full of their research. They can't carry on a conversation with you without insisting that you read their suitcase first. Some sound like the stereotype of a professional expert who's in love with jargon. Just as you should hold any professional technical expert accountable to your group and its

needs, so should you hold any member of your group who becomes a leader/expert. Self-taught experts can be the best kind of experts since you'll never find anyone more deeply committed to your community. But it's up to all of you to help keep that leader from becoming a "data fanatic."

### Science For the People

Its "Mr. Wizard" time, folks. In this section, we'll discuss techniques you can use to do "People's Science," which are ways you can demonstrate scientific principles about your issue in a lively, practical fashion. There are a lot of good reasons to consider this "People's Science" approach first, before hiring an outside expert; here are some of the reasons:

- It's a lot cheaper.
- It's a lot more fun.
- It's less intimidating.

Part of your opponent's Dr. Toxic's job is to try to convince your community that the outside experts know more about the community you live in than you do. Doesn't it seem strange that the dumpers will

come into a community and try to convince people who worked the land all their lives, farmers for example, that the outside experts know the land better than they do. The main purpose of “People’s Science” is to restore to people a sense of confidence in their own common sense.

Here are some examples of “People’s Science.”

### **Leaking Landfill Experiment**

This is so easy that grade school kids have done these for Science Fairs. Question: “Will our local landfill leak? How long will it take to leak?”

**Materials:** a clear container, such as an aquarium. Kitty litter, sand, dirt, water and food dye. Optional: plastic wrap, drinking straws, toy houses, people, animals and small plants.

Build your own model of that landfill that is being proposed, or already exists. Build it to scale, based on the specifications you’ve gotten from industry or government. After you’ve built it (adding, according to your own taste, a liner, houses, drinking straws for monitoring wells, etc.) test it. Add colored water to the top, coloring the liquid with food dye, ink paint or whatever is handy, and see how long it takes the fluid to penetrate through the different layers to the bottom. Do the arithmetic to figure out how long it will take the real landfill to leak into groundwater. Change the landfill around using your common sense to estimate how it might operate in real life. Take this model to your meetings to show your neighbors. Bring it with you to public hearings.

**Note:** like all experiments, you should test it before you use it. One problem you might run into, for example, is that some brands of kitty litter will absorb some types of food dye, so only clear fluid passes through. While this does not invalidate the experiment, it does minimize its visual impact. If this occurs with your test, try different types of coloring until you get it right.

A twelve-year old did this “Leaking Landfill” experiment as a Science Fair project (he won a Blue Ribbon). Here’s how he set it up. On the

next page is his diagram of what his experiment looked like.

**Variation:** in Sumter County, Alabama, Waste Management, Inc. has built the world’s largest landfill on several hundred feet of chalk. WMI said this landfill would not leak for 10,000 years. One of the resident’s first questions was, “Won’t the chalk crack and allow material to go through?” The company brushed this off and residents asked us how they could prove that the chalk might break. Answer: we picked up a piece of actual chalk and held it four feet off the ground and dropped it. It broke into a hundred pieces. We asked the residents, “What does your common sense tell you?”

Next, residents wanted to take on the “10,000 – Year No-Leak” claim. We showed them that you could take a piece of dry chalk and put a cotton swab soaked with ink on top of it and measure how long it took for the ink to penetrate. It took less than a day and measuring the distance the ink penetrated and figuring in the amount of time it took, we came to conclusion that it would take 10-15 years for material to leak 200-300 feet down from that landfill (not even accounting for cracks in the rock). Since the company claimed the material was “impermeable” because the rock was water-saturated, we repeated the experiment with water-saturated chalk. The amount of time it took was double that of the dry chalk experiment, so we estimate it will take 20-30 years to penetrate 200-300 feet, not 10,000 years, as Waste Management had claimed.

The whole point of these experiments and the others described in this section is to restore people’s faith in their own common sense and intelligence, which your opponents try to strip away through their use of experts.

### **The effectiveness of a clay cap**

They want to solve your leaking landfill problem by putting a “clay cap” on it. It almost sounds logical, but you’ve got some lingering doubts. Try this: take a tube of toothpaste. Unscrew the cap. Put it on a table. Hit it with your fist. After all,

## Hypothesis

To see if a simulation of a toxic waste landfill would leak.

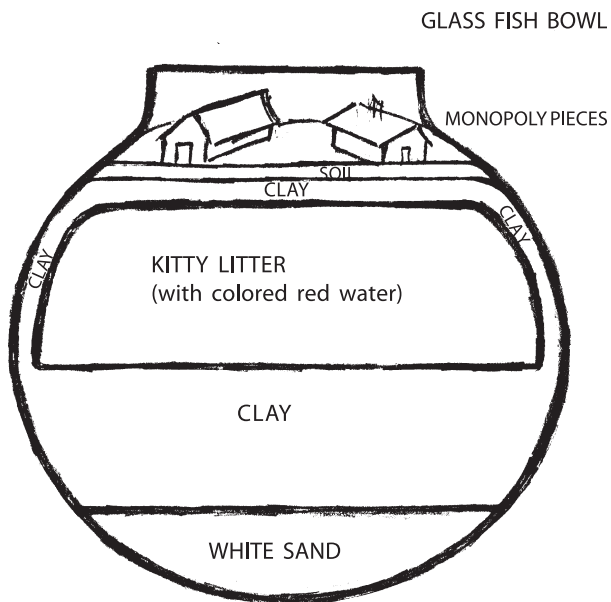
## Design Of Experiment

### Materials:

- One 5-gallon fish bowl purchased from Target.
- Alfa Pet Flash-A-Way cat litter by New Unique Cat litter, Alfa Pet, Inc., St. Louis, MO.
- Snow White - white sand by Pennsylvania Glass Corporation.
- Clay from a construction site in Arlington, VA.
- Baccto Potting Soil from Michigan Peat Co., Houston, TX.
- Monopoly pieces for decoration.
- Red food dye from Crown Colony Food Color kit by Safeway Stores, Inc. Oakland, CA.
- Water from the tap at my home in Falls Church, VA.

### Procedures:

- I got a 5-gallon fish bowl, which was filled 5 cm from the bottom with sand.
- I then marked 6 cm on the bowl and filled to that mark with clay.
- Then I packed it down as tight as I could using a piece of wood.
- I put a layer of clay, which was 5 cm deep around the bowl leaving a hole in the center for the simulated wastes.
- I then added red dye to two cups of water in a separate container.
- I used 2 cups of water so that it would be equivalent to the amount allowed in a landfill, which is 25% by weight.
- I then mixed the two cups of water and the two pounds of kitty litter together.
- I put the wet kitty litter mixture into the clayhole in the fish tank.
- I put a layer of clay, which was 2 cm thick on top of the kitty litter.
- Then I put a layer of potting soil, which was 2 cm thick on top of the layer of clay.
- Last, I put nine monopoly houses on top to indicate real homes in a real landfill situation.





what is a clay cap, except for a mass of earth that's going to be a crushing weight on your landfill, causing material to SQUEEZE out the sides and out into the community.

### **“Kill the fish”**

A coalition of Lake Charles, Louisiana groups went to Baton Rouge to testify about how badly contaminated their drinking water was. They brought a sample of well water from one of the resident's homes, some goldfish and a fish bowl. The first speaker stood up and began his testimony by saying that he was about to put the contaminated water in the bowl, was going to add the fish and that by the time the hearing was over the fish would be dead. The state legislators were outraged! How could these Lake Charles people be so cruel as to kill the fish! However, the residents made two points: 1) that the water is bad and 2) it seems like their public officials are more concerned about gold fish than they are about the people. In this instance, the residents didn't have to “kill the fish” to make the point.

If you decide to try this, we suggest you consider two factors. First, will your people want to do it? Some of your own folks may feel the same way the Louisiana legislators did and get angry at the thought of killing these fish. Second, if you decide to do this, make sure the fish will actually die. That is, you're going to look pretty silly if you set these fish out there to make the point and when it comes time for them to die, they're still swimming around.

### **Toxicomatic**

In Toledo, Ohio, a local organization was fighting the expansion of a local landfill. The landfill operators assured residents that this landfill would have a “state-of-the-art” plastic liner that would never leak. Then Toledo had an earthquake. Local leaders came up with a demonstration of what would happen to this new landfill when the next quake hit.

Take a blender, fill it with water. Take a small plastic bag and add one or more eggs (to represent toxic waste barrels). Add the bags with the eggs to the water-filled blender. Turn it on. This represents what would happen at that dump.

Other ways to deal with dumper's claims about liners is to take heavy plastic materials of the type they say they will use as a liner and proceed to destroy it. Use your common sense. You can subject this plastic to hot and cold, to a variety of chemical agents (try Drano or commercial acid—but be careful, please, and keep the kids away) and attack it with various metal objects, such as shovels, picks, jagged pieces of metal, etc. The liner of a dump must survive this kind of abuse if it's going to perform as advertised.

### **Right-to-know experiment**

This experiment is more an exercise in psychology and political science. Suppose you are running into opposition from local politicians in your effort to get a “Right-To-Know” law passed. Try this. You will need a container, water and a hunk of dry ice.

At a chosen point during the next public meeting or hearing on “Right to Know,” secretly add the dry ice to the water-filled container. Go up to the politicians and try to get them to take it or, even better, drink from it. Their reaction is likely to be, “What is that!!!”

You can then respond, “If we had the Right-To-Know, then you could find out.” Point made. Lots of fun.

### **Air emissions: balloons, kites, and glitter**

Suppose the technical point you're trying to highlight has to do with the spread of airborne contamination (e.g. plant emissions, smoke, fumes, particles, etc.). You want to prove the technical point that emissions can reach many parts of the community, get this point across to the general public, get media attention, and have fun at the same time. Here's how.

- **Balloon actions.** You will need 100 or more regular sized balloons, a tank of helium, string, printed cards and some people. Go to the site. Set up a “balloon launch,” ideally in front of a lot media (especially good action for television, since it's colorful). Make your press statement about how pollution from this location affects lots of people in your community and let the balloons go. Try to pick a nice, sunny, breezy day. Off they go! Attach a card to each balloon that says something like: “This balloon was launched from

the site of – describe problem very briefly. Along with this balloon came poisons that can cause serious illness. Concerned? Call: (your number).”

Try to get the media to go with you to follow the balloons to watch where they land. Go and knock on doors in the neighborhoods where they land.

Repeat this action as often as you'd like. It's fun and you may want to do it under different weather conditions and wind directions.

- **Kite actions.** This is similar to balloon actions, only you do it with kites. The point here is to get media attention, draw a curious crowd, and give the kids something constructive to do to help their parents. You could set it up as a contest. Get local merchants to donate prizes for the best kite. Have the kids make their own kites for the contest. The only rule is that the kite streamer has to have your group's slogan on it (e.g. “Stop the Incinerator Now!”). Have fun.
- **Glitter actions.** Here's an interesting idea being considered by group in Little Rock, Arkansas. Their issue is contaminated dust blowing off the dumpsite and into their neighborhood. Their plan is to get a lot of glitter (several dozen pounds). They would then pile it into a mound as close to the dumpsite as they can get and then let the prevailing winds blow the glitter all over the neighborhood. They would follow up by knocking on doors wherever the glitter lands. They're planning on using orange-colored glitter, since the plant dumpsite they are fighting is loaded with Agent Orange.

### “Float” experiments

These experiments involve floating small objects, like toy boats, or larger objects, like people-sized rafts, down a body of water that is being (or might be) contaminated. Are people downstream from you aware of the potential threat? You can do this very simply, or you could turn it into a big deal or a major social event. It's up to you, to your group's interests and imagination and to your best judgement of what will catch the public's eye.

### Do-it-yourself statistics

So many toxics issues are highlighted by arguments over numbers. What is the nature of the problem? How serious is it? How do you interpret the statistics? Who do you trust? For example, you say that the local site operator is engaged in activities that are against the law (e.g. dumping at all hours, emissions and other discharges in the middle of the night, etc). The company denies this and your public officials say they have no record or official knowledge of these problems, nor the means to watch for such violations. You can do it yourself.

- **Community watch.** Many groups have dealt with this type of situation by setting up local community watch programs. They simply ask residents to watch the problem area, log what they see and report these observations. Community watch programs involve lots of people in a way that's simple and direct and they work! Groups that have set up these watches have gotten data that could not have been gotten otherwise and have gone on to win.
- **Health problems.** As part of your work in reaching out to your neighbors, you should ask about health problems and keep a record. We're not suggesting that you start by doing an elaborate health survey, but that you simply keep tabs on health problems that you discover as you talk to people. You can, when you're ready and have thought it through, conduct your own fullfledged health survey, but you can start collecting that information informally at any time.

**Caution:** if you are seriously thinking about doing a full-fledge health survey, read CHEJ's *Guide to the Community Health Survey*.

- **Physical survey.** You can learn a great deal about a site by looking at more than just the people. For example, you could set up a “Toxic Tour” where you look for the physical signs of toxic contamination (e.g. weird looking stream run-off, “stressed” (damaged) vegetation, etc.). When CHEJ staff goes into a new community, we often

learn more about problems that community is facing by simply looking around and picking up on these signs. Keep a log to record what you saw and when and where you saw it.


### Other people's science Exercises

- **Testing.** Getting honest testing of potential water or ground contamination is often a major issue in many communities. You should always ask for “split sampling” to be done. Split sampling means that when they take a water or soil sample, they take a part of that sample and have it analyzed by a second source, in this case, you. When you get your opponent to agree to split sampling, you are more likely to keep them honest. You then have the option of getting the sample tested by your own lab, or you could simply not have it tested at all. As long as your opponent thinks you've had the split sample tested independently, you've accomplished your purpose.

Incidentally, if you're going to push for split sampling, you should also insist that you or someone you trust be present when the sample is collected, so that you are not given a phony split sample. Common sense, right?

- **Fair share programs.** This idea is more a “tactic” than “People's Science,” but it fits in with what we've been talking about. According to the latest EPA statistics, as of this writing, the U.S.'s annual output of toxic waste equals six 55-gallon barrels of toxics for every man, woman and child. Suppose you would like to make an impression on your local dump by, maybe, closing it down for a day. You could set up a “Fair Share Day.” What you do is bring all your members to the dump at the height of their busiest time of day. Your people could line up at the dump with all of their regular household toxics (e.g. Drano, bug spray, detergents, oils, etc.) to “make a fair share deposit on those six 55-gallon barrels.”

Industry and government say that you are responsible for this country's hazardous waste problem because of your consuming habits. Ask yourself, “how is it that each one of the people in my family is responsible for six barrels? Then, through Fair Share Day, you can take industry and government's logic and turn it around on them. It's also a good educational experience for your neighbors. It will cause them to think about this six-barrel question and also to understand the nature of the hazardous waste problem.



## Chapter 5

# Conclusion

Nobody, not an expert, not a lawyer, organizer, no one is going to come into your community and solve your problem for you. Experts are nothing more, or less, than a tool you can use in your effort. Tools are only as good as how you use them.

We've used experts a lot in our work; so have many of the groups in our network. We've made mistakes in the way we've used experts. So, probably, have you. We've also had some very good experiences.

This guidebook is intended to help you apply own good sense and experience to dealing with experts. In the final analysis, you're going to use your best judgement and decide what to do about this whole question of experts and technical information in the way that makes the best sense to you at the time, given your circumstances. You'll make your own

mistakes and have your own positive experiences. Then, you'll write your own new chapter to this guidebook. Our final wish to you is that you share these experiences with us so that we can all learn from each other.

### **Related CHEJ Guidebooks and Factpacks**

- *Fight to Win: A Leaders Manual*, by Lois Gibbs
- *User's Guide To Lawyers: How to get them to work for you so you're not working for them*
- *Should Your Group Incorporate?*
- *Reprints: Legal Corner*, by Ron Simon
- *How to Deal With a Proposed Facility*
- *Research Guide for Leaders*

“CHEJ is the strongest environmental organization today – the one that is making the greatest impact on changing the way our society does business.”

*Ralph Nader*

“CHEJ has been a pioneer nationally in alerting parents to the environmental hazards that can affect the health of their children.”

*New York, New York*

“Again, thank you for all that you do for us out here. I would have given up a long time ago if I had not connected with CHEJ!”

*Claremont, New Hampshire*



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