

EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

Vol. 21 No. 4 Winter 2003



**Building and Joining a Coalition
Persistence Pays Off In Calvert City, Kentucky
Green Flag School Program and
BE SAFE Initiative Launched!**

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

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“THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’”

Bob Dylan – 1964

Everyone's Backyard Goes Electronic

It's true . . . with time, comes change. At the Center for Health, Environment and Justice we are committed to not only supporting but also sharing these inspiring grassroots environmental fights and victories from across the nation. That commitment will never change! What we are changing is the way we share the stories. Yes, CHEJ has moved into the 21st century and will be making EB Y available on line to our supporters and members. You can now receive and share EB Y with a friend by visiting our website at www.chej.org.

Other changes have been made to address both the economic times and the need to practice what we preach. The printed version of the newsletter will still be on 100% recycled, processed chlorine free paper but will be on lighter stock and a few pages shorter to save dollars that can go toward our work with grassroots leaders. This is in keeping with our commitment to support communities faced with environmental health threats rather than dressing up our publication. Action Line, the state-by-state accounting of grassroots stories—what readers have told us they like best about EB Y—is still there, and still inspirational, as are the feature articles.

In an effort to make this adjustment a smooth one, we are asking that anyone who would prefer to receive EB Y electronically contact us via email at info@chej.org and we will begin sending you EB Y electronically. Paper versions will still be available, for those who prefer to receive theirs by mail. We will continue to published EB Y quarterly.

For Environmental Justice,

Lois Marie Gibbs

Please help us make your donations go further. Email us today at info@chej.org and start receiving EB Y electronically.

ABOUT CHEJ

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

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

Persistence Pays Off

By Stephen Lester

Corinne Whitehead and her son Earnie couldn't have been happier on October 22nd this past year. This was the day they learned that Liquid Waste Disposal (LWD), a hazardous waste incinerator that has been operating in Calvert City since 1978, was ordered by the Kentucky Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to shut its doors. The state had seen enough: repeated violations of both federal and state environmental laws and regulations, non-compliance with agreed orders, poor compliance history, improper changes in operational control, and a lack of acceptable financial assurance mechanisms.

The DEP concluded that "LWD cannot operate a hazardous waste incinerator facility and maintain compliance with the applicable statutes and regulations. LWD has violated multiple environmental laws and regulations, both state and federal, during operation under Interim Status. Operating records from 2003 inspections revealed increasingly poor combustion practices that indicate dangerous emissions to the residents of Marshall and Livingston Counties in Kentucky."

The Whiteheads and other activists in the Calvert City area have been saying this for years. Now the DEP has agreed. Finally.

LWD, which was sold to General Environmental Services in January of 2003, has a long and tragic history in Calvert City. It has been operating three incinerators with an "interim status" permit granted in 1980 by the US EPA. LWD was the last incinerator to operate under an interim status permit. Although many of LWD's violations over the years are summarized in the termination notice, it does not begin to capture the pain and suffering the community has experienced over the years.

One of the main reasons that the Coalition for Health Concern (CHC) was formed in 1985 was to address the high rates of cancer and other illnesses in the region. "It seems that everyone has cancer or knows someone with cancer" said Corinne Whitehead, president of CHC. Rates of acute lymphocytic leukemia and soft tissue sarcoma are high. The region also has high rates of lupus. The children are affected too. Many have cancer and birth defects. "We have a special school for these 'exceptional' children," says Whitehead.

For 18 years, the Coalition for Health Concern has been there with the community fighting to shut down LWD, get the BF Goodrich Superfund site cleaned up, or hold the US military accountable for the contamination at the Paducah Gasification site. For nearly two decades, CHC has been watching, filing complaints, writing letters, going to meetings, staging protests, talking to neighbors, state officials, federal and state representatives, the media, and to anyone who



Lois Gibbs and Corinne Whitehead in front of LWD in 1987.

would listen. Never during this time did they ever let LWD or the DEP forget that people living in the community were suffering and dying from the poisons that were coming out of the incinerators.

The community's story was captured on film in 1989 as part of a PBS Frontline feature called "Who's Killing Calvert City?" The lasting image from this film is of flames roaring from the incinerator under the cover of nightfall. Corinne Whitehead has often described LWD's operation as being "free and wild." Without bounds and out of control.

CHC did all they could to educate the community about the dangers not only of the LWD incinerators, but of the many other chemical and industrial plants operating in the city. CHC's "Hunt the Dump" campaign found 251 hazardous waste sites in the Calvert City area. CHC held workshops, distributed flyers, held community meetings, brought in experts, did a community health screening study, and spent countless hours reading and researching to better understand what they were facing. They never gave up hope. They were constantly driven by the cancers, birth defects, and other illnesses afflicting their friends and neighbors.

Things have not changed much at LWD over the years. In the October 2003 termination order, the DEP described the current conditions at the facility. "LWD does not maintain their facility and continues operating the incinerator when the air pollution control equipment is falling apart and leaking, releasing hazardous constituents into the environment and violating multiple state and federal laws. The condition of the equipment coupled with high opacity readings and excessive CO emissions illustrates LWD's propensity to continue to operate under poor combustion practices and disregard for compliance with Interim Status regulations."

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AMERICAN COMMUNITIES UNITE TO PREVENT HAZARDS LAUNCH BE SAFE INITIATIVE

Groups across the country launched the BE SAFE initiative this October to prevent hazardous exposures through a “better safe than sorry” precautionary approach. CHEJ is spearheading this effort in coalition with the Environmental Health Alliance to build a unified demand to change chemical policies. In the U.S., chemicals must be proven to cause harm almost to an absolute certainty before they are withdrawn from the market. Sometimes even if harm is absolute, corporations will argue a little harm is acceptable.

The following simple analogy explains the complicated process used by corporations to allow serious contamination into our environment and bodies.

Most people believe if you have a toddler and an open staircase it makes sense to be cautious and place a gate across the stairs to prevent the child from falling. U.S. chemical industries would first argue investing in the gate may not be necessary—instead they would do studies to determine how many toddlers would fall and the level of harm from each tumble down the stairs.

After finding toddlers would likely fall down the stairs and several children could be harmed, industry would still argue the gate costs too much. Instead, they would suggest that inexpensive pillows placed at the bottom of the staircase are ample protection.

BE SAFE was launched to promote precautionary policies or “gates across the stairs.” This precautionary approach shifts the questions we ask about environmental hazards from “what level of harm is acceptable?” to “how can we prevent harm?”

“There are a growing number of policies to prevent harm, such as taking lead out of consumer products and removing arsenic from playground materials,” said Lois Gibbs, CHEJ’s Executive Director. “Although the country has made progress, we have a long way to go. We need to institute this BE SAFE approach to protect people from harmful chemical exposures.”

A powerful base of diverse organizations are building support for BE SAFE to prevent pollution and environmental destruction *before* it happens, including the Learning Disabilities Association, Children’s Health Environmental Coalition, Sierra Club, Councils on Occupational Safety & Health, Physician and Breast Cancer groups. Groups are gathering thousands of endorsements for a BE SAFE Precautionary Platform to present to the newly elected President in 2005. To endorse the platform, visit www.besafenet.com. BE SAFE is also focusing on initiatives to require safe alternatives to chemicals, products and technologies that cause harm to peoples’ health.

The protection of children’s health is a priority focus and groups are calling on government and industry to heed early warning signs and prevent toxic exposures to children. “Today’s children are exposed regularly to a wide variety of household and environmental chemicals in the food they eat, the water they drink, and the air they breathe,” said Kathy Lawson of the Learning Disabilities Association of America. “We can let political candidates know that pollution prevention and health protection are our top issues.”

The campaign is working with over 200 groups on National Days of Action on priority issues and targeted state campaigns in ME, MN, MI, NC, NY and OR.

BE SAFE PUBLICATIONS

BE SAFE Publications (available at www.besafenet.com)

- BE SAFE partner groups have developed over 30 **Brochures** describing precautionary approaches to address common environmental health issues.
- An **Annotated List** of local, state, national and international policies based on the precautionary approach.
- **Samples** of local and state precautionary policies.

SUPPORT BE SAFE

- ✓ **Endorse the BE SAFE Platform** at www.besafenet.com.
- ✓ **Ask your Friends to Endorse the Platform** with an email alert or leaflet.
- ✓ **Distribute Campaign Leaflets** that can be downloaded from the website.
- ✓ **Hold a House Party** to help spread the word.
- ✓ **Make a Donation** of \$35, \$50 or \$100.
- ✓ **Your Vote Counts.** For information on environmental voting records, contact www.sierraclub.org or www.lcv.org. To register to vote, contact www.earthday.net.

Contact Environmental Health Alliance
c/o CHEJ, at 703-237-2249.
Email chej@chej.org or visit www.besafenet.com

Building and Joining a Coalition

By Lois Marie Gibbs

“If you like everyone at the table – you have a club not a coalition”

A coalition is a group of organizations who work together for a common goal. An individual membership organization cannot technically be a coalition, although the term is used more loosely in common conversation.

Coalitions come in a variety of different forms. They can be permanent or temporary, single or multi-issued, geographically defined, limited to certain constituencies (such as a coalition of incinerator groups), or a combination of a number of different groups.

Coalitions are only as strong as each of its member groups. If the coalition consists of 10 groups each of whom have few or no members, you end up with a coalition defined by an equation of $10 \times 0 = 0$. However, if a coalition consists of leaders from strong organizations with an active membership base, the math is quite different, as is the level of power the coalition has to achieve its goals. Therefore, you need to build a local group before you enter into or establish a coalition. If you have not yet built a strong group, then focus on doing that first.

Unifying issue. Those who join the coalition need to have some organizational self interest. Each organization brings its own history, structure, agenda, values, culture, leadership and relationships to a coalition. It is important for all members of a coalition to understand each other in order to build on their strengths and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

There Are Many Advantages to Working in a Coalition

Win on an issue which you could not have won alone. For example, changing chemical policies from a control to a prevention approach (which is what the BE SAFE campaign is advocating) cannot be achieved by a single group. An individual group may be able to stop a chemical release or exposure by shutting down a facility. However, to eliminate exposures on a nationwide level, we need to go beyond a single site. We need to undertake massive consumer education, develop market incentives through consumer purchases, and assist the labor movement in pressuring industries to protect jobs, workers' health and adopt safe disposal practices.

Build a lasting base. A single group has power, but joining together with other organizations increases that power. When groups working on different issue areas unite, it not only creates more power but it

helps to broaden the vision of each member of the many injustices that exist, how they are connected, and how, collectively, groups can create systemic social change.

Increase the impact of an individual organization's effort. Not only does your involvement help the coalition win, but it also makes the work you do more effective. There are more people who have a understanding of your issues, and more people who can assist your group in some way.

Increase the resources available. If the coalition's issue is central to your organization, your group may directly benefit from additional members and may share some of the resources other coalition members have, such as office space, meeting space, printing equipment or funding.

Broaden scope. A coalition may provide the opportunity for your group to work on state or national issues, making the scope of your work more far-reaching.

There Are Also Many Disadvantages to Working in a Coalition

Could distract from other work if you are not careful. Your group's work as part of a coalition could take too much time away from local efforts if leaders are not careful. If that happens, not only will the local work not be as successful, but it weakens the coalition's work as well. Weak members can't deliver.

Too many compromises. To keep a coalition together, it is often necessary to play to the least common denominator, especially when deciding tactics. Groups that like more confrontational, highly visible tactics may feel that the more subdued tactics of a coalition are not exciting enough to activate their members.

Inequality of power. The range of experience, resources and power within a coalition can create internal problems. One group, one vote does not always sit well with groups with a wide range of power and resources. Your coalition needs to define this power relationship to address the bigger/richer groups versus the smaller resource-poor groups.

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ACTION LINE

CALIFORNIA

Happy Birthday to **Tri-Valley Cares** founded in 1983 to monitor activities at the nearby Lawrence Livermore National Nuclear Weapons Laboratory. Tri-Valley Cares stopped the DOE and Livermore labs from building a massive toxic and radioactive waste incinerator and then shut down the Livermore Lab's existing incinerator.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

CHEJ joined other groups and lawmakers in calling for a reinstatement of the "polluter pays" principle, which holds polluters accountable for their own toxic waste mistakes. CHEJ's Director, Lois Gibbs, spoke at a press conference on Capitol Hill along with Senators Boxer, Clinton, Corzine, Jeffords, Lautenberg, Biden, and Rep. Solis. October 1st marked the first day since the federal Superfund program began in 1980 that it will be funded entirely by taxpayer dollars. Polluters haven't paid the Superfund tax since 1995, enjoying a \$4 million per day tax break. The funds are exhausted and taxpayers will now have to shoulder the burden.

FLORIDA

Parents in Tamarac are organizing to shut down a school that has tested positive for toxic mold. Parents are hoping not only to help their school, but to work with the five other schools in the district who face similar problems. Over one third of the students in each school are sick. The group and the **Healthy Living Foundation** in neighboring Palm Beach have met with state legislators to discuss legislation on school indoor air quality (IAQ) in Florida.

LOUISIANA

Congratulations to the **Louisiana Bucket Brigade** who received the Stewardship Award from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Ann Rolf, founding Director of the Bucket Brigade, commented, "It is gratifying to win an award, which of course goes really to all of the community members with whom we work!"

MAINE

The Penobscot Nation is challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's decision to put Lincoln Pulp & Paper Company on a list of Superfund sites. The tribe, which alleges dioxin pollution in the Penobscot River has caused high cancer rates among Indian Island residents, contends the decision was based on politics, not science. The decision is viewed as favorable for Eastern Pulp & Paper, the mill's parent company, which is mired in bankruptcy. CHEJ has been providing organizing and technical assistance to the Penobscot Nation around dioxin exposure since 1997.

MASSACHUSETTS

The Boston City Council passed a Dioxin Resolution in October that will reduce people's exposure to dioxin by establishing purchasing guidelines for the city that phase out products such as those made from vinyl plastic and favor materials that do not produce dioxin. The resolution, the first of its kind on the East Coast, passed by unanimous vote. At a public hearing local residents came head to head with industry representatives who were flown in from across the country and Canada to testify against the dioxin resolution. Those testifying in favor of the resolution represented firefighters, Vietnam veterans, cancer patients and many other groups. The **Environmental Health Fund** spearheaded this effort.

MICHIGAN

In August, the Central Wayne Energy Recovery Facility in Westland defaulted on an \$80 million bond and shut down. The operator attributed the decision to the expense of retrofitting rather than on the consistent community pressure that had been applied over the years to shut down this incinerator. A local leader who had fought years earlier to keep this incinerator from opening, got elected as a local city councilor where she has continued to fight against the incinerator and to support local efforts from within the government. These efforts paid off.

MINNESOTA

Congratulations to the **Southeast Minnesotans for Environmental Protection** who successfully stopped a proposed plan to build a tire incinerator in Preston. More than 175 people came to a local fundraiser to show their support. Using CHEJ's advice and assistance the group organized and became politically active. They quickly recognized that their battle is a political fight, not a scientific one. Two lawsuits have also been filed to help keep the tire burner from being built any time soon.

The **Indigenous Environmental Network** located in Bemidji and **Heal Our Mother Earth**, located in Cass Lake got mixed messages from the EPA who announced at a public meeting in November that dioxin had been found in 6 locations at the St. Regis paper company Superfund site at levels that exceed the government's emergency removal level of 1 part per billion (ppb). However, none of the samples collected from the 43 homes located on the Superfund site had dioxin levels that require immediate removal. The EPA plans to cover and install fencing around the areas that exceeded the 1 ppb standard. CHEJ's Science Director Steve Lester and Organizing

Director Michele Roberts visited the Cass Lake community in early summer and held several public meetings and workshops to educate and help organize the community to address the contamination at this site.

NEW JERSEY

Residents of South Hampton are getting organized to address the contamination of their drinking water wells with lead, mercury and tetrahydrofuran (THF) from a private industrial landfill in adjacent Tabernacle Township. The county told the residents that the levels of THF exceed the "safe" standard and have sent letters to residents advising them not to drink their tap water. The landfill operator has pledged to clean up the site if he is granted a permit to begin a mining operation there instead.

Keep Blairstown Beautiful is organizing to identify the source of MTBE, benzene and toluene in their drinking water. The source appears to be a fuel oil company that has had several major gasoline spills. The company, of course, denies that they are the source and is quick to identify other industrial sites in the area. KBB is looking to have more groundwater tests done to track down the source.

NEW YORK

Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County continue to vigorously oppose a plan by Integrated Waste Systems (IWS) to construct what would be one of the largest landfills in the US. CCCC has held off IWS for over 5 years. Public comments are due in January, 2004 on IWS's proposal to build a new 17million ton, 3,000 ton-per-day landfill in the town of Farmersville. Last December, IWS filed for bankruptcy to avoid foreclosure for failure to pay property taxes on the Farmersville site for over three years. In 1998, Southern Tier Waste Services purchased IWS for \$1.00. There is no indication that either company has any employees, and it is rumored that IWS's environmental engineering firm is preparing the application materials on a contingent fee basis. IWS is expected to sell the permit if issued. The company has ties to Casella Waste Systems, which purchased IWS's Schultz C&D Landfill in Cheektowaga, NY.

Parents Who Are Fighting for a Healthy and Safe School was organized by parents concerned about the effect on the health of their children of an ongoing renovation project at the Starpoint school in Lockport. Students are inhaling dust and coming home with headaches and nausea. Parents are fighting to stop the construction during the school day and get partitions installed that separate the students from the work areas.

ACTION LINE

The **Kandid Coalition** and the **Citizens' Environmental Coalition** reported that they found high levels of methylene chloride in the air at the fence line of Kodak's Rochester facility. Air samples collected by CEC using EPA-approved "buckets" identified 12 chemicals in the air around Kodak Park, including methylene chloride, which was found at levels ten times higher than the state's ambient air guideline. Methylene chloride, a neurotoxin and potential carcinogen, is used in huge quantities by Kodak at this facility. "I have lived a few blocks from Kodak Park for decades, and today I have advanced prostate cancer," said Charlie Roemer, a Rochester resident who lives near Kodak. "Now that we know that levels of methylene chloride are above state guidelines, Kodak and New York State need to take more steps to protect our health." The "Bucket Brigade" is an easy-to-use air sampling device housed inside a 5-gallon plastic bucket. Using these specially designed buckets, citizens can measure everyday pollution levels or respond to accidental releases at a chemical facility.

NORTH CAROLINA

The citizens of Columbus County have been fighting the proposal of the Riegel Ridge Mega Landfill for over six years and have finally gotten the justice they deserve. The NC Department of Environmental and Natural Resources rejected the application for a 138-acre landfill, which would have threatened a unique and environmentally sensitive wetland and ecological preserve known as the Green Swamp. Congratulations to **Friends of the Green Swamp** who are keeping a close eye on plans for redesigns of the landfill and are ready to reorganize in the event developers and politicians start talking again.

OHIO

The city of Columbus owns the site of the dismantled Columbus garbage incinerator, once the largest source of dioxin emissions in the country. It now wants to burn tires at the site using a pyrolysis technology from Taiwan. The company has no track record and no emissions data to share. It keeps making the claim that no dioxins can form because of the lack of oxygen. **Parkridge Area Residents Take Action**, who succeeded in shutting down the incinerator, is being reactivated to fight this new proposal and they're not buying any of the city's or the company's claims. At one meeting, 150 people turned out to protest this plan. According to Teresa Mills, long time member of PARTA, "there were signs everywhere. During the 30 minutes of OEPA presentation we held up the "keep it simple stupid" sign and about 20 KISS signs. We had children walking around the room holding up signs which were

bigger than they were. The mayor of Grove City [located next to the incinerator] shamed the OEPA for not having microphones for the citizens to ask questions. When OEPA called on her to ask her question she walked straight up to the OEPA and took the microphone away from them to ask her question. She kept repeating her question over and over without an answer from the agency. When she handed the microphone back to the agency the citizens gave her a standing ovation." The residents gained another victory when the city council of Grove City voted unanimously to oppose the issuance of the permit.

Citizens for Responsible Destruction of Chemical Weapons in Dayton succeeded in fending off the military's proposal to dispose of VX (a nerve gas and a chemical of mass destruction) into a Jefferson Township landfill, and to dispose of runoff from the site into the septic system. The waste would have been brought in from as far away as 200 miles (Newport, IN). The Army had no evacuation plan and no emergency response plan in the event of an accident during treatment. Last summer, the group, which had already developed 18 resolutions against the facility, called CHEJ to discuss community organizing strategies. In the course of this fight, the group discovered many pollution problems at the plant and they will continue to work with the neighborhood to clean it up.

PENNSYLVANIA

Coalition Against Incineration in Harrisburg is fighting to keep the PA's DEP from building two municipal solid waste combustion units to replace the closed municipal waste-to-energy plant. The units will have the capacity to burn 800 tons of trash per day. CAI held a vigil at the entrance of the incinerator to commemorate its June 18th closing.

RHODE ISLAND

In November, CHEJ's Executive Director Lois Gibbs, met with residents of North Tiverton where high levels of heavy metals and carcinogens, including arsenic, cyanide and lead, were found more than a year ago in neighborhood soil. The state Department of Health has told them not to let their children play in their yards and a moratorium on digging has been imposed on the neighborhood. A gas company used the area as a landfill during the 1960s for hazardous waste from its coal gasification plant. The group is protesting a recent report by the gas company stating that no additional cleanup is necessary on more than half of the affected properties.

TENNESSEE

Tennessee Citizens for the Environment (TCE) of Dickson have been trying to find the cause of a cluster of babies born with cleft palate. The residents discovered that their groundwater was contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE), a toxic solvent, from a nearby leaking landfill. The government is skeptical about the cause of this cleft palate cluster and private attorneys are trying to get the citizens who are being affected to pursue class action lawsuits. The citizens are frustrated and want answers to their questions about the high incidence of cleft palate babies. CHEJ has been helping them identify options for conducting a health study.

VERMONT

CHEJ's Executive Director Lois Gibbs met with local leaders from a group in Clarendon called **FIRST**. A clustering of children with leukemia was discovered through a local school there. Several potential sources of exposure are being investigated, including a benzene plume, sludge that was spread on land near the school, and heavy metal pits. After less than a year of organizing, the group has convinced the state to give them a \$10,000 technical assistant grant to review and interpret the data as it is generated.

Residents Concerned About OMYA are concerned about potential contamination of their water wells as well as dust, noise, and airborne contaminants from a mining operation located near their homes. OMYA, a Swiss corporation that operates a calcium carbonate mining and processing facility in Florence, was exempted from the state's solid waste disposal laws by the Environmental Conservation Commissioner in keeping with Governor Douglas' campaign pledge to make Vermont more "business friendly." In support of RCO, Vermont Law School's Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic recently filed comments opposing the Commission's decision, urging them to bring the facility into compliance with the solid waste act and other environmental requirements. Over the past 25 years, OMYA has dumped over 40 million cubic yards, roughly 3 million tons, of tailings in quarries on the property.

VIRGINIA

CHEJ has been working with the **Rayon Park Association** in Richmond to help them address contamination caused by a US military site located in the community. The county completed a health study in June that did not find elevated health problems, though the study had numerous flaws. This despite the fact that dozens of people have been diagnosed with cancer and other illnesses. CHEJ staff visited

ACTION LINE

the site and spoke to the community about the need to organize and hold the military accountable. Many residents of the ninety homes in the neighborhood fear that chemicals dumped at the center are making them sick.

WASHINGTON

Parents in Kingston have formed the **Coalition for Environmentally Safe Schools** to block their school district from building a new school on an old Nike missile site. The site was used to build Ajax and Hercules missiles, and is partly covered by wetlands. Neighbors have found contaminants in their drinking water and are worried about increased rates of health problems. They are particularly worried about a chemical called ammonium perchlorate, an oxidizing component in missile fuel that can disrupt the endocrine system by inhibiting iodide uptake by the thyroid. Local leaders are asking the school board to take a "better safe than sorry" approach.

WISCONSIN

An alliance of remarkable breadth in Wisconsin has won a 27-year fight to block a proposed copper and zinc mine at the headwaters of the Wolf River. The threats to the high groundwater table, to the Wolf River's tourism economy, and to the fisheries and wild rice beds relied upon by Native Americans helped

coalesce this diverse alliance. The groups participating in this effort included Native American nations, sportfishing groups, environmentalists, unionists, rural residents and urban students. Grassroots organizing, both door-to-door and over the internet, enabled the alliance to stave off the proposal for decades while the mine site changed ownership several times. The alliance got a statewide moratorium on sulfide mining passed in 1998 that blocked the mine's opening. Now, two American Indian tribes have bought the land and the mineral rights to the property, using their casino revenue, effectively putting an end to this long-term fight.

CANADA

In October, CHEJ participated in the **Western Mining Activists Network** Conference in British Columbia. WMAN consists of activists from the United States, Canada and Indigenous Communities whose mission is to reform mining practices.

Inco, one of Canada's worst mining polluters, was the target of a worldwide protest in October. For the first time in the company's history, people united across the globe to oppose further environmental and health impacts due to dirty mining practices. Aside from communities affected by pollution in Canada, communities from Indonesia, Guatemala, New York, England, Australia, Japan and Wales participated in a variety of events to let people know about the damage Inco has caused from the release of toxic pollutants. This collective effort allowed communities to demonstrate to Inco, and all dirty corporations around the globe, how powerful a message from concerned citizens can be. *



Western Mining Activist Network Conference Oct. 3-5, 2003
Britannia Mine Tour, BC, Canada.

LOVE CANAL - 25TH ANNIVERSARY

The 25th anniversary of Love Canal was marked by events in western New York this summer and in five New England states in the fall. The NY activities were organized by CHEJ and a coalition of environmental, community and labor groups. Events were held in Niagara Falls at the Love Canal landfill and at "Love Canals" of today in communities in Buffalo, Cheektowaga, and Lewiston/Porter. The events were extraordinary and were instrumental in raising awareness of environmental problems in these communities. Labor played a significant role in raising the issue of workers exposed on the front lines. The events concluded with an evening reception at the PACE Union Hall in Niagara Falls. Whenever labor and environmental health advocates come together to share space, messaging and solidarity, it creates a powerful force for change.

The anniversary activities then moved to the northeast where events organized by the Toxics Action Center were held in VT, ME, MA, RI, and CT. These events focused on lessons learned from Love Canal and the BE SAFE initiative of preventing exposures to environmental hazards. Coverage of the events, which was significant, included a two page spread in Newsweek, three CNN reports, an interview on Maine Public Radio and dozens of stories on radio and in local newspapers.

A book commemorating the *25 Years of Citizen Activism* since Love Canal was published in conjunction with these events. Copies are available from CHEJ for \$10 plus \$2 postage. Contact info@chej or 703-237-2249 to get a copy of this collector's item.

COALITION BUILDING

Continued from page 5

Individual organizations may not get credit. If all activities are done in the name of the coalition, groups that contribute a lot often feel they do not get enough credit.

Clearly, not all experiences are positive, but almost everyone agrees that when there is an important shared goal, the benefits can outweigh the problems. So how do we emphasize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages?

Building coalition members is different than building a local group. In a coalition, you don't develop leadership. Rather, you need to figure out how to work with the existing leaders from member organizations and help them participate fully. What they may not know is how to work with each other, and how to function in a coalition so that it builds both the coalition and their own organization. Often you will have to demonstrate how to do this.

Organizations bring different strengths and weaknesses to a coalition.

As long as each member understands and accepts what other members bring, problems should be minimal. For example, one organization may be able to contribute large sums of money but be unable to turn out its membership, while the opposite might be true of another member organization. Both can be essential to the success of the coalition effort and should be valued for the resources they bring.

Recruitment. To recruit people to a coalition, you need to take similar steps to those that you took to recruit members to your local organization. However, you need to think "outside the box" of your natural friends and allies. If you look, walk, talk and dress like everyone at the table, then you don't have a coalition, you have a club. Meet with prospective partners one on one or go to their meetings. Don't just expect them to come to your meetings and be disappointed when they don't. A great organizer, Tim Sampson, once said, "The flowers of organizational relationships grow from personal interest, kindness and cultivation."

You need structure. How will decisions get made? Who can speak for the coalition? How will the coalition be funded? These decisions must be made collectively, up front, in order for the coalition to get off the ground.

Identify areas of agreement. It's rare that all members of any coalition agree on all issues. You need to agree to disagree on some issues and stay focused on the ones in which you do agree. If the disagreements are so fundamental that they interfere with the goals of the coalition, then working together may just not be possible. You need to recognize those groups that fundamentally disagree with the coalition's main strategies immediately and flag them before the disagreements infect the workings of the entire coalition.

DIOXIN 2003

Organizers Participate In Scientific Conference On Dioxin

CHEJ and the Alliance for Safe Alternatives (ASA) organized a special session at the Dioxin 2003, an annual international scientific conference. The session, highlighted new strategies for setting policies to regulate dioxin and other persistent toxic chemicals that emphasize a precautionary approach to managing chemical exposures and thus risks. Just prior to this conference, CHEJ and ASA convened a two-day "skillshare" that brought together 36 key leaders from around the country who are working on state-level policy efforts to regulate chemicals. Key discussion points included coordinating efforts to pass state purchasing policies and laws to phase out persistent toxic chemicals and building off the progressive European chemical policy initiative called REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorization of Chemicals).

Keep out of internal battles. Never become involved in the internal politics of any coalition member organization! You could end up losing because you have to work with the winners, who may resent your advice and meddling in their organizational business.

Strategies and tactics. When developing tactics for a coalition, it is usually necessary to work towards the center of the groups. At certain points in an issue campaign, the coalition's strategy may be to encourage the appropriate organizations to act independently and in their own names, utilizing more militant tactics. This can make the coalition appear more reasonable. Such "independent" action does not and should not have to receive the consent of all coalition partners.

Conclusion

Get ready to change the country. Coalition work is important, but it is not easy. Coalition members will be in conflict over strategies or funding. But look at what we stand to win with a successful bottom-up campaign. We get the beginning of a rebuilt democracy based on the coordinated efforts of people who have figured out how to limit corporate influence and maximize public participation.

We leave behind a safer, cleaner world for our children. We leave behind a political system where citizens will be heard with clearer voices than have been heard in the past. We will bring democracy back to the people and take power away from the corporations.

*An expanded paper on Building and Joining Coalitions can be found on our website at www.chej.org. **

Green Flag Program Gets Under Way

During the week of September 16th, The Child Proofing Our Communities Campaign launched its Green Flag Program with media events in eight states. At each event, a Green Flag Program representative presented an award to a local school that had achieved success in investigating environmental health issues in their schools. These events have already galvanized the Green Flag teams and environmental programs at the participating schools. We hope that media coverage generated by these events will encourage many more schools to participate in this program.

Schools honored in September included:

- Thornton Friends Middle School (Silver Spring, Maryland)
- Herndon High School (Herndon, Virginia)
- French Elementary School (Jackson, Mississippi)
- Huckleberry Hill Elementary, Southeast Elementary and Villa Maria Educational Center (Hartford, Connecticut)
- Southeast Elementary School (Mansfield Center, Connecticut)
- Independence Middle School (Jupiter, Florida)
- Lewis Cass Technical High School (Detroit, Michigan)
- Fernangeles and Aldama Elementary and Sun Valley and Millikan Middle Schools (Los Angeles, California)
- Churchill High School (Eugene, Oregon)

A Green Flag award was presented to the Douglass Alternative School in Wilmington, Delaware in October and to the Gale Academy in Chicago in December.

Read more about the Green Flag Program at: <http://www.greenflagschools.org>



French Elementary School in Jackson, MS receiving a Green Flag award for its outstanding environmental work.

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

Continued from page 3

DEP inspector Shannon Graves described what she saw to a *Paducah Sun* reporter. "It's very alarming to me because there's no way to protect the environment if you don't know what's coming out of the stack." Graves described numerous containers of hazardous waste that she saw, found incinerator ash in furnace rooms and at one point witnessed waste leaking "like a waterfall" from a pipe that had built up too much pressure and had to be shut down.

The fight to shut down LWD isn't over for CHC. The owner filed for Chapter 11 reorganization in federal Bankruptcy Court in June and has filed an appeal with the bankruptcy judge hoping to overturn the state's termination order. LWD argues that it will spend \$7 million to "fix-up" the incinerators and that it needs to stay open to pay off its debt and to keep its workers employed. At one time nearly 140 people worked at the facility. Now there are only about 70 jobs.

Earnie Whitehead argued at a public hearing in July of 2003 that LWD has repeatedly been given second chances and opportunities to start over since 1988. They've had plenty of opportunities and time to correct problems and they haven't done it. It's well past the time to shut down this facility and keep it closed.

For now, CHC has achieved a major victory. The DEP has finally acknowledged the risks and health problems that the community has been telling them about for years. This validation provides a strong tool for CHC to move forward with to shut down the incinerator and clean up the site. We congratulate CHC for their victory, but more for their dedication, hard work, and perseverance over the years. Their victory shows how long it takes in some cases and how persistent grassroots efforts can pay off. It clearly shows that you should never give up on what you believe is right.

*Editors Note: As we went to press, we learned that the bankruptcy judge had ruled in favor of the company allowing them to continue to operate until January 30, 2004. If they have no buyer by then, they must comply with the DEP termination order and shut down. We find it outrageous that a federal judge would override a state health protective order to shut down this facility. **

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WITH SPECIAL THANKS

CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations to support our work between March 8, 2003 and November 30, 2003. All gifts, regardless of their size, are very much appreciated.

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White Lung Association
Women's Community Cancer Project



BE SAFE

BE SAFE is a nationwide campaign to build support for the precautionary approach to prevent pollution and environmental destruction *before* it happens. The Center for Health, Environment & Justice is spearheading this effort in coalition with over 300 organizations and 500 individuals in the Environmental Health Alliance to build a unified demand for preventive, protective policies in America.

■ **Support a Better Safe Than Sorry Approach**

Everyone needs a protected, safe community, workplace and environment. Support the BE SAFE precautionary approach because it makes sense to protect our children from chemical exposures, prevent pollution, promote the use of safe technologies, and provide a clean environment we can all enjoy.

■ **Prevent Harm and Put Safety First**

The BE SAFE Platform includes the four principles of the precautionary approach: Heed Early Warnings, Put Safety First, Exercise Democracy, and Choose the Safest Solution. You can show support by endorsing the BE SAFE Platform today. Be counted when we deliver this national petition to the White House in 2005.

Join BE SAFE

**Endorse the BE SAFE
Precautionary Platform
and
Ask your friends to endorse
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See Story Inside on Kick-off of BE SAFE Initiative

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