

# EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

Vol. 26 No.3 Fall 2008

## The Final White Wash At Love Canal



Organize to Protect Your Community



The Journal of the Grassroots Environmental Movement

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

Center for Health, Environment and Justice

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**On the Cover:**  
**The Final White Wash**  
**Streetlight Illustration**

# A WIN-WIN FOR POLITICIANS AND COMMUNITIES

Who would have thought that during this presidential campaign we would be looking at a woman, an African American man, and white man as viable candidates! This is truly one of the most exciting election years in a very long time. Even if you haven't been so motivated in a long time, this is the year to get out and vote.

In addition to the presidential race, many members of Congress are up for election as well. Over 400 seats will be filled this November. This is the time to attend the rallies and ask the candidates where they stand on your issues. Those running for Congress are looking for attention, since the presidential candidates are getting all the attention. It's a perfect time and opportunity to raise the issues you care about in a public forum to educate others and to find out where the candidates stand.

If you are strategic, you can use this opportunity to advance, if not win, on the issues you care about. We did this at Love Canal during both the governor's race in 1978 and the presidential race in 1980. We made the problems of Love Canal a political test for the candidates in both these races. We shadowed the Governor, targeting his \$1,000-a-plate fundraisers, handing out flyers, forcing the Governor to respond and calm the fears that we would negatively impact his campaign. Relocation of part of the community resulted from this effort.

In October 1980, President Carter was running for re-election. Because of the intense pressure and accountability that a small working class community put on his campaign, he visited Love Canal and eventually appropriated the funds to move the remaining 700 families.

Love Canal is not alone in achieving action during political campaigns. In 1996, residents in Pensacola, FL who fought for 10 years to relocate the 358 African American families who lived in a dioxin-contaminated neighborhood used the presidential election too. With the help of CHEJ, the community placed a full page ad in *USA Today*, asking President Clinton to stand behind his words that no child should live next to a Superfund site. The ad was hand delivered to Mrs. Clinton at a public event in Florida. Less than a week later the entire community was given notice that they would be relocated.

In each case, it was a win, not a problem, for the candidate. President Clinton got to talk about how he supported protecting families, communities of color, from being victimized by pollution. President Carter stood with me on stage and talked about how he cares about family values, community, and how he will pass a law (Superfund) so that other American families will not have to suffer like the families of Love Canal.

So take advantage of the election season and make your issue the candidate's issue – you will be doing them a favor.

For a Healthy Environment,  
Lois Marie Gibbs

## ABOUT CHEJ

CHEJ mentors a movement building healthier communities by empowering people to prevent harm caused by chemical and toxic threats. We accomplish our work through programs focusing on different types of environmental health threats. CHEJ also works with communities to empower groups by providing the tools, direction, and encouragement they need to advocate for human health, to prevent harm and to work towards environmental integrity. Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for families living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ 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 at <http://www.chej.org>.

# THE FINAL WHITE WASH AT LOVE CANAL

August 2, 2008 was the 30th Anniversary of the Love Canal crisis. This was the day in 1978 when the New York State Commissioner of Health declared a State of Emergency at Love Canal and ordered the 99th Street School closed and a cleanup plan undertaken immediately. He also recommended that pregnant women and children under the age of two should move away from the area immediately surrounding the Love Canal landfill.

CHEJ used this date to celebrate many victories, acknowledge the existence of Love Canals of Today, and expose the deliberate failure of the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) to scientifically assess the health impact of living at Love Canal. On the morning of this anniversary, at a press conference in front of the fence that surrounds the Love Canal landfill in Niagara Falls, NY, CHEJ released *NYS Department of Health's Final White Wash*, a critique of the state's follow-up study on the residents of Love Canal.

This study evaluated a small number of health outcomes in 6,181 Love Canal residents and found serious adverse health effects including increased rates of birth defects, and higher than expected rates of kidney and bladder cancer. These findings were made despite an inherently flawed study design that biases the results towards *underestimating* the health outcomes. CHEJ is now calling on the NYSDOH to notify former residents of the adverse health effects found.

## FLAWS IN STATE HEALTH STUDY

The Final White Wash identified the following flaws in the state's health study:

- NYSDOH only collected health data from computer generated registries that did not begin recording data until **AFTER** many illnesses had occurred at Love Canal.
- The NY State birth defects registry began in 1983 three years **AFTER** families were moved. In 1978 and 1979, 56% of the children born at Love Canal were born with birth defects. Adverse reproductive outcomes including birth defects were the basis for two evacuation orders by the state in 1978 and 1979. None of these birth defects were included in the state study because the registry didn't begin until 1983.
- The NY State cancer registry did not begin until 1979, just one year before families were moved. In 1978 and 1979 twelve women on a single street at Love Canal reported having breast cancer. None of these



photo by Suzie Canales.

Lois Gibbs leads tour of Love Canal landfill as part of 30th Anniversary events.

women's cancers were included in the study because the cancer registry didn't start until 1979, after these women were diagnosed.

- There were almost 900 families living at Love Canal, but the study only looked at residents that filled out a questionnaire in 1978 or 1979. No one knows what portion of the community the NYSDOH study represents.
- A significant portion of the study population (17%) left the state and was not included in the study. By 1996, 25% of the study group had left the state. None of the health problems these people developed after they left the state were included in the study.

## KEY FINDINGS OF STATE HEALTH STUDY

Despite these major design flaws, the state's health study still found the following:

- The rate of birth defects in Love Canal residents was elevated compared to two comparison groups - New York State excluding New York City and Niagara County.
- Children born at Love Canal were twice as likely as other Niagara County children to be born with a birth defect. This finding is statistically significant.
- Children born to mothers who lived on the Canal at some time during their pregnancy are at higher risk from low birth weight, pre-term births and small for gestational age births than those conceived after the mother left the Canal area.

Continued on page 10



# BE SAFE Campaign

*BE SAFE is a nationwide initiative to build support for the precautionary approach to prevent pollution and environmental destruction before it happens.*

## Help Your Town Go Green with a New Green Purchasing Kit

**B**E SAFE's brand-new *Green Purchasing How-To Kit* is being released this fall to help people pass local and state policies to green the marketplace and promote safer products. These policies require agencies to purchase environmentally-friendly products which provide major health and environmental benefits and substantial cost savings.

The kit contains model policies, such as ordinances passed by cities around the country. It also includes sample news releases, reports and a valuable list of resources on all aspects of green purchasing. From start to finish, this publication walks the reader through each step in developing and passing a policy and includes a campaign timetable. BE SAFE will feature the kit on our new website available this Fall at [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com). If you want to receive the announcement for the kit, please contact BE SAFE at [annerabe@msn.com](mailto:annerabe@msn.com) or 518-732-4538.

## Coming Soon

### Full Cost Accounting Report Uncovers True Price of Cleaning Up Nuclear Waste

**C**HEJ and a coalition of local and statewide environmental groups obtained funds from the New York State Legislature to commission an independent *Full Cost Accounting* study on the various options for cleaning up the West Valley federal nuclear waste site, located south of Buffalo, NY. This new study compares the true costs of excavating and safely storing radioactive waste versus monitoring the leaking buried waste for thousands of years. The West Valley site's radioactive waste will be radioactive for over 10,000 years, and it is buried in a region that will erode into the Great Lakes within a thousand year range. The report will be released in the fall of 2008. If you want to receive the announcement, see BE SAFE contact above.

## Victory! U.S. Government Cutting Toxic Phthalates Out of Kids' Toys!

**I**n yet another victory for CHEJ's PVC Campaign, President Bush has signed legislation to ban toxic phthalates and lead in kids' toys all across the country. While CHEJ advocated for a stronger bill, it's still a major step towards protecting children from dangerous chemicals in toys.

In June, CHEJ Science Director Stephen Lester testified before Congress in support of the bill, and CHEJ's Betty the BE SAFE Ducky visited a Chicago news conference to encourage legislators to pass this important bill. CHEJ was part of a large coalition of groups including the Breast Cancer Fund and U.S. PIRG that worked to secure this major victory.

## Back-to-School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies Released!

**I**f you're behind on your back-to-school shopping or need to pick up a few last-minute items, be sure to check out CHEJ's new **Back-to-School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies!** CHEJ created this guide to empower you to make smarter, healthier shopping choices for your family and the environment. The guide lists the most common back-to-school supplies made out of PVC plastic and provides safer PVC-free alternatives.

### Why Shop for PVC-Free School Supplies?

Children's school supplies, such as lunchboxes, backpacks and binders, are often made out of PVC, the poison plastic. PVC products often contain harmful chemicals such as phthalates and lead which can leach out to the surface of the product or evaporate into the air over time posing unnecessary dangers to children.

Get your free copy of CHEJ's *Back-to-School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies* by visiting CHEJ's website at [www.besafenet.com/pvc](http://www.besafenet.com/pvc).

BY RON DAVIS, CHEJ STAFF ORGANIZER

# STAND TOGETHER OR FALL APART

## ORGANIZE TO PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY

In town after town, we are seeing communities being misused and abused for the benefit of corporate interests. Public agencies created to protect the public are being overpowered to act in the best interest of the corporations. In one state, a governor has identified the corporations as the state's "customers," leading one observer to ask, "where do the people fit into that configuration?"



When harm or the potential for harm is identified in a community, many of us think that our elected leaders will act in the best interest of the community, but more and more often, the actions of our elected officials fail us and erode our confidence. For example, in a small town in Illinois, a very wealthy company wants to build an asphalt plant in a quarry, with emissions being released at ground level within 300 feet of a residential neighborhood. Upon learning of this proposal, many local residents opposed the plan, thinking that no reasonable person would think that this location made sense. They also believed that their elected officials would see the situation as they did and look out for their interests over the company's interests. The community organized and turned out plenty of people to the city council meetings. They carried signs and spoke in opposition to the asphalt plant permit, but they didn't realize how much the system was stacked against them.

The three immediate past mayors of the town have worked for this company and supported the plan. Two of them currently work for the company, and the third is now the director of the state EPA. When it came time for the city council to vote on the permit, the mayor cast the tie-breaking vote by voting to support the permit request.

Making matters worse, the city council then voted to limit attendance at council meetings. People could only attend if there were seats available in the meeting room. No standing room.

The officials in this town seem to have forgotten who elected them, who they represent, and whose interests they should

be protecting. As is the case in so many communities, people place their faith in their elected officials to do the right thing and to fight the fight for them. Instead, one of the most important lessons that people learn is that they cannot rely on elected officials to represent the community's best interests and that the community needs to hold elected officials accountable if they hope to succeed in achieving their goals. Many communities also learn that once elected to office,

representatives spend most of their time working on getting re-elected and making friends with those who can help them get re-elected.

### GETTING ORGANIZED

So how do we change this situation? When you become sick and tired of your interests not being represented, there is only one way out – **to organize**. Remember that elected representatives need to be re-elected and we are the ones who will vote them in or not. This is where our individual action leads to collective power that creates the change we want.

Community organizing is simple but it takes a lot of work. Organizing is getting together with others in your community to act collectively in the group's self-interest. It involves a group of concerned volunteers who are directly or indirectly affected by the problem. An organized community uses its power to get what it wants. In rural Alabama, the community organized to stop a chemical plant from being located in their county. They did it by getting over 200 neighbors to see how it was in the community's best interest not to allow this corporation to locate in their community.

Similarly, a small town in New York won its fight to stop an ethanol plant from being located there. In this instance, the leaders found power when they joined with other like-minded individuals and groups to apply public pressure. The group initially tried litigation, but learned that law does not equal justice. They now strongly discourage others from taking a legal route.

*Continued on page 11*

# ACTION LINE

*Action Line is the heart of Everyone's Backyard. This is where we tell the stories of grassroots groups that reflect their creative energy and accomplishments. It is also a way to share strategies, actions, and industry trends. Although we do not always mention our role, CHEJ is providing organizing and technical assistance to many of these groups. For other stories, we draw on a large network of contacts and organizations that we have developed during our 25 years of operation. We welcome and encourage contributions.*

## Arizona

Over 10,000 members of the **Navajo Nation** who mined uranium for America's atomic bombs are fighting the U.S. government for compensation from exposure to dangerous levels of radioactivity. The U.S. government knew early on that uranium could cause lung damage, but instead of warning the Navajo miners, the government decided to study them. Former workers have been asking for compensation from the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program, but only one in four sick workers or their survivors have been compensated. At the same time, millions of tax dollars have been spent on flawed health studies and top officials running the compensation program have collected tens of thousands of dollars in bonuses, totaling more than \$3.2 million since the program began. Members of the Navajo Nation, along with workers at other similar sites around the country, are pressing Congress to pass legislation to reform the compensation program to ensure it justly compensates impacted workers.

## California

**Citizens for a Healthy Community (CHC)** and **Greenaction** led hundreds of citizens in celebrating their success in shutting down a local plasma gasification medical waste facility in Tehama County in late June. InEnTec was forced to cancel both the building and operating permits for this "incinerator in disguise" because of intense public opposition over the past three and a half years. Local leaders discovered in 2005 that the county had given the facility the green light without public hearings or a public comment period, and without conducting an environmental impact assessment. The pressure resulting from well-attended meetings combined with litigation won the day.

Residents in San Francisco are working to clean up the Hunters Point Navy shipyard, a Superfund site, and contacted CHEJ for help. The Navy promised the citizens a thorough cleanup, but is now backpedaling, saying they will only clean up the site to state standards and put a cap over it. The community is not willing to accept anything less than a thorough cleanup as originally promised by the Navy, since the site is targeted for redevelopment by the city. One possibility is a new baseball stadium for the city's major league baseball team. Organizers plan to pressure the city council to accept the land only if the Navy does a thorough cleanup.

Residents in West Fresno are organizing to stop a household hazardous waste transfer station from being built in a community of color. Leaders want to stop the proliferation of polluting businesses from coming into an area already over-burdened with these kinds of industries. CHEJ is providing organizing support and helping to bring together two existing organizations to explore options for achieving this goal.

## Connecticut

For years, residents in Norwalk have dealt with foul odors and emissions from an asphalt plant, and they are now ready to take action. CHEJ is working with local leaders to help them develop a strategy to apply pressure on a local asphalt company to cleanup its releases. Local leaders petitioned the state's Department of Environmental Protection, the Health Department and elected leaders to enforce air quality laws, but state officials report that their tests show "no unusual pollution." The group then collected a petition to get a more reliable air testing system in place and requested toxic release data from the asphalt plant. Leaders recently told CHEJ that the asphalt plant had notified the Health Department that they would be closing the plant down for the rest of 2008. The group plans to step up its organizing efforts in order to ensure that the plant does not reopen.

## Florida

Local activists in Nassau County have called on politicians to reveal the location of an old paper mill waste dump located near a school and residential area. The county denies the existence of the dump, but community leaders know better and are hoping to convince the government to clean up the site. CHEJ is working with the community to train core leadership and develop the best tactics to engage the local government in conversation.

## Georgia

Local activists in East Point have begun to organize around air emissions from a wood treatment facility that emits air pollutants at 85 times recommended exposure levels. More than 3,000 people live within one mile of the plant. They are pressing for an investigation and for closure of the plant, but the company has made it clear that they will sue any individual or group who seeks to threaten its livelihood. CHEJ is working with local leaders on

organizing tactics and will continue to provide support as they push for a healthy community.

## Kentucky

*In Remembrance: Rev. Louis Coleman*

The Rev. Louis Coleman Jr. passed away this past July. Rev. Coleman, one of Louisville's best-known activists, picketed or prayed for over three decades in front of nearly every major Kentucky institution to advance justice and civil rights. In recent years, he fought against air pollution from a cluster of chemical plants in Louisville. Rev. Coleman was the longtime head of the **Justice Resource Center** and pastor of First Congregational Methodist Church in western Louisville.

## Louisiana

**Concerned Citizens Around Murphy (CCAM)** put Murphy Oil U.S.A., Inc. on notice this July of their intent to sue over the refinery's violations of the federal Clean Air Act. Murphy Oil's Meraux refinery has released tons of sulfur dioxide and other chemicals into the air in excess of federal permit limits. St. Bernard Parish residents are concerned for their safety and about the health effects these releases might cause. CCAM wants the state to enforce its regulations to improve the air quality in their community. CCAM was formed in the aftermath of a crude oil spill at the Murphy Oil site caused by Hurricane Katrina.

A local leader in St. Charles Parish who is challenging the Parish Council over accepting contaminated land donated by BP (formerly British Petroleum) to build a library has been hit with a SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) suit. The activists believe the suit was filed to stop the efforts of an emerging local group opposed to the construction of a public library on the polluted land. Organizers feel this is an effort to divert attention away from the real issue and vow to continue their efforts calling for an extensive cleanup before any construction on the library begins.

## Massachusetts

The **Toxics Action Center (TAC)** in Boston is organizing support to stop plans by the state Department of Environmental Protection to lift a moratorium on the construction of new municipal waste incinerators. The state's plan is designed primarily to encourage businesses promoting gasification technologies to come to MA to build new waste burners. The state is also working on a solid waste master plan that claims to use "Landfills Last," though it's not clear whether they will go instead with "Incinerators First." TAC is encouraging groups across the state to participate in public meetings held by the state to discuss the master plan and to influence which direction the state takes.

# ACTION LINE

## Michigan

Leaders at the **Ecology Center** and other environmental groups are optimistic that the long-polluting incinerator in Detroit will be shut down for good within the next year. The mayor announced on June 30th that the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority, which manages the city's trash, will not exercise its option to purchase the incinerator from its operator Covanta Energy and they will not renew their contract to provide the city's trash to the incinerator company. Instead, they will turn to expanded curbside recycling and use of a landfill. Victory is not quite secure. The city has until January 2009 to purchase the facility, and the owners could continue to operate by burning trash from areas other than the city until the end of June 2009, though this option is not likely to be financially viable. However, residents are happy their mayor is looking to a future free of burning trash, and plans are in the works to expand a 3-day per week recycling drop-off service.

## Nevada

In the last issue of EBY, we reported on the frustrations of local residents in Clark County east of Las Vegas who unknowingly bought homes in a 900 home development located next to an old garbage landfill. Although the landfill was ordered to shut down in 1998, it was never properly closed. In August Republic Services, who owns the landfill, agreed to pay \$1 million in penalties and acknowledged that an estimated \$36 million in work must be done to cleanup the dump. One commissioner argued that the company should not push any of the landfill costs onto taxpayers, saying "they should pay for whatever it takes to close it correctly." But another commissioner disagreed and said the consent decree leaves room for the county and the company to negotiate. Citizen activists feel the community must organize or they will end up getting the short end of the deal.

fight by successfully organizing and increasing public awareness. They found support by joining with other organizations, such as the Sierra Club. One lesson they learned was not to take the legal route at first. CHEJ provided the residents with resource materials and organizing help in their fight to stop the permitting of this ethanol plant.

A group of residents in Lockport are getting organized and seeking others in the community who are directly affected by existing or potential contamination from Eighteen Mile Creek near the abandoned Flintkote factory. This site was recently listed by the state Department of Environmental Conservation as a Class 2 Superfund site due to the environmental and public health risks present at the site. Lead and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a coolant used in electrical capacitors and transformers, are the pollutants of greatest concern.

## North Carolina

In conjunction with the **Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL)**, CHEJ is planning a series of visioning workshops to bring together community members to brainstorm positive economic development alternatives that will generate jobs without threatening the area's health and environment. These sessions will attempt to answer the question, "If not the nasty incinerator, or mega dump, then what?" The discussions will focus on developing a sustainable and precaution-based solid waste plan for the county or town with a goal of "zero waste." In addition, BREDL will host regional meetings, help develop precautionary action plans and provide organizing assistance for activists working on sludge, landfills and waste-to-energy plants in the state. For more information, contact BREDL at [bredl@skybest.com](mailto:bredl@skybest.com).

## Ohio

**Communities United for Action (CUFA)** organized an environmental justice bus tour of Cincinnati's "Toxic Donut," with support from CHEJ and the Ohio Conference NAACP, for delegates attending the 99th Annual NAACP Convention held in Cincinnati in July. CUFA leaders narrated the tour that included a PowerPoint presentation. Over fifty delegates, many from the Ohio delegation of the NAACP, joined the tour and finished with much excitement and a stronger sense of urgency to address environmental justice (EJ) concerns. CHEJ and the Ohio Conference NAACP partnership also provided an environmental justice public policy briefing for delegates as part of the convention events. The delegates learned about the environmental justice forums held last year throughout the state, a meeting with state legislators, and the need for an EJ Bill in Ohio. One state legislator has sent an EJ report generated through the community forums to the Legislative Service Commission and if no glaring legal concerns arise, an EJ Bill will be introduced.



photo from [www.legalelectric.org](http://www.legalelectric.org)

*Neighbors Against the Burner meet to oppose incinerator.*

## Minnesota

**Neighbors Against the Burner (NAB)** won a victory when plans were canceled to build the Midtown Eco Energy incinerator in the Phillips neighborhood of southeast Minneapolis. Key elements of NAB's success included passing legislation that required new studies before a permit could be issued and soliciting support from groups and experts across the country including activist Paul Connett (see EBY Winter 2007), the **Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance**, **Energy Justice Network**, and **Green Delaware**. NAB succeeded in generating enough public pressure to cause Kandiyoshi Development Partners to toss out their plan to build a wood-burning energy facility on city land. A key rallying point was the fact that the Phillips neighborhood was already over-burdened with pollution. The community isn't quite safe yet as the city has promised to help Kandiyoshi find a different site for the facility.

from community members and state and local officials about the persistent pollution left by the Ford Motor Company on the 500-acre site. Local residents, including the Ramapough Indian Nation, are concerned that their health problems stem from the site.

Local residents in Brick Township are organizing to cleanup the Brick landfill Superfund site. It has been reported that the chemicals from the 40-acre site have spread over 400 acres and contaminated local groundwater that threatens nearby private drinking water wells. CHEJ is providing organizing assistance to local leaders who want to increase awareness of the problem and develop a strategy to get the site cleaned up.

## New York

Residents in Romulus celebrated when they heard that Empire Bio-Fuels was abandoning its plan to build an ethanol plant at the Seneca Army Depot in the Finger Lakes region. The community won this

# ACTION LINE

## Oklahoma

The town of Picher received renewed attention from EPA after a mid-May tornado killed six and stirred up concern about the continued exposure caused by dispersion of lead, zinc, and other metals from huge piles of mining waste left at Tar Creek Superfund site. The piles, some of which are hundreds of feet tall (see EBY Summer 2004), are the remnants of mining operations that date back more than a century. Residents are hoping that inspections by EPA and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will show that the combination of destroyed houses and their proximity to the unstable mining waste will lead inevitably to relocation of the 800 community members who remained after a mass evacuation of over 19,000 that began in February 2006.

## Pennsylvania

**Keep Erie's Environment Protected (KEEP)** continues its opposition to what would be the largest tire incinerator in the world. They recently got support from the Erie Housing Authority who came out against the incinerator because the proposed location is near several housing projects. The proposed plan is seen as an environmental injustice since a large number of low-income people of color will be impacted. KEEP also gained support from an alliance of ten businesses that joined their appeal of a local zoning ordinance. There is also support from the medical community who is working to develop a local air pollution law that will be stricter than both state and federal laws. The proposed incinerator would burn 900 tons/day of scrap tires. KEEP is getting support from **CHEJ**, **Action PA** and the **Energy Justice Network**.

Hundreds of parents, citizens, and teachers of the **Phoenixville Coalition of Concerned Citizens** and the Pennsylvania State Education Association rejoiced over success in blocking construction bids for an elementary school to be built on district land near the Kimberton Superfund site in Chester County. The land, which is contaminated with multiple potential carcinogens including trichloroethene (TCE) and dichloroethene and waste from a municipal dump, was rejected for the new school in East Pike Township by the School Board in late June. Parents also brought a petition for a referendum vote, but the Board was all ready to give in. Pressure had mounted at eight public meetings held since February 2007 which reaffirmed a letter written to the Board by a Superfund polluter discouraging the proposed construction. CHEJ salutes the community for taking action to protect the health of its children and teachers!

## South Carolina

The **Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities** and residents of Charleston spoke out at a recent meeting about the future of the county's trash

incinerator. Due to their forceful opposition to a 20-year extension of Montenay/Veolia's contract to burn the county's trash, a County Council member conceded that "the human cost appears too great." Residents, who have complained about the burner since 1989, are calling for the facility to be shut down in 2010 as per the original agreement. Instead of a polluting incinerator, the citizens are demanding aggressive waste-reduction initiatives and more recycling which would boost local jobs.

## South Dakota

Farmers in South Dakota are fighting what could be the nation's first new oil refinery in 30 years being proposed by Hyperion Energy. Plans were kept secret for months but residents of Union County have now voted in favor of rezoning land for a \$10-billion refinery capable of converting 400,000 barrels of oil into gasoline, diesel and jet fuel every day. While the county as a whole favored the project by a 58 percent majority, most of the farmers whose land would be affected said no and are planning their next steps to defeat the proposed refinery.

## Texas

Residents in Rio Grande City celebrated when a permit to build an asphalt plant next to an elementary school was withdrawn. The residents in this community successfully reached out to the parents whose children attended the school by involving the parents in designing, signing and collecting petitions. They also obtained sworn statements from school officials expressing concern about the safety of the students. This information was sent to state officials as the group made their fight very public. CHEJ helped develop this winning strategy by encouraging the group to join forces with the elementary school parents and school personnel. Congratulations!

## Virginia



*Mecklenburg County residents protest ethanol plant.*

Residents in Hopewell are working to stop the permitting of an Osage Bio Energy ethanol plant in the city limits. The Hopewell chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

opposes the construction of the plant until additional impact studies are done to determine the potential environmental and health impact of the project on African-Americans and other minorities and members of the low-income community located where the plant would be built. Demonstrations have been held against the plant, which will unfairly endanger a disproportionate number of low-income minorities. Public hearings held by the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) showed that 80% of the 500 comments received opposed the project. Osage hope to build another plant in nearby Mecklenburg County where they face similar opposition. The **Association to Preserve Mecklenburg** has organized protests and lobbied county officials who are reviewing zoning regulations for the project. DEQ is currently reviewing the permit application.

## Wisconsin

Residents are concerned about the cleanup of over 143,000 gallons of toxic chemicals that have been extracted from the groundwater beneath the SNE Corporation site in the town of Wausau. For decades, SNE sprayed a wood preservative chemical called penta on housing products. During the plant's operation, the chemical seeped into the ground and contaminated the soil and groundwater. The environmental consulting firm performing the cleanup has no idea how long the treatment will take. Although town residents get their drinking water from the city rather than groundwater wells, six residents filed a civil lawsuit recently against the current owners of the property, claiming that they developed cancer and other illnesses after being exposed to harmful substances from the plant, including dioxins from the penta contamination in the air blowing off the site and the groundwater.

## International: Canada

Victory! Members of the **Aamjiwnaang Nation** celebrated the news that Shell Canada had withdrawn its plans to build a multi-billion dollar oil refinery in Sarnia, Ontario across the St. Claire River from Port Huron, Michigan. Although touted as an economic windfall for the community, many neighbors and First Nation residents questioned the health and environmental costs and the impact on future generations. Shell cited economic facts as the primary basis for their decision, though organized opposition was a likely factor as well. The announcement came one day before a public meeting was to take place that Shell was not invited to attend. Aamjiwnaang residents and local neighbors on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border had opposed the project for close to two years. The estimated \$15 billion project would have turned tar-like crude from oil sands in Alberta, Canada into refinery ready light oil. ♦



A CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THREATS TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH

# Child Proofing Our Communities

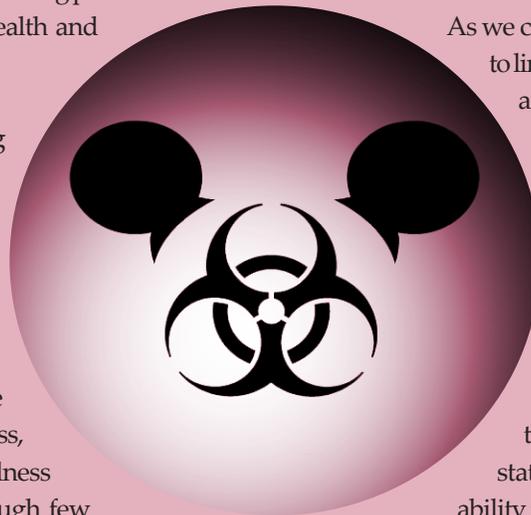
## The Disney-Go-Green Campaign Switching to Green Cleaning

The mission of CHEJ's Child Proofing our Communities (CPOC) campaign is to protect children in the places they live, learn, play and pray. We focus on protecting children from toxic chemical exposures because they are more at risk from even low dose exposures than adults. This is why green cleaning is so important to our campaign. Green cleaning is the use of alternative cleaning products and procedures that protect human health and the environment.

Chemicals used in traditional cleaning products are not only harmful throughout the entire lifecycle of the product, but also to our health. In addition to asthma, allergies, learning disabilities, reproductive disorders, and various types of cancer associated with chronic and frequent low-dose exposure, persistent headaches, dizziness, skin irritations, and respiratory illness can occur from acute exposures. Though few chemicals have been studied specifically for their effects on children, it is widely known that children are more sensitive to chemicals.

It is easy to assume that children are just smaller versions of adults. And sometimes it's true. But when it comes to their health, this is just not the case. They consume more calories, drink more water, and breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults do. Children are curious. They explore the world around them and are inclined to put their hands in their mouths after touching what they find. Children are still growing. They have immature organ systems that are less able to handle toxic chemicals. And don't forget that children are young and have more time for environmentally-induced diseases to develop.

Fortunately, many community groups and legislators around the country are taking children's vulnerabilities into consideration. As of this fall, three states – New York, Maryland, and Missouri – have passed policies that eliminate toxic cleaning products in schools and are switching to safer alternatives in their school districts.



As we congratulate these states on their efforts to limit the toxic chemicals to which children are exposed, the CPOC campaign continues to discuss the importance of switching to safe certified green cleaning products with our Disney Go Green campaign. We launched this campaign because of the environmental and health impacts toxic cleaning products have on Disney's guests and employees. Given that Disney's own environmental policy states that they are "keenly aware of their ability to influence public opinion and inspire action," we know that Disney World can eliminate all toxic cleaning products from its hotels, parks, and restaurants.

On October 29, 2008, communities across the country will participate in a National Day of Action to encourage Walt Disney World Parks and Resorts in Orlando Florida to "Go Green." We are asking people to throw a party at their house, yoga studio, or after-school program to learn more about green cleaning products and practices. By participating in this National Day of Action, you will send a clear message to Disney – be a real leader and Go Green!

You can find all the materials you need to join this National Day of Action by checking out our website - [www.chej.org/disney/dayofaction](http://www.chej.org/disney/dayofaction).

There were increased rates of adverse pregnancy outcomes for children born on the Canal compared to children born off the Canal for all three adverse pregnancy outcomes: low birth weight, pre-term births and small for gestational age.

- Love Canal residents had increased rates of bladder, kidney and lung cancer.
- Children conceived on the Canal were more than twice as likely to be born female compared to children conceived after the mother left the canal area. This finding is statistically significant when compared to rates in NYS and Niagara County. This result is consistent with findings in other contaminated populations like Agent Orange veterans, residents of Seveso, Italy who were exposed to a toxic cloud of dioxin following an explosion at a pesticide plant, and others.

### DOING WHAT'S EASY

What the state did was analogous to the illogical actions of the man in the following tale, searching under a streetlight for his car keys (see cover illustration). A stranger approaches and asks if he can help.

"Yes, I dropped my car keys."  
"Where did you drop them?" the stranger asked.  
"I'm not sure," he replied.  
"So, why are you looking over here?" asked the stranger.  
"Because there is a streetlight here, I can see better."

Sadly, this tale offers an apt analogy for how NYSDOH's actions have once again failed to the answer critical health questions for the residents of Love Canal.

Many former residents who attended the morning news conference and evening reception hosted by CHEJ and the Love Canal Medical Fund were upset that after 30 years, they still do not have clear answers to the health risks they face. One former resident, Renee Retton, an infant at Love Canal 30 years ago, commented, "It's as if we do not count to the state of New York. I lost my

baby sister at Love Canal." Renee plans on making this fight her life's work, as Lois Gibbs did. Today Renee is attending school to become a nurse and hopes to focus on legal/medical issues to help people impacted by threats such as her family faced.



Lois Gibbs (left) with Renee Retton, a Love Canal child in 1978, at press conference in front of the Love Canal landfill.

### 30TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION

At the evening reception, attended by over 120 former residents and friends, a poster of the man looking for his keys under the street lamp was circulated. On the back of the poster was a letter asking that the Governor direct the Health Department to send a certified letter to every person who ever lived at Love Canal to warn them about the increase in birth defects in women who were children at Love Canal and the elevated risk of cancer for everyone. Many of the people attending the reception signed the poster which was hand delivered to the Governor's office in Albany the following Monday.

Four Love Canals of Today from western New York were recognized at the evening reception: the Bethlehem Steel site in Lackawanna, the CWM Chemical Services, Inc. landfill in Model City, the FMC pesticide plant in Middleport, and the West Valley nuclear site in Ashford. These sites remind us that Love Canal was not an isolated case and that we need to prevent environmental harm by stopping exposures to toxic chemicals in our environment. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE LOVE CANALS OF TODAY, AND TO SEE THE FULL REPORT "NYS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH'S FINAL WHITE WASH," SEE [HTTP://WWW.CHEJ.ORG/30THA\\_LOVE\\_CANAL.HTM](http://www.chej.org/30THA_LOVE_CANAL.HTM).

### Ten Rules of Community Organizing

By Dave Beckwith

1. Anybody can be a leader.
2. The most important victory is the formation of the group itself.
3. If you're not fighting for what you want, you don't want it enough.
4. Nobody is going to come to a meeting unless they've got a reason to come to the meeting
5. Nobody is going to come to a meeting unless they know about it.
6. Sometimes losing is winning.
7. Sometimes winning is losing.
8. If an organization doesn't grow, it will die.
9. Celebrate!
10. Have fun!

For more details about these rules of organizing, see CHEJ's website at [http://www.chej.org/10\\_rules\\_of\\_organizing.htm](http://www.chej.org/10_rules_of_organizing.htm).

# With Special Thanks

CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations and pledges to support our work between May 1, 2008 and July 31, 2008. We wish we had the space to acknowledge each and every one of CHEJ's donors in these pages because all gifts, regardless of size, are very much appreciated. Thank you for your support!

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Anonymous

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### Community Protector

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Circle Graphics Online  
Citizens' Environmental Coalition  
Green Environmental Coalition  
Save Our County, Inc.  
Stop Polluting Orleans County

\* Posthumous gift

STAND TOGETHER OR FALL APART, continued from page 5

In Peoria, Illinois, the operator of a hazardous waste landfill wanted to expand its landfill. Over the years, the company had grown close to the elected officials, especially the chair of the county commission that was going to vote on the expansion. In order to control the process, the chair set up rules intended to restrict communication between council members and the public. But the community organized around these rules. They sent emails, faxes, and letters to the commissioners; they attended commission meetings; they put up signs, even a billboard, with the same general message – "Enough is enough! No landfill expansion!" Despite efforts to control the permitting process, the commissioners got the message and the permit expansion was denied, not just once, but three times now, as the company has refused to give up.

In this situation, the community learned that the commissioners, especially the chair, did not have their best interests at heart. They also learned that they cannot play by

rules set up by the politicians who are beholden to a company and that they must fight their own battles.

The community fighting the asphalt plant is learning many of these same lessons. They learned that their turnout at the council meetings had a real impact, leading the council to restrict attendance at future meetings. They also realized they only need to turn one council member's vote to get a majority in their favor; that they need to be more assertive and take control of their situation and not to leave anything in the hands of their elected officials. They are continuing their organizing efforts to stop the asphalt plant in spite of the initial vote against them.

CHEJ has worked with thousands of groups over the years that have won through community organizing. You can win, as well, by following some basic rules of organizing (See box on pg.10). But whether you win your community organizing fight or not, communities must remain vigilant because the next attack on the health of the community is right around the corner. ♦



# MAKING THE LINK ONLINE AUCTION

**GREAT DEALS ON GREEN GOODS!**



Visit CHEJ's Making the Link Online Auction starting November 1st , at [www.chej.org](http://www.chej.org).  
You'll find environmentally-friendly goods and services at bargain prices while supporting CHEJ's work!

## UNIQUE DONATION OPPORTUNITIES!

CHEJ would love to include your eco-friendly product, gift certificate, or vacation spot in the auction.

Do you have a timeshare, or know someone who does? Do you or a friend make organic goods?

Do you have a good relationship with a car salesperson?

Contact Suzie by October 10th to learn more or to make a donation: [sbrindle@chej.org](mailto:sbrindle@chej.org) or 703-237-2249 x 24.



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