

EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

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DIRECT ACTION STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE



SUPERFUND'S 30TH BIRTHDAY



The Journal of the Grassroots Environmental Movement

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Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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On the Cover:

**Sandra Turner-Handy of the Michigan
Environmental Council**

Photo by Langelle/GJEP

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

CHEJ was founded in 1981 and as we approach our 30th Anniversary, CHEJ's board and staff thought this was a good time to look back and look forward. Asking ourselves, what has been accomplished, what remains to be done, does CHEJ have a meaningful role in the next decade of work and if so, what might that look like?

CHEJ works to build healthy communities with social justice, economic well-being, and democratic governance. We believe this can happen when individuals from communities have the power to play an integral role in promoting human health and environmental integrity. Our role is to provide the tools to build strong, healthy communities where people can live, work, learn, play and pray.

At a national level, CHEJ's goal is to shift the terms of the debate from the acceptance of risk to the prevention of harm and to achieve fundamental practice and policy changes that reflect this shift.

After thirty years we are regarded not only as a source of quality information and technical expertise, but also as an environmental advocate that knows how to organize and get things done. We've accomplished a lot over three decades--winning more than we lost.

What has been accomplished?

The evidence is there before us. Thirty years ago the skies were darken with smoke and toxic air pollution, rivers caught on fire, most take-out restaurants served food and drink in Styrofoam, and garbage was piling up everywhere - little was recycled. Toys and consumer products were full of toxic chemicals poisoning our families. Today the air and water is cleaner, rivers no longer catch fire, recycling is common place, and many unsustainable products have been eliminated. Indeed, we've accomplished a lot.

What is left to do?

We still face a legacy of problems from our historical industrial and chemical economy. Many of the future challenges are much more insidious - climate change, legacy waste sites, new approaches for regulating the over 80,000 chemicals in commerce today, eliminating harmful consumer products, preventing harm from environmental chemicals to human health especially vulnerable children, building a green sustainable economy, clean energy independence and more.

As we enter our 30th Anniversary year, we thought it would be interesting to invite others in the movement to contribute to this column and share their thoughts about where we are today and what they think remains to be done or how we should proceed. This is an exciting time for CHEJ. In the coming year, we will be holding several anniversary events and hope that you will join us.

Lois Marie Gibbs,
Executive Director

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 www.chej.org.

BY ANANDA LEE TAN

DIRECT ACTION STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE

Clean Air, Good Jobs & Justice for All! - Mass Action at Detroit Incinerator

Landscape of Change

In recent years, frontline communities around the country have succeeded in preventing a massive amount of industrial carbon and toxic pollution by confronting the world's dirtiest corporations in their own backyards. From stopping oil refinery expansions and the construction of new coal plants to replacing landfills and incinerators with zero waste jobs - these grassroots campaigns have become the countervailing force to corporate power in the U.S. One such grassroots force is the anti-incinerator network, made up of community activists, coalitions and small non-profit organizations. As a result of their efforts - no new waste incinerator has been built in the U.S. in over twelve years.

One of the most epic fights has been around the Covanta incinerator in Detroit - the world's largest waste incinerator. Over the last 20 years this facility has burdened local residents with pollution linked to high asthma rates and other illness; cost Detroit taxpayers over \$1.2 billion in debts; and, burned precious resources that could have generated thousands of well-paying jobs in recycling.

On June 26th, the closing day of the 2010 U.S. Social Forum, the Zero Waste Detroit (ZWD) coalition led a March through local neighborhoods to the gates of the incinerator - demanding that the mayor replace this toxic facility with good, union jobs in recycling. Several thousand activists representing environmental justice, labor unions, faith groups and other organizations from across the country joined local activists to pressure the city's leaders, in solidarity with communities fighting polluters everywhere.

Mass, non-violence action has played a historic role in movement building. From the famous garbage workers strike in Memphis to civil disobedience by North Carolina communities against toxic landfills in the 1980s, such actions have come to define the environmental health and justice (EJ) movement. The incinerator action in Detroit was defined by similar traditions - honoring past struggles and celebrating future wins. This article will look at how the June 26th action illustrates key strategies for community organizers.



Zero Waste Detroit and the Michigan Teamsters march for clean air, good jobs and justice at US Social Forum.

Photo by Hilary Moore, Mobilization for Climate Justice

Putting Principles to Practice

Movements are built house-by-house, block-by-block, community-by-community, whenever people share a commitment to collective empowerment. Key to planning any successful action is finding agreement on common organizing principles and protocols. In planning this action, the leadership of local, frontline communities was prioritized at the onset. Partnering groups agreed that the action would be

guided by local representatives of ZWD - with support from allied groups and networks. Such decision-making protocol fosters accountability amongst partnering organizations and their constituents.

Flipping the Script for Community Power

To build a powerful movement, you must first figure out where you have power and build from there. We have power in our communities where we have relationships and can hold politicians and corporations accountable. With over fifteen thousand activists arriving for the Social Forum, and Detroit's incinerator contract scheduled to expire a week later, June 26th became a strategic moment to mobilize large numbers in a show of force:

- Demonstrating wide-spread national support for local demands;
- Gaining national attention for the fight against the incinerator;
- Leveraging broad political pressure on Detroit's mayor to decide against contract renewal.

Telling the Story of Transformative Change

A leading movement thinker once reflected - "to change a society you need to tell a powerful new tale...an alternative story." Developing a strong action scenario is like telling a compelling story - being rooted in real stories of resistance makes the scenario all the more compelling. In Detroit, both memory and imagination served to guide the transformative story told through this action.

ZWD met with the Ruckus Society and the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) to develop a creative action

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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.

Precautionary Action on Toxics

A Congressional hearing last year charged the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) with using flawed scientific methods for evaluating health effects at Superfund and other contaminated sites. The committee stated that, "The longer ATSDR continues to pursue its role in protecting the public's health as it has for the past three decades, issuing deeply flawed scientific reports, not responding to the concerns of local communities and approaching potential environmental exposures with a mindset that endeavors to disprove any link between the public's ill-health effects and potential exposures to environmental contaminants or toxins, the more people will suffer."

ATSDR responded by establishing a National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures involving over 100 organizations including CHEJ who were asked to make recommendations on how agencies can do better. CHEJ has led efforts to include recommendations advising that the federal government take a precautionary approach to eliminate toxic exposures, and establishing independent task forces with community representatives to advise both ATSDR and EPA on how to improve their policies, especially the methods used to evaluate health effects in communities. For more information, contact anne@chej.org.

CHEJ Holding EPA Accountable on Dioxin

Since the Obama Administration took office, CHEJ has rekindled its work on dioxin. We've coordinated a number of national sign-on letters pressuring EPA and the White House Office of Management and Budget to finalize and release the dioxin reassessment. We've also provided written comments on EPA's proposed interim cleanup guidelines for dioxin and on EPA's response to comments on the reassessment by a committee of the National Academy of Sciences, testified at two EPA Science Advisory Board meetings, mobilized key allies, sent out press releases, and pursued other strategies to hold the EPA accountable. The next step is to push EPA to release the reassessment. **If you want to join this effort, contact CHEJ at mike@chej.org or 212-964-3680.**

This Holiday Season – Cross the Poison Plastic Off Your Shopping List!

As you go shopping this holiday season, steer clear of PVC or vinyl, the most toxic plastic for our health and environment. Many PVC consumer products are often loaded with a toxic witches' brew of contaminants including phthalates, cadmium, lead, or organotins. Additionally, PVC's lifecycle poisons communities, most of which are low-income and communities of color, when PVC is manufactured and dumped in incinerators and landfills.

Here are some quick tips on how you can avoid PVC:

- Shop for products labeled "PVC-free".
- Avoid toys made with PVC, as well as other PVC products, especially those with additives which are soft and flexible.
- PVC products are not always labeled, although some may be labeled as "vinyl" or "PVC."
- To identify PVC packaging, first look for the universal recycling symbol. If it has the number "3" inside it, or the letters "V" or "PVC" underneath it, you know the product is made out of PVC.
- Some products are not properly labeled, making it tough to determine whether they contain PVC. If you're uncertain, e-mail or call the 800 number of the manufacturer or retailer and ask what type of plastic their product is made of. You have the right to know.

Looking for that perfect gift?

Here are great websites for finding safer PVC-free products:

- <http://besafenet.com/pvc/safe.htm>
- <http://www.healthystuff.org>
- <http://www.thesoftlanding.com>

"Ask not how much risk is acceptable, but how much harm can be avoided."

BY ANNE RABE, CHEJ'S BE SAFE CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR

SUPERFUND'S 30TH BIRTHDAY: CLEANUP PROGRAM AWAITS CONGRESSIONAL REINSTATEMENT OF INDUSTRY FEES



Photo by Timothy Ivy

Thirty years ago this December, President Jimmy Carter signed the law that created the federal Superfund toxic waste cleanup program. Since then, hundreds of health-threatening waste dumps have been cleaned up. But in 2003, the fund went bankrupt when fees collected from polluters were completely spent. Congress stopped collecting the fees in 1995 and once the fund went dry, the entire burden of paying for the cleanup of these sites fell on the U.S. taxpayers. Since then, the federal government has appropriated public dollars every year to pay for the cleanups. But the budget allocated by Congress has consistently been too small resulting in more communities threatened by toxic sites as they awaited their turn on the lengthy cleanup list.

The good news is that for Superfund's 30th birthday, President Barack Obama is pushing to renew collecting fees from oil and chemical companies to replenish the financially ailing program and take the unfair burden off taxpayers. This winter, CHEJ and dozens of community groups at Superfund sites around the country will hold a National Day of Action to call on Congress to pass legislation to reinstate the polluter pays fees.

Grassroots efforts to cleanup toxic waste sites created Superfund over three decades ago. Lois Gibbs, CHEJ's Executive Director, recalled this history at a Congressional hearing last June. "Over thirty years ago I spoke to a Congressional committee just like this, asking for funding for the cleanup of hazardous waste sites. My community at Love Canal in Niagara Falls, NY was in part the impetus for creating Superfund after 20,000 tons of chemicals buried in the middle of my neighborhood leaked into the surrounding yards and the school playground. I spoke then about the need for the program because at Love Canal, 56 percent

of our children were born with birth defects. It is tragic that now, three decades later, while the same crisis exists within thousands of communities, I have been asked again to speak to the need for an adequately funded Superfund."

Over the past thirty years, Superfund has had its successes and failures, and there were many more successes than failures when the program was adequately funded by polluter pays fees. There is no question about the need for the Superfund and the need to have reliable, adequate funding in place to protect the American people. Here is what it is like to live in a community that is a Superfund community. The Behr Dayton Thermal Products plant in Dayton, Ohio polluted the groundwater with the solvent trichloroethylene (TCE) which migrated underground into a residential area. People in this community are exposed to TCE vapors that evaporate from the ground and into their homes. A local school was closed and a federal agency found a high cancer incidence in the community. These homes are worthless. They cannot be sold and people feel like they cannot live in them. Property values have already dropped 50 percent. These families have been victimized by no fault of their own. This is not the way our country should treat its citizens. The government needs to take care of these innocent families who have fallen victim to corporate negligence by restoring the polluter pays fees so that there is a reliable source of funding to provide the necessary cleanup needed to protect innocent American people.

For 15 years, the government imposed taxes on companies responsible for hazardous chemical releases that went into a trust fund to clean up the worst toxic sites in the country. When the fund ran out of money, the U.S. taxpayers began paying for the cleanups, though there was never enough money allocated to do the job right. This has led to a slower rate of cleanup. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the program completed cleanups at 19 sites last year, compared with 89 in 1999. Now the Obama administration is pushing to reinstate the taxes and the EPA, which rarely urges passage of bills, sent a letter to Congress in June calling for legislation.

This long-awaited action came on the heels of a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) that found at over 60 percent of 239 Superfund sites with "unacceptable or unknown human exposure," all or more than half of the cleanup work remains to be done. EPA officials told GAO that, in managing limited resources, some sites have not received sufficient funding. And it will only get worse. EPA officials estimate that costs will be up to \$681 million each year for 2010 to 2014, which greatly exceeds the previous annual budgets of \$220 to \$267 million (2000 to 2009). On top of that, EPA regional officials estimated that up to 125 sites—about 20 to 25 sites per year—will be added to Superfund over the next 5 years, which is higher than the past average of 16 sites per year.

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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 more than 25 years of operation. We welcome and encourage contributions.

California



Photo from www.gpe-j.org

Poster from Kettleman City Protest Against Expansion of Kettleman Hills Hazardous Waste Facility.

El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio/People for Clean Air and Water with support from the **Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment (CRPE)**, **Green Action** and others are continuing their battle to stop a toxic waste landfill from expanding in their community and destroying their environment. The state is investigating whether the Chemical Waste Management facility in Kettleman City was a contributing factor to 10 babies born with cleft palates since 2007. The landfill facility accepts many toxic chemicals including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which are known to cause cancer and birth defects. CRPE has been using civil rights and environmental law to challenge the project's impact on the community and filed a lawsuit earlier this year challenging the county's approval of the expansion of the largest hazardous waste facility west of the Mississippi. **El Pueblo, Kids Protecting Our Planet** held a pep rally over the summer where the youth led the march to demand environmental health and justice and no expansion of the landfill. The residents are hoping to delay Chemical Waste Management's expansion until the state health probe is complete.

Florida

Save the Ichetucknee River and local residents in Ichetucknee Springs are organizing to oppose plans by Suwannee American Cement Plant to burn hazardous waste for fuel. The state recently issued a draft permit to Suwannee to burn plastics, tires, roofing shingles, carpeting, scrap automobile interiors, and more. The group is concerned about

the impact of the air emissions on the river and the environment surrounding the plant.

Georgia

Last October over 200 people attended a hearing on a proposal to build two new reactors at the Southern Company's Vogtle power plant in Shell Bluff where there already are two nuclear reactors. Shell Bluff is a low-income African American community that has a high rate of cancer among local families. Currently, some 775 metric tons of spent uranium dioxide fuel are being stored on-site in the form of spent fuel rods cooling in a steel-lined, underground pool. CHEJ held a workshop just before this public meeting to talk about messaging and organizing opposition to the new reactors. The group succeeded in getting a large number of people to attend the meeting and when their leader stood at the podium to speak they planned to all stand throughout the room and sing a hymn – and that is exactly what they did much to the surprise of the hearing officers and pro nuclear attendees.

Illinois

Members of **Greenpeace**, **Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization (PERRO)**, the **Sierra Club** and other organizations participated in the **Chicago Clean Power Coalition** rally at the Alivio Medical Center. The rally called for shutting down carbon dioxide emitting coal fired power plants (Fisk Generating Station and Crawford Generating Station) both located in urban neighborhoods. PERRO became concerned with the issue because of a 2001 study published by the Harvard School of Public Health. The study examined residents living near fossil fuel



Photo from news.mediill.northwestern.edu

Protestors rally to shut down Chicago's coal plants

burning power plants in Illinois and found that the Fisk and Crawford plants contributed to Chicago's annual hospitalization cases of 2,800 asthma attacks, 550 emergency room visits and 41 premature deaths. The coalition is pushing to reduce the emissions by 50 percent and particulate matter by 90 percent which would be equivalent to taking 625,000 cars off the road.

Michigan

CHEJ's Lois Gibbs visit to Marquette gave a new shot of energy to the local residents fighting to stop the Kennecott sulfite mine from expanding in the Upper Peninsula. Over 150 people attended a meeting sponsored by **Students for Sustainable Living** and other local groups to talk about the need to possibly use the opportunity of a new governor to revisit the issues around the mine. The only study conducted on the environmental safety of the mine was done by the company. Of course they say it is safe. Over 200 health professionals have signed a letter, published widely, to stop mining activities as it poses increased health risks to the community. If over 100 health professionals say no – what is the question?

The Ecology Center in Ann Arbor believes the closing of Energy Investment Fund incinerator in Detroit adds credibility to longstanding claims that the facility isn't economically viable, and cannot produce steam at a competitive price. An agreement could not be reached between Detroit Thermal and the Energy Investment Fund, resulting in the city's waste incinerator shutting down in October. The incinerator wasn't able to produce a sufficient amount of steam to assist in the heating and cooling of nearly 150 buildings in downtown Detroit (see *Feature on Social Forum*).

Minnesota

Neighbors Against the Asphalt Plant (NAAP) are continuing to organize opposition to a plan by Bituminous Roadways to build an asphalt plant in the town in Roseville. The City Council was taken by the overwhelming opposition in the community and appears poised to tell the company that it does not meet current zoning requirements and will deny their permit request. The state pollution control agency which began an analysis of the air impacts of the proposed plant has put a hold on its analysis and is awaiting the decision of the city council. The state will not have to issue a ruling if the project does not receive a local permit. NAAP plans to continue keeping the pressure on until the company withdraws its permit request.

Montana

The Opportunity Community Protective Association (OCPA) and residents in Opportunity, a small town near the Anaconda Smelter Superfund site, are not happy with the results one year after

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or call 703-237-2249

the USEPA completed its “cleanup” of part of the contamination caused by the smelter. Waste from the smelter and from mining operations was dumped into the Clark Fork River and ended up in sediment at the foot of the Milltown dam in Missoula. Atlantic Richfield who is responsible for cleaning up this contamination removed 2.5 million cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the reservoir and brought it to Opportunity where it was spread two feet thick over more than 600 acres that were once used as settling ponds for the company’s mining operations. The ponds have long since dried up, but the residual mine tailing sludge left behind contains arsenic, cadmium, lead, zinc and other poisons. The plan was to cover the dried mine tailings with sediment from the contaminated reservoir and from that would spring vegetation. OCPA was excited at first to have the dried mine tailings covered instead of blowing all over the place and to have what they were told would be vegetation in place of what looked like a moonscape. But one year later, the EPA has found that no vegetation grew at the site. Somehow, the agency seemed surprised that nothing grew. As one official said, “the vegetation never took off.” Now, it’s back to the drawing board looking for a plan to address the contamination in Opportunity.

New Jersey

Citizens for a Clean Pompton Lakes (CCPL) with support from Congressman Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) have succeeded in convincing DuPont to allow residents in the Pompton Lakes area to hire their own contractors to test the air in their homes and to install a remediation system that would prevent toxic vapors from entering their homes. Over 400 homes were affected by trichloroethylene (TCE) and other chemicals leaking from the nearby DuPont plant. These volatile chemicals got into the groundwater and are evaporating through a process called vapor intrusion into homes built above the groundwater. This is a major victory for the people in the area known as the “Plume.” Prior to this decision, residents were only allowed to use contractors that DuPont provided them.

A lawsuit filed last year by the **Eastern Environmental Law Center** on behalf of the **Ironbound Community Corp.** against Covanta Energy was settled recently. Covanta’s “energy-from-waste plant” in Newark, which has committed hundreds of violations for releasing sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and fine particulates under the

federal Clean Air Act, will install new air pollution control equipment to limit their emissions. They have also agreed to provide \$875,000 for green space recreation projects in the Ironbound section of Newark and to commission a study to examine waste deliveries at the incinerator that will recommend improvements to existing inspection programs. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has indicated that the incinerator emits more mercury than any other trash burning facility in the state.

New York

Camillus Concerned Citizens (CCC) organized to stop plans by the state and Honeywell to dump tons of remediated toxic waste removed from Lake Onondaga in their neighborhood near Syracuse. CCC met with the US EPA to ask them to halt the project. The group has identified several innovative treatment technologies that they feel could be used to clean up the lake and negate the need for a waste disposal site. Their next step is to convince EPA and the state to consider these alternative technologies and enlist the support of area environmental groups.

Hopewell Junction Citizens for Clean Water filed a lawsuit against Hopewell Precision claiming that it contaminated the town’s wells with trichloroethylene (TCE). Federal environmental officials determined that 20 homes were contaminated since the 1970s. The EPA finally provided water and air filtration systems for the homes in 2003. Unfortunately the lawsuit was dropped by the lawyers because the company doesn’t have sufficient assets. Moving forward to help other communities harmed by toxic vapors, the group helped organize a meeting with EPA and state officials recently to discuss how the agencies can address toxic vapors impacting seven New York City schools.

North Carolina

Two chapters of the **Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League**, **Citizens for a Healthy Environment (CHE)** and **Clean Air Now (CAN)** testified at a public hearing sponsored by the NC Environmental Management Commission in Greensboro telling the state agency that four years is too long to wait for cleaner air. The groups want the medical waste incinerators in the state, the BMWNC incinerator in Mathews and the two incinerators operated by Stericycle in Haw River, to come into compliance with new EPA rules by 2012 instead of 2014 as called for in the federal regulation. These incinerators release dioxins, mercury, lead, and other pollutants at levels well above the new federal standards. The groups are arguing that the incinerator companies have the financial resources and technical capacity to meet the new emission limits now and that there is no reason to allow them to continue to pollute the surrounding community

for another four years. “The EPA’s new standard for air pollutants will substantially reduce these emissions [from the BMWNC incinerator] and create a far safer environment for area residents. This needs to be addressed sooner, not later,” said a member of CHE.



This past fall CHEJ’s Lois Gibbs and Anne Rabe facilitated a workshop in Durham on Biomass Messaging for the **Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League** and other community groups and leaders. Groups across the state are dealing with rash of proposals to burn wood, chicken poop, and other bio-based materials under the guise of waste-to-energy facilities that reduce our dependence on foreign oil. The companies that are pushing this approach are calling this the answer to North Carolina’s economic woes. The group determined that the one thing that these companies hate the most is when this approach is referred to as incineration, which in fact it is. So the group decided that they needed to call all of these biomass facilities what they really are — incinerators!

Ohio

CHEJ member group, **Property Owners Want Equal Rights (POWER)** and **Ohio Citizen Action** are doing more than protesting the proposed expansion of the Rumpke Sanitary Landfill in Cincinnati. The groups are offering alternatives they say will extend the life of the landfill without using more land, and challenging the community to rethink the way we dispose of our garbage in a 40-page report released by the groups, *The Future is Now: A Citizens’ Audit of the Rumpke Sanitary Landfill*. Ideas include a mix of advanced recycling techniques coupled with entrepreneurial uses for reusable waste. The groups believe that at least 50 percent of the trash could be diverted from the landfill thereby extending the life of the current footprint. See <http://ohiocitizen.org/?p=3830> for a copy of the report.

The **Green Environmental Coalition** in Yellowsprings joined CHEJ and the **Ohio Environmental Council (OEC)** in screening the documentary “Living Downstream” that features Dr. Sandra Steingraber. A packed house sat spell bound during the screening

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with many wanting more information on what they could do to change things. CHEJ and OEC presented information on the Toxic Substance Control Act, and its possible reform. Post cards are being gathered and will be presented to elected officials in Washington sometime in the coming year.

Pennsylvania



Crawford Area Residents for the Environment (CARE) along with several scientists are working together to stop Crawford Renewable Energy from building a tires-to-energy plant in Meadville. Residents are concerned about the facility's effects on the area's water supply, their well-being, and about toxic substances like dioxins and furans that are released from the incinerator entering the food chain and the Conneaut Marsh. The proposed plant would sit near 12,360 acres of the Conneaut-Geneva Marsh, which is recognized for its noteworthy bird habitat. As one scientist put it, "there is a danger in the idea that it is okay to release a little bit of pollution. It does not take much to have a huge impact."

Texas

Poverty ridden communities along the Texas-Mexico border, called *Las colonias*, are home to many immigrant families. Residents in a colonia near **El Paso** have been living without running water for decades. The residents have to purchase water from two sources- the water district and a private owner. The water is often treated with bleach. The Lower Valley Water District (LVWD) was given a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for a project that would provide water service, but plans were stalled. Residents have been fighting for years to make the LVWD finish the project. The resident's pressure finally paid off when the USDA and the LVWD agreed to renew the project. The residents plan to continue to monitor LVWD's progress.

The **Argyle-Bartonville Communities Alliance** formed to fight the placement of natural gas production wells near homes and schools. The group is fighting drilling at two sites that were approved for drilling by the Argyle town council. Both sites are less than a half mile from three schools. Since the drilling began, complaints from students have included nosebleeds, dizziness, disorientation, and nausea. Students have reported smelling rotten eggs and other odors similar to fingernail polish. Natural gas production has been linked to emissions of benzene, formaldehyde, carbon disulfide, ethane, toluene and xylene. The school district has asked the state health department to investigate, but many are skeptical that the school district will do anything. Last year the school district received over \$680,000 in revenue from gas drilling leases signed with gas companies. One parent put it this way: "You can't put a price on keeping our kids healthy."

West Virginia

With the help and donations of organizations including the **Coal River Mountain Watch** and the **Annenberg Foundation**, the construction of the new Marsh Fork Elementary School will begin next year at a site that is about 3 miles from the current location. A family whose two children attended the school filed a lawsuit against Massey Energy Company who operated a massive coal processing plant located immediately adjacent to the school. The lawsuit accuses Massey and its subsidiaries of exposing hundreds of children to toxic coal dust, being careless and causing a public nuisance. The suit also claims long-term exposures to this dust could cause a greater risk of developing health problems to an estimated 300 students and faculty members. Expert testimony will show that coal dust contains substances that have been associated with cancer, respiratory disease, poor lung function, and chronic bronchitis as well as renal, cardiovascular and autoimmune diseases.



The Marsh Fork Elementary School (at bottom center of photo) will be relocated away from the Massey Energy coal sludge processing facility.

Wisconsin

Congratulations to **Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger** (CSWAB) who helped win new state water standards to be implemented early next year. CSWAB



This fall, don't forget to make a pledge...

Combined Federal Campaign #10633

Check with your workplace to see if you have a CFC Workplace Giving Fair. For more info, contact dstewart@chej.org or 703-237-2249 ext. 14.

began pushing for new regulations in 2006 once it was evident that cleanup at the Badger Army Munitions Plant and other military sites could only be enforced by means of existing standards. The state will adopt a groundwater standard for the carcinogenic explosive dinitrotoluene (DNT) at 0.05 parts per billion (ppb). Testing at the Badger site has found DNT in groundwater at levels as high as 2,200 ppb. CSWAB was able to get the standards for perchlorate, an oxidizer in solid propellants such as missiles, rockets, fireworks, lowered from 7.0 to 1.0 ppb. Their key to success - getting hundreds of people to testify at public hearings held by the state.

The proposed Northwest Asphalt Products Inc. plant was voted down by the Village Board in **Caledonia**. The plant would have been located on the border between the towns of Raymond and Caledonia. This was the second board vote. In the original board meeting, Raymond voted 3-2 for the plant while Caledonia voted against it. Apart from the traffic the plant would bring, residents were concerned about the negative effects of emissions from the proposed plant on the wetlands, drops in home values, poorer water quality and the danger the new plant would attract other heavy industrial businesses to the area, and the disappearance of certain tranquil qualities of the rural area. One resident was so worried about how the plant would affect his son's asthma that they took a test trip to another asphalt plant, where the boy needed his inhaler every five minutes.

British Columbia, Canada

Zero Waste BC and other community and environmental groups are awaiting the decision of the province's Environmental Minister who will review the 5,000 page proposal submitted by the city of Vancouver to build a trash incinerator. The minister will also consider the countless emails and letters from the public, many of which oppose the proposal. The city must comply with provincial regulations and address air quality, which has been a heated issue for residents opposing the project, as well as other environmental factors that could raise potential questions from residents and area officials. ♦



A CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THREATS TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Child Proofing Our Communities

Let's Move, Mrs. Obama

The Let's Move! campaign, started by First Lady Michelle Obama, has the ambitious goal of solving the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation so that children born today will reach adulthood at a healthy weight. Let's Move! combats childhood obesity through a comprehensive approach that engages every sector affecting the health of children and provides schools, families and communities simple tools to help kids be more active, eat better, and get healthy.

We took this mission literally and organized 326 organizations and 1,340 individuals who signed on to a letter to Mrs. Obama asking her to strengthen the recommendations on safe environments to include cleaning up toxic contamination at school sites and avoiding building schools and playgrounds near sources of toxic air pollution. We urge the Task Force to deal with the reality that schools, playgrounds, parks, and other areas where children might be active are continually being built on contaminated land. Not addressing this serious issue will affect the health of children who are active at these locations.

Parent's Guide: Educational Tool and Action Steps

A Parent's Guide: Reducing Children's Environmental Health Risks is a great tool for parents. Parents can use this resource to learn about harmful environmental threats in your community. The guide explains toxic threats in simple language and includes ideas on how to reduce your chances for exposure. The guide drives home the point that individual families cannot combat this massive problem alone. There is a need for neighborhoods to take back their communities by starting local efforts and joining national campaigns to fight back greedy companies from polluting their communities. Contact CHEJ for a copy of the Parent's Guide as well as other publications to assist you in your local fight!



Just Released! EPA's School Siting Guidelines for Public Review and Comment

As we prepare to go to press, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has finally released its draft guidelines on school siting for public comment. People have until February 18, 2011 to submit comments. You can read the guidelines and make your comments on line at <http://www.epa.gov/schools/siting/>. Surprisingly, the agency is not publishing a traditional report. Instead, the document is available in electronic format on its website. A pdf file of the various links in the document (117 pages) can be downloaded from the website. To request a copy of the pdf file, contact the EPA office of Children's Health at (202) 564-2188 or school_siting@epa.gov. In your request make sure you ask for a hard copy of the school siting guidelines. CHEJ plans to critically review the document and provide a summary well before the public comment period is over. Look for these summary comments as you prepare to submit your own comments to EPA. It's important for EPA to hear as many voices as possible so that the final guidelines are as strong as they can be. For more information, contact Makia Burns at 703-237-2249 x 21 or at mburns@chej.org.

plan. ZWD felt that the action needed to be beautiful, inspiring and empowering, making the streets safe for local residents to take action. We decided that:

- Images, music and messages would be positive and bold, evoking visions of resilience and resistance.
- Smokestacks would represent solidarity with all communities, where stacks spew pollution from burning coal, oil, waste and other fuels.
- Sunflowers would help frame ecological justice as being intrinsic to community health.
- The fallen would be remembered, children and future generations would be defended, polluting corporations would be resisted, and, a trashed economy would be reclaimed.
- The action would leave behind memories for local communities and future generations.
- We would aim to unify all the frontlines of Detroit – including people living next to the DTE coal plant, the Marathon oil refinery and the Covanta incinerator.

Turning the Inside Out

Just as the equation of power in our country must be inverted, activists should always seek to turn movements inside out – so we remain rooted in popular bases. “Turning the inside out” requires guiding people’s passions and principles to the streets and into the communities whose power we seek to build. Social Forum organizers supported turning people out - at plenary events, workshops and People’s Movement Assemblies (PMA) throughout the week. This allowed us to focus on art-builds, non-violence trainings and the actions of allies. We co-sponsored the Eco-Justice PMA, where scores of allied groups committed to turning their people out. We had to overcome hurdles such as conflicting events, transportation for people and props, and parallel events where thousands of activists had already committed themselves

Turning Detroit out required meeting people at their doorsteps - through “Art in Action” workshops with local youth who defined their own vision of liberation on banners and action props. Visiting activists joined local organizers in door-to-door canvassing in neighborhoods most impacted by Detroit’s largest polluting industries. We canvassed churches, community brunches and markets, local schools and colleges.

Success in Camaraderie and Alignment

Parents, teachers and students at the Golightly elementary school, located next to the incinerator, engaged in gardening action around the school yard, planting flowers and fruit trees to express resiliency in the face of abject pollution. The Michigan Teamsters and other labor allies marched abreast of local EJ activists; banners were dropped behind the incinerator and floated in its foreground; the smokestack of corporate empire was (symbolically) brought tumbling



Photo by David Sobrit, Courage to Resist

Detroit Youth Create Their Vision of Change at US Social Forum.

down; and, the mayor was forced to listen to the demands of his people - people united along the frontlines of Detroit and across the nation, with hundreds of bright sunflowers marching to the rhythm of revolutionary marching bands and song.

The march ended at the old Detroit Recycling Center, a shuttered warehouse one block from the incinerator – a worksite shut down after Covanta demanded they receive all recyclables to burn. Leaders of ZWD and the Michigan Teamsters closed the action, committing to work together to replace the incinerator with good, local recycling jobs. This marked a new era of political alignment between labor and environmental justice in the U.S., just a week after the United Autoworkers and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee blockaded Chase bank, to throw their lot down with the working poor.

On the 8th of October, after two decades of community resistance, Covanta’s Detroit burner was shut down for “economic reasons.” While this fight is clearly not over, the June 26th Day of Action illustrates how mass, non-violence action and community organizing played a strategic role in stopping one of the world’s largest climate and community polluters. This action wouldn’t have been successful without the many diverse groups who made this action beautiful and impactful – and there were many. A different group had helped coordinate each facet of the action, both creative and logistical, and there was much gratitude and camaraderie knowing our friends had our backs with attention to detail. Building movement is basically about building relationships.

Now, with the largest waste burner down, there remain 86 waste-to-energy burners for us to shut down. Watch out Covanta - we are coming for you, with all our friends, street-by-street, community-by-community!

Ananda Lee Tan coordinates U.S. and Canadian networks and campaigns for the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives. Ananda has been an activist, organizer and rebel-rouser for over two decades, working on anti-war, forestry, agriculture, climate, trade and social justice campaigns around the world. Ananda lives with his wife and son in East Bay, California. ♦

With Special Thanks

CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations to support our work between August 1, 2010 to October 31, 2010. 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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SUPERFUND'S 30TH BIRTHDAY, continued from page 5

If the people lead, the leaders will follow is an old organizing truism. Organized community groups have led the campaigns that created Superfund, the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) that is responsible for evaluating health problems at Superfund sites, as well as the creation of the Technical Assistance Grants (TAG) program for communities struggling to understand scientific test results and cleanup plans. EPA recently sent CHEJ a summary of the TAG program which showed that approximately \$28 million has been awarded to groups since the inception of the TAG program in 1988, providing much-needed assistance to impacted communities at Superfund sites.

Over the next year, CHEJ and the Polluter Pays Network of groups will wage a campaign to help President Obama meet his goal to pass the Superfund polluters pay fee bill in 2011. To get involved, contact anne@chej.org. ♦

Sources: Superfund: EPA's Estimated Costs to Remediate Existing Sites Exceed Current Funding Levels; More Sites are Expected to be Added to the NPL, GAO, May 2010; and Obama, EPA to Push for Restoration of Superfund Tax, Washington Post, June 21, 2010.



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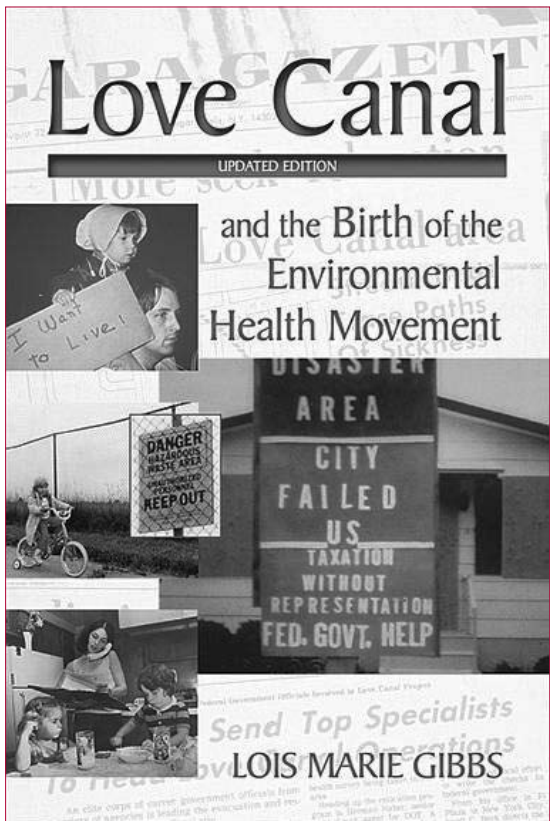
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