

REFLECTION ON WOMEN'S STORIES FROM THE CENTRAL APPALACHIAN WOMEN'S TRIBUNAL ON CLIMATE JUSTICE



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: SIX ESSENTIAL LESSONS IN ORGANIZING



The Journal of the Grassroots Environmental Movement

www.chej.org

Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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On the Cover:

CHICAGO RESIDENTS RALLIED LAST FALL TO SHUT DOWN OF TWO COAL PLANTS IN INNER CITY; BOTH PLANTS RECENTLY AGREED TO SHUT DOWN (SEE ILLINOIS ACTION LINE STORY).

Photo by Stephen J. Carerra/Greenpeace

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MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Throughout CHEJ's thirty year history, we've had the honor and privilege to work with over 11,000 grassroots communities across the country that faced an environmental health threat. We've worked with leaders who were at first afraid of speaking publicly and later transformed into passionate articulate spokespeople. CHEJ has worked with ordinary everyday people who knew little about science who became self-taught technical experts that could debate the corporate or regulatory experts and win that debate.

I was once skeptical about what people could really achieve. No longer. I've seen groups take on just about every size, shape and type of industry and win. Once, a group decided the best way to close a landfill that wanted to expand was to get the local government to buy it and close it. What a goofy idea I thought – they'll never pull that off. Yet, they did. Using a local referendum, the taxpayers bought the landfill and then closed it properly. Unbelievable!

Over the past thirty years much has been accomplished.

The struggle at Love Canal was the impetus for creating the federal Superfund to assess and cleanup chemical contamination at the worst sites across the country. Not one new commercial hazardous waste dumpsite has been built since 1982. Not one. Additionally, waste reduction, reuse and substitution have become the new approach to solving the root problem of hazardous waste generation.

The federal Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry was established from the pressure of leaders wanting to know the health impacts of community exposures to chemicals in the air, or water, or soil. Today, in response to communities ATSDR is working to establish a grants program designed to enable communities to hire their own health experts.

Through massive public outcry for change, new rules were set for solid waste landfills and thousands of facilities were closed the day the rules came into effect coined by the industry as "Black Tuesday." Recycling became the rallying cry for communities across the country with cities, towns and states establishing recycling goals and programs.

McDonalds was strategically chosen as the corporation to educate America about the need to use sustainable packaging. CHEJ's (then CCHW) McToxic's Campaign successfully eliminated Styrofoam from its packaging and launched CHEJ's PVC Campaign work with a nationwide network that has convinced Crabtree & Evelyn, Target, Sears/Kmart, Microsoft, J.C. Penney, Best Buy and others to phase out PVC in products and/or packaging.

Dioxin air releases were reduced by 92% because of grassroots efforts to shut down garbage and medical waste incinerators, changing the chemicals used at paper and pulp facilities, and by phasing out certain products like PVC.

CHEJ and our allies pushed to make children's health risk from environmental chemicals a priority and established new federal children's protection programs such as EPA's new school siting guidelines for local school districts to use when building new schools. Together with our allies, we have also passed legislation to ban lead and phthalates in kids' toys.

Yes, the past thirty years were successful. But we are not yet done. The key to all of these successes is the community leaders, standing up, speaking out and connecting with each other to create the pressure for change. Let's keep moving forward, together.

Lois Marie Gibbs,
Executive Director

ABOUT CHEJ

CHEJ is a national non-profit organization that helps people build democratic, community-based organizations to prevent harm from toxic chemical hazards. CHEJ works with the environmental health and justice movement to eliminate harmful toxic exposures in communities impacted by hazardous waste sites, chemical plants, and other polluting industries, as well as, eliminate unsafe chemicals in products used in homes, schools and other facilities. CHEJ mentors and empowers community-based groups to become effective in achieving their goals and build a national environmental health and justice movement where every community is safe to live, work, pray and play without toxic hazards. CHEJ has assisted over 11,000 groups nationwide. To learn more, visit www.chj.org.

By LOIS MARIE GIBBS, CHEJ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: SIX ESSENTIAL LESSONS IN ORGANIZING

There are many lessons we have learned over the years. As we close out our 30th Anniversary year, I want to highlight some key lessons of successful organizing.

1. People Can Create Change

We often face extraordinary opposition with more money than we could ever image. Yet the power of the people should never be underestimated. No matter what happens at the statehouse or the White House, all elected representatives still need to go home and still need to be voted into office. If you can change the minds and the hearts of local people on your issue, you can change the minds of those who represent them.

2. Think and Act Out-of-the Box

It's great to go to meetings, public hearings and write letters to the editor, your elected representatives, and anyone else you think might be able to wield some influence over decisions made on your issues. All of this is necessary, but if you only work within the system set up by regulations or government for public participation, you are likely to be less effective.

Be creative and identify activities that are outside the system and can create fun and attention to your issues. For example, a waste company wanted to build a disposal facility in a small town in Alabama. Although the group fought hard to stop it, they lost the permit hearings. So they thought about ways to "inconvenience" the company and make them not want to build their facility there. In this situation, the community had the support of the local government.

They passed local laws and ordinances that targeted the day-to-day operations of the company. For example, they said no trucks could travel through town without being inspected by one of the town's inspectors – at a cost of course. Next, they passed a rule that during school hours all trucks carrying waste must be escorted through town – at a cost, of course. And, during the time when children were traveling to and from school, trucks couldn't travel at all. It made the company crazy and they knew that the trucks would be delayed and that they might be denied passage due to a failed inspection. Eventually the company walked away from the site, and the community won!

As groups are thinking about fracking and nuclear or other environmental risks, try and think outside the box. Ask yourself, what else could possibly give your community a level of power and control and change the possible outcome of the issue?

3. Frame your Messages in a Way that Reaches the Most People

I often visit communities where people are talking about dangers, health or environmental impacts, from a proposed facility or from an existing environmental problem. Although it may be hard to



believe, not everyone cares about health issues or impacts on the environment. Yet, more often than not that is all we talk about.

When you talk about the problem, you need to include those issues, but also think beyond them. In Detroit, for example, organizational leaders opposed a third nuclear power plant along the edge of Lake Erie. They talked about the near melt down of the existing reactor, what happened in Japan, and how it could happen in Detroit. Leaders passionately spoke about the radioactive waste that is stored on-site and the danger that it poses. But not many people responded to this concern. Then in a CHEJ training session, they were challenged to think outside the box and go beyond the immediate danger and destruction posed by the proposed plant. They came up with an attractive new message – Detroit's citizens (the ratepayers) are being asked to pay for this plant before it's built through an increase in their utility bills. Detroit citizens will not reap the benefits and in fact they may be paying for something that may never be built. Aren't there other important places that Detroiters can spend their hard earned money on, like food, housing or education? As you may know Detroit is on the verge of bankruptcy and the poverty level is very high. To charge poor families for a new reactor is quite unfair by any standard.

In Massachusetts, a community was outraged by a proposal to build a waste site in their neighborhood. This community already had a prison and other undesirable facilities. At first the leaders of the local group talked about the problems that the facility would pose to both the environment and public health. Then, after a CHEJ workshop on messaging, they changed their focus to a more value-driven call for action – How dare the state try and place this nasty facility in our community after we have already taken several other undesirable businesses. The community group working with their local government hung a banner at the primary entrance to the community which said, "How Dare They Propose a Waste Site Here?" Their value based message and approach worked. People agreed and spoke out against the proposal. And, they won!

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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.

NY Teachers: Let's Get PVC Out of Our Schools!

Our fight for PVC-free schools is picking up momentum. This April, the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) union passed a major policy resolution at their 40th annual representative assembly titled, *"Reducing & Phasing Out the Purchase of Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) Plastic in New York Schools."*

The resolution is the latest action by a major organization calling for a phase out of toxic PVC due to the hazards that vinyl chemicals like phthalates and dioxin pose to children's health. The resolution follows a similar resolution passed by the American Public Health Association last fall.

NYSUT is made up of more than 600,000 people who work in, or are retired from, New York's schools, colleges, and healthcare facilities. NYSUT represents everyone from classroom teachers, college and university faculty and professional staff, school bus drivers, custodians, secretaries, cafeteria workers, teacher assistants, nurses and healthcare technicians.

NYSUT's resolution concludes by stating that:

"RESOLVED, that NYSUT urges school districts in New York state and the State Education Department to develop new green procurement policies to reduce and phase out the use and purchase of PVC building materials, office supplies and school supplies; and be it further

RESOLVED, that NYSUT support efforts to have school districts in New York state and the State Education Department implement cost-effective strategies to reduce and phase out PVC in building materials, office supplies and school supplies and should encourage suppliers and vendors to reduce or eliminate their use of PVC in product and packaging; and be it further

RESOLVED, that NYSUT urges New York state schools to educate the public about dangers of PVC and their strategies for phasing it out; and be it further

RESOLVED, that NYSUT urges state and federal governments, in enacting such phase-outs, to consider policies that alleviate short-term economic impacts on the PVC production workforce, and to also consider economic benefits to workers in industries making safer alternatives."

You can read and download the resolution by going to www.chej.org/wp-content/uploads/NYSUTPVCResolutionFINAL.docx

Help us continue the momentum!

If you belong to a PTA, union or other organization that might be interested in enacting a similar resolution, please contact CHEJ's Campaign Coordinator Mike Schade: mike@chej.org / 212.964.3680.

We Almost Lost Detroit



The Sierra Club Southeast Michigan Group, Don't Waste Michigan and CHEJ held a two day strategy session in Detroit recently to develop an organizing and publicity campaign to halt the proposed Fermi 3 nuclear reactor and to shut down the Fermi 2 reactor. Located south of Detroit, the site includes Fermi 1, which had a partial core meltdown in 1966 but it was not until 1975 that the book, *We Almost Lost Detroit*, brought the near-catastrophe to public attention. Fermi 2, the world's largest Mark 1 reactor, is almost as big as both its identical twins, Japan's Fukushima 1 and 2. Fermi 2's near-misses include an explosion that resulted in millions of gallons of

radioactive water being discharged into the lake.

Now, Detroit Edison wants to build yet another reactor. Even worse, the state is making rate payers pre-pay the cost of constructing it! That's right – **pre-pay** for a reactor that is unnecessary, unsafe and expensive. The median income of Detroit households is \$28,000, and more than 26% of people live below the poverty line. Why did Michigan approve this unfair policy? Could something similar be happening in your state? America doesn't need another nuclear reactor. We need safe and clean energy. If your group is interested in hosting a CHEJ publicity and organizing workshop on a reactor fight, contact us at anne@chej.org or 518-732-4538.

By REBECCA BARNES-DAVIES

REFLECTION ON WOMEN'S STORIES FROM THE CENTRAL APPALACHIAN WOMEN'S TRIBUNAL ON CLIMATE JUSTICE

The Central Appalachian Women's Tribunal on Climate Justice held in Charleston, West Virginia on May 10, 2012 was a powerful and meaningful event of local women lifting up their voices and engaging in action to protect the health and integrity of their families, their communities, and their land. The speakers and leaders of this event were local residents who shared their personal stories of witnessing the devastating effects of Mountaintop Removal (MTR) Coal Mining in their homeland of Appalachia. Some of these local women have won prestigious awards, gained national recognition, and/or been interviewed in documentaries for their great efforts. They come from a four state area: Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, and Kentucky.

This gathering was one in a series of global tribunals that help to lift up the particular vulnerability of women to, and strength in the face of, climate change. These tribunals have given voice and recognition to women who live all around the world and are fighting for justice in their environment. Reflections from this Appalachian tribunal will go to the "Rio+20" United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development this June in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Nearly twenty women shared their personal stories, testimonies, ideas, and demands related to Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining.

"It's not possible to destroy our mountains without destroying us. It's not possible to poison our streams without poisoning our children....For all the voices you hear today, remember there are others who have been silenced or intimidated." - From a woman who can remember watching the blasting on the mountains from her bedroom window since she was 5 years old.

A 25 year old woman, who knows that the legacy of environmental degradation in her mountains is to "stunt Appalachians' health before they're even born," wants MTR stopped because she desires that it be "safe to birth my future children in my homeland... living where our families have lived for generations."

A nurse takes note of "strange and serious illnesses" in her home territory (after going away for nurse training and then coming back home). She was particularly stunned by an extremely rare illness that took the life of her cousin (an illness with which only 20,000 people have ever been diagnosed) that is now the diagnosis for another person in her community and one more nearby. She says there is not one home located near coal mines that has been untouched by serious illness.

A woman whose 12 year old daughter lost a classmate to cancer—the same daughter having severe sinus troubles because of MTR (including the membrane in her nostrils being cut by the loose rock dust the family had to breathe)—shared her anger that her daughter's health was being sacrificed to the energy demands of cheap coal in this country. This woman's family stayed sick the entire time they were blowing up the mountain above their home. To add insult to injury, the reports from the coal company discounted the health disparities in these communities affected by MTR coal mining



Photo by Jorge Aron

Anne League testifies before the Central Appalachian Women's Tribunal on Climate Justice in Charleston, WV.

because the case studies didn't take into account "consanguinity" (in-breeding)!

Coming from a family that has been in coal mining for generations, one woman shared that in her 20 year saga of trying to protect her land, it has been an ongoing battle that takes a ton of work, and unfortunately "people here are frightened of the industry." In many families, people worry "they'll take my pension...burn down my house" and she shrugs as she speaks, knowing their fears are realistic and part of the fabric of this struggle. She has fought long and hard, pushing politicians who often won't do anything, which she recognizes is because "it is political suicide to try to do anything" against coal in this part of the country. Yet she has hope, even as there's another round of fighting ahead (the coal company has yet again filed permits for the land near her home, permits that have been denied multiple times). She smiles and says, "Get all these ladies together and do what women do and that's win the battles!"

Another woman whose male relations are all in coal mining, and who herself was a stay-at-home mom, shared her story about being "thrust" into this movement by the coal company itself. How could she have a choice when this MTR coal mining "can turn lungs into concrete," and when constantly "babies are wakened by noise" and when a toddler in his bed was crushed by a boulder falling into his house from the mountaintop above? Sludge gets into the water. She declares, this is "equivalent to a war zone." She wants her children to know that they have choices. So when her legislator, agreeing with her in principal but nervous to take action says "we have an awful lot of coal," she retorts "we also have a lot of sun and air." She is clear that "they mine coal where we live, not we live where they mine coal." Families and communities come first. And, besides, "Nothing else matters if we can't breathe the air and drink the water."

Telling a story about an old preacher who was discussing the biblical passage about it being hard for a rich person to get to heaven (and

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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.

Alaska

Victory! Thanks to the hard work of **Alaska Community Action on Toxics**, the Alaska State Senate voted to pass a bill to ban the import of products containing toxic flame retardant chemicals known as PBDEs. These substances are used in furniture, fabrics, and consumer electronics to slow the burn rate in the event of a fire. They have been shown to accumulate in humans and animals, even in the Arctic, and they present a significant risk to thyroid function, brain development, memory, and behavior. If the new bill is passed, it will phase out the use, sale and manufacture of products containing PBDEs by 2013 and promote the use of safer chemicals and products.

California

Over 100 outraged residents of Gonzales walked out of a public meeting held by the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority to discuss a proposed plasma arc waste incinerator. The residents were angry because the agency failed to give equal notice to Spanish speakers, did not translate key documents into Spanish, and did not provide for adequate interpretation between English and Spanish. Maria Perea, President of the local group **Asamblea de Poder Popular de Gonzales**, said of the situation "This is racist and absolutely unacceptable. Over 80% of the community is Latino and over 40% are limited English speakers... We call on everyone in our community, as well as elected officials, to immediately protest such blatant racism in this day and age." Many Gonzales residents are worried that their concerns were not heard, but they vow to continue to fight the proposed burner.

Florida

The grassroots group **Gainesville Citizens CARE** has been organizing against the City of Gainesville's proposed 100 megawatt biomass incinerator. In April the group filed a lawsuit asking that a \$3 billion Power Purchase Agreement approved by the City Commission and negotiated by Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) be declared void because it violated the state's sunshine law. Gainesville CARE believes that the City Commission negotiated details of the agreement without public notice and failed to include a "termination for convenience clause" that would have given Gainesville the option of backing out of the contract prior to construction of the

plant. Public outrage against the commission and the incinerator has inspired the release of a searing protest song called "The Biomass Queen" which portrays the tumultuous history of the biomass plant and its burden on Gainesville's poorest citizens in classic blues style.

Florida activists are celebrating a major victory as commissioners in St. Lucie County officially terminated a contract with Geo Plasma that the company has sought since 2005 to develop the nation's first plasma gasification plant. The 100,000 square foot plant would have treated up to 3,000 tons of trash per day, and in turn generated electricity. Opponents of the plant were concerned about potential air pollutants and the slag by-product that would have been generated by the process, as well as the financial burden on the county. Commissioners cited financial limitations as the primary reason for terminating the contract.

Illinois



Fisk power plant in Chicago targeted for closure.

Congratulations to the **Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)** and to the **Chicago Clean Power Coalition** for shutting down the Fisk and Crawford coal fired power plants located in the midst of their neighborhood. "For over ten years our communities have been fighting for the right to breathe clean air, clean land and clean water. Today we are ending over 100 years of pollution for profits and showing the power of community. This fight was more than just about a right to breath, this continues with ensuring the land left behind is properly cleaned to avoid leaving our community with another contaminated piece of industrial land and another struggle for environmental justice in Little Village" said Kimberly Wasserman of LVEJO in a press statement. The groups celebrated this historic victory with a "Retirement Party" attended by hundreds of people in Chicago's Dvorak Park. According to an agreement

signed by Midwest Generation, the Clean Power Coalition, and the City of Chicago, the Fisk coal plant in Pilsen will shut down in 2012 and the Crawford coal plant in Little Village will shut down by 2014.

Kentucky

CHEJ's Betty the Be Safe Duck, the two-story inflatable duckie that has become the symbol for a toxic-free future participated in a rally for chemical industry reform in Berea. Hosted by the **Kentucky Environmental Foundation (KEF)**, the rally gathered support for the Safe Chemicals Act currently before Congress. During the event petitions were signed and sent to U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell (R), Rep. Ed Whitfield (R), and President Barack Obama, encouraging them not to "duck" the issue of chemical reform and to vote in support of the bill. The Act would require companies to show that the chemicals they use are safe. As KEF member Jason Howard points out, "More than 80,000 chemicals are in the marketplace today, but under an ineffective federal law called the Toxic Substances Control Act, only 200 have ever been tested for health or safety impacts. These chemicals include heavy metals that persist in the environment and travel through the food chain, and hormone-disrupting chemicals are linked to cancer, reproductive disorders, developmental and learning disabilities, even diabetes and obesity."

Maryland

The **Gude Landfill Concerned Citizens** are waiting on plans to clean up the Gude landfill located in Montgomery County near Washington, DC. The oldest landfill in the county was closed in 1982 with promises from the county government to turn the landfill into a park with tennis courts, basketball courts, and other recreational facilities. Shortly after the landfill closed, plans to build homes on the landfill were abandoned because the landfill surface was collapsing at a rate of 1-2 feet per year. There is still no park today, but officials are now worried by the finding of the vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals leaking into local groundwater. Local officials claim there is nothing to worry about since residents are on municipal water not well water. Someone should remind the county that volatile chemicals like vinyl chloride evaporate into homes from contaminated groundwater – through soil and foundation walls – due to the process known as vapor intrusion.

Massachusetts

The **Toxics Action Center** hosted its 25th Anniversary Environmental Action Conference, co-hosted by groups including **Massachusetts Climate Action Network** and the **Northeastern Environmental Justice Research Collaborative**. It was a premier grassroots event attended by over 300 citizens, activists, and experts that recognized the group's many victories and rallied for future fights for environmental health. CHEJ Executive Director Lois Gibbs was a keynote speaker at the event,

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which included workshops on the future of energy and trainings on lobbying elected officials and fundraising.

Michigan

Save the Wild U.P. (SWUP) and **Water Action Vital Earth (WAVE)** are continuing to oppose global mining giant Rio Tinto/Kennecott's plan to mine nickel and other metals from a sacred Native American site near Marquette. The air pollution generated from the blasting at the site has re-energized the 8-year fight and inspired more citizens to speak out. So far, Rio refuses to monitor the air despite it being common practice at mine sites. The groups are also fighting the county's proposed haul road to service the mine. The groups question why it's in the public interest for tax payers to maintain a haul road for one of the richest mining companies in the world. The Army Corps and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service oppose the proposed "county" road; EPA has yet to weigh in. All three agencies opposed Rio's application for the road. The groups expect a victory despite local officials who support the road.

Montana

Some relief has finally come for residents of one of the nation's most deadly Superfund sites located in the mountain town of Libby. For decades, town residents were exposed to uncontrolled asbestos pollution from the nearby W.R. Grace vermiculite mine. 400 Libby residents have died and an additional 1,750 are ill. While state officials knew that dust from the mine was a serious public health risk, they failed to intervene or even provide warning of the mine's dangers. A Montana judge approved a \$43 million settlement for over one thousand of the victims. So far, more than 60 percent of the claimants have received settlement checks. The state is now facing a new lawsuit filed by the insurance company that helped cover the settlement but has not received repayment from the state. The settlement money was put into a trust that was not named as a defendant in the case, meaning the dispute is not expected to take away from payments to Libby victims.

New York

CHEJ's campaign to shift markets away from PVC, the poison plastic is targeting the NYC school system, which impacts over one million school-aged children and 135,000 faculty and staff. CHEJ is trying to persuade the NYC public school system to phase-out PVC in school supplies, construction materials, and electronics. Due in large part to CHEJ's efforts, the Bloomberg administration is working with Staples – the city's sole office supply vendor – to identify and prioritize PVC-free office supplies for city agencies. Likewise, the City is using PVC-free specifications for city-wide carpeting contracts, and purchasing PVC-free electronics off of state contracts. CHEJ is meeting with Dept. of Education officials to get similar policies implemented within the NYC school system. We are also conducting

PVC-free green purchasing workshops on safer alternatives to PVC in association with the City and State unions and agencies.

The NYC Environmental Justice Alliance (NYCEJA), **New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)**, and a coalition of groups are fighting development of "incinerators in disguise" in NYC, which the mayor supports under the guise of "waste reduction." NYPIRG calls the proposed projects "risky, polluting and unsustainable," and says it poses "the same environmental and public health concerns as conventional garbage incinerators." Potential air pollutants include mercury, dioxins, and greenhouse gases. The coalition is asking Mayor Bloomberg to reconsider his plans. The coalition secured a big victory recently when the mayor withdrew consideration of a plant at the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island, one of the sites under consideration.

CHEJ, Healthy Schools Network and Empire State Consumer Association have been helping parents investigate possible environmental causes to the strange tic-like symptoms documented in 16 students at LeRoy High School in upstate New York, near Rochester. The parents and groups succeeded in convincing the school to hire an environmental firm to do soil, air and water testing on the school property. The testing will determine whether two nearby toxic waste sites, adjacent pesticide spraying and fracking gas wells on the property could be causing toxic exposures. The federal land state agencies are also investigating a few other possible environmental causes, although some doctors maintain the symptoms are a result of "conversion disorder."

North Carolina

Congratulations to **Citizens for Marlboro County (CMC)** on their recent victory! Judge Michelle Childs ruled in favor of CMC in a defamation suit brought by MRR Southern waste company. MRR Southern claimed that CMC defamed it by publishing false and defamatory statements about the Plaintiff in the local newspaper and on its website (www.no-megadump.com). The court rejected MRR's argument and agreed that the company had failed to prove that CMC's statements were false and/or defamatory, and that they acted with common law malice. This was a long and hard fought battle for CMC, a chapter of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL).

BREDL has joined a legal case to be heard before the state Supreme Court that will decide whether ambient air testing data generated by South Atlantic Galvanizing (SAG), located in Graham, can be considered confidential information that cannot be shared with the public. The data was initially classified as confidential data by that state Department of Environment and Natural Resources, but BREDL

challenged the determination as being in conflict with federal and state laws concerning open records and access to public information. The Director of the state's Division of Air Quality agreed with BREDL and agreed to release the air pollution data but SAG appealed the decision. When that appeal was rejected, SAG appealed again, this time to the state Superior Court. BREDL is worried that this case would set a horrible precedent if SAG were successful. "I can see hundreds of ways industry could use this against our communities" said a spokesperson for BREDL who is gearing up for a long legal battle.



Cumnoch Preservation Association (CPA) in Lee County is a rural community located right on top of an area of shale targeted for natural gas drilling known as hydrofracking or simply "fracking." The natural gas deposits in this area are widely believed to be "ground zero" for those who want to frack North Carolina. CPA is dedicated to halting natural gas fracking and to preserving the Deep River community where they live. Concerns include the impacts on groundwater and surface water and air quality, and the impacts on land and lives, infrastructure and waste handling and other negatives the natural gas industry will bring into the state.

Ohio

Citizens' and environmental groups in Cleveland not only oppose the city's proposal to build a new waste gasification plant but they are taking it a step farther. They are holding a symposium on recycling and composting to show the city that there are alternatives to incineration.

Fracking-350.org is on the road in Ohio doing workshops on fracking. In June the roadshow will reach its destination, the statehouse in Columbus. Come join us for Father's Day as we tell the Ohio legislature that Ohio citizens say "Don't Frack Ohio."

The City of Mansfield is set to vote on a ban on injection wells within the city limits. The city will

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place an amendment to their charter on the ballot in the November elections. Citizens are gearing up to educate the community and get this amendment passed.

Pennsylvania

Good news in Allentown, where a proposed waste-to-energy plant was voted down by the city council based on concerns for environmental health and public safety. The Delta Thermo Energy plant would have been the first of its kind to turn sewage sludge into a “coal-like substance” that could be burned to produce electricity, but citizens of Allentown worried about the impacts of importing such waste into their city said no! The **Sierra Club** was one of the groups that opposed the plant, citing the air pollution that would result from burning the waste and emphasizing the risks of using experimental technology that hasn't been implemented before.

Tennessee



Photo by Martina B. Cherry

District 16 Councilmember Tony Tenpenny talks to citizens protesting against the construction of a new asphalt plant in their neighborhood.

A determined group of Mill Creek residents has come together to fight a proposed asphalt plant less than a half-mile from a residential neighborhood outside of Nashville. Earlier this year local politicians proposed re-zoning to allow the new asphalt plant in the residential area that already has two other asphalt plants and an active rock quarry. Since then, citizens have voiced their concern over the industrialization of their community. Data from the city's air testing shows that the existing asphalt plant already emitted more than 3 tons of particulate matter in 2010. Residents believe the new plant will further degrade local air quality. One local resident put it this way, “One asphalt plant is more than enough for our neighborhood. We don't need a new one in our backyard.” Local residents cheered when Councilman Dominy, who had initially opposed the project, recommended to the Zoning Committee that the bill be permanently shelved.

Texas

Congratulations to CHEJ Board member Suzie Canales of Corpus Christi, the recipient of *The Texas Observer's* 2012 People's Friend Award! Suzie received the award for her tireless efforts to bring justice to ‘fence-line’ communities polluted by refineries and petrochemical

plants. Working with **Citizens for Environmental Justice**, Suzie has empowered citizens to do their own air-quality testing through all-volunteer bucket brigades, and her work also led to a criminal conviction of Citgo, the first-ever by a jury under the Clean Air Act. Texas Observer editor Dave Mann had this to say about Suzie. “She's passionate about her work, and, as quite a few powerful people have found out, she refuses to back down or be intimidated.”

Virginia

The Whitehorn-Banister Rural Historic Landscape in Pittsylvania County is threatened by proposed construction and operation of a uranium mine and mill at Coles Hill within the historic landscape. In addition to the loss of historic value, this development would lead to groundwater contamination, noise pollution, real estate value loss and hinder future heritage tourism initiatives. The **Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League** (BREDL) is working with local historians and concerned citizens to ensure that if the state moratorium on uranium mining is lifted provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act are used to document and mitigate the damage to these historic resources that would result from the mining of uranium in this area. At a minimum, BREDL is asking that these historic resources be inventoried and documented.

Washington

In February, Occupy Seattle led a rally to shut down Seattle Steam's Pike Place Market waste wood incinerator and protest the construction of a new incineration plant near Pioneer Square. Protesters marched to the Pike Place plant before heading to a local park and staging various “die-ins” and “teach-ins” demonstrating the negative impacts of the incinerators. The Pike Place plant is adjacent to one of Seattle's most marginalized low income communities and is associated with dangerous air pollution. The proposed plant is expected to pose additional health risks for residents of downtown Seattle. Prior to the Occupy Seattle rally, the Seattle City Council voted in favor of the proposed plant and Seattle Steam was set to receive millions of dollars in federal and local subsidies. The march was led by Occupy icon Dorli Rainey and sent the message that Seattle residents won't back down in the fight against industrial pollution.

West Virginia

CHEJ Executive Director Lois Gibbs traveled to Charleston to serve as a panel member in the Central Appalachian Women's Tribunal on Climate Justice, sponsored by the Loretto Community at the United Nations, the Feminist Task Force of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, the Civil Society Institute, and the **Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition** (see feature story). The three-member Tribunal acted as judges listening to testimony by victims of the health, economic,

community, and environmental impacts of mountaintop removal. After hearing the testimony, Sally Dunne, the United Nations representative for Loretto Community, commented that there's a “real case” to be made for human rights violations in southern West Virginia and plans to take the case to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Tribunal's recommendations will be presented at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June.

Wisconsin

Victory! Thanks to strong opposition from Wisconsin citizens and tireless campaigning by the **Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters**, the Wisconsin State Senate voted to reject an open-pit mining bill that contained unprecedented rollbacks to environmental protections and threatened to contaminate state drinking water with arsenic, lead, and mercury. If passed, the bill would have allowed Florida-based Gogebic Taconite to build an iron ore strip mine in northern Wisconsin while eliminating public rights to contest mining activities and costing tax payers millions of dollars in mine permitting, staff costs and environmental impact studies. Proponents of the bill state that it would promote job growth in the state. The Senate voted to reject the bill and it was sent back to the Senate Organization Committee on a unanimous vote.

Thanks to the efforts of Green Bay activists and community groups like the **Mather Heights Neighborhood Association**, the Green Bay aldermen agreed to reconsider their approval of a proposed trash-recycling alternative energy plant. The inquiry came after citizens continued to voice concerns that Oneida Seven Generations Corp. had misled government officials by not including emission smokestacks in initial plant diagrams. While supporters of the plant consider it a green alternative energy source, opponents worry the plant will produce emissions similar to those of trash incinerators that could jeopardize the environment and human health with toxic emissions and other pollutants. There will be a thorough assessment of the project and Oneida has been advised that it should move cautiously on making any additional investment in development. ♦

BACKYARD TALK

WWW.CHEJ.ORG/BLOG

A Conversation on Environmental Health and Justice



Children's Environmental Health Program

Introducing CHEJ's Children's Environmental Health Program (CEHP)



Children's health issues have always been part of CHEJ's core work. Concerns about schools built on top of or near landfills and other contaminated sites led to a campaign we called Childproofing Our Communities or CPOC. Often people were confused about the focus of CPOC and could not relate to its name

so we've changed the campaign name to

Children's Environmental Health Program (CEHP). This is not a new project or campaign but a renewed dedication to tackling the tough subject area of addressing environmental hazards that could pose a threat to children where they live, learn, eat, and pray. CEHP will continue to educate and empower communities on children's special health vulnerabilities and bring together community leaders to collaborate on efforts to prevent harm in their communities.

Want to teach your child about the environment?

CHEJ's Green Flag Schools Program for Environmental Leadership provides a framework for students to become environmental leaders and contribute to positive change in their communities. This national awards program helps students of all ages learn environmental concepts, investigate their schools, and identify solutions for making their schools safer and healthier. There are four project areas of study that students can select from: Reduce/Reuse/Recycle, Integrated Pest Management, Indoor Air Quality, and Non-Toxic Products. The program can also be used to qualify for the Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Program a federal recognition award.



Access our website for more information and to download the free Green Flag Program Start-Up Kit or contact us to receive a kit by mail. <http://chej.org/campaigns/cehp/projects/green-flags/>.

Interested in hosting a Children's Environmental Health Workshop in your area?

CHEJ is organizing regional workshops on children's environmental health and justice issues to educate community leaders about potential hazards posing risks to children and to explore their solutions.

If you are interested in hosting a workshop or webinar on any or all of the following three subjects, please contact CHEJ at (703) 237-2249 or chej@chej.org.

PCBs in Schools – This workshop focuses on PCBs in old lighting fixtures, the health risks to the school population and how to replace these toxic lights with energy efficient lights.

School Siting – This workshop focuses on new federal guidelines to ensure potential environmental hazards are investigated by school districts when selecting property for a new school building so that they are not near toxic waste sites or major sources of air pollution.

PVC in Schools – This workshop focuses on the toxic materials, such as PVC and phthalates, which are in many school supplies and school building materials and the availability of cost-effective, safer PVC-free alternatives.



then when someone who wasn't seeing the point, laid a dollar over the scripture and said "well, can you see it *now?*!"), another woman focused on following the money in this debate. She has seen the medical expenses in her community, the cost of roads (driven on by too-heavy coal trucks) go into the creeks, the flooding in her community and wants these economic costs to be part of the discussion. When people talk about the economic boon of coal mining, do they consider these things that matter to local residents?

When discussing the effects that MTR coal mining has on the local community, one woman shares that the coal mines "after they ruin your community and quality of life," they "come in and offer money to buy you out." She has seen 30 communities dry up and disappear in her 44 years of living in the area. She says "you can't have Mountaintop Removal and communities...it's one or the other."

Another woman talks about the chemicals in water, air, and land. One family reportedly has a continuous flame in their well because of the explosive methane that seeped into their water supply from mining. Birds and fish are dying, she explained, and property values plummet because homes are covered in coal dust. Mountain ginseng and mountain flowers are buried. Family cemeteries are sometimes made inaccessible because of coal mining. One cemetery was pushed over by a bulldozer. All of these things break the sense local residents have of belonging to the land.

A woman who stood up to the coal company in her town started explaining how the fabric of community is torn by the coal company: "fear." If her truck was in her neighbors' driveway, her neighbors got in trouble for associating with her. She lost her best friend. She stopped being asked to serve on volunteer organizations because the coal company wouldn't give donations to any local organizations that activists, like her, were a part of (even if they didn't have anything to do with the struggle against coal mining). People were afraid and felt controlled, and they got alienated from each other.

The long-time custom of "porch sitting" is another example of how communities are harmed by coal mining, says another woman. You can't sit on your porch with the huge trucks going by, because of coal dust spewing, she explained. MTR coal mining also reduces the labor pool, so that creates tension. Drug use has gone up as more people get depressed and look for outlets to escape.

A "stubborn holler dweller" (as she was called by the EPA) stood up to the coal company in her area and received serious death threats. Encouraged to move to a hotel, she stood her ground. With a 6 ft chain link fence, security cameras, and attack dog, this local woman would "not be put out of my grandfather's home," even when people were caught sneaking onto her property. It is her home and she has a right to stay there.

"Mom and Dad's chimney was pulled away from the wall" and they "lost access to water" because of coal mining, another woman said. When her parents lost access, the coal company graciously brought a barrel of water over, pouring bleach in it when it was obviously full of things you could see floating around in it. This woman, not trusting anything, took a sample. Her sample showed the water was not fit to drink. This struggle sometimes is just "too hard... people decide to move." Her parents stayed, but one huge



Maria Gannoe who testified at UN Women's Tribunal standing behind her home in WV.

Photo by Virian Stockman, www.olhrc.org

blast and shaking of the house brought a heart attack to her Dad. A year later, after having been moved away, her Mom died "crying to go back home." This woman tells us "I feel like an orphan...People have no idea what we go through."

A pastor reports that the local river isn't one where you can put your feet in or catch fish from. "No baptisms in this river," she says. Meanwhile the receiving chairs on her porch are covered in coal ash. The prayer concern list at church has "so many health problems." She believes in the statement from Martin Luther King, Jr. that the church should be the headlights, but she says that in this case, the church is the taillights (in standing up for the people in Appalachia against coal mining companies).

At first in denial over the devastation of MTR, having bought land and built a dream house, another local woman was forced to accept it when her well water turned bright orange. She shares resigned disbelief that the burden of proof was on her (and her pocketbook) to prove that it was the coal company's fault. This was a "huge wake-up call," she says. She quickly came to realize that many state officials have a kind of culture of "customer relations" with miners that they don't have with residents. Meanwhile, she found that when she sampled her water, she had to send it 70 miles away (refrigerating it that whole time) because the company's water tester will "switch your samples for tap water" so again, "the burden of proof is on me."

These women are strong, wise, and courageous. In addition to the strong stance that the Presbyterian Church USA has long taken—that low-income communities not be disproportionately impacted by negative environmental practices—in 2006 the PCUSA General Assembly approved a resolution to abandon the use of mountaintop removal coal mining. We believe that the earth is God's, and all people and all parts of creation are to be valued, respected, and tended with care. I pray that we will indeed join our hearts, minds, and bodies to this faithful call and work for an end to MTR.

Rebecca Barnes-Davies is the Associate for Environmental Ministries for the Presbyterian Church (USA), a program that works to inspire, equip and connect individuals and congregations to work for eco-justice for all God's earth (www.pcusa.org/environment). Rebecca is a graduate of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She also organizes a local Eco-Justice Worship Collective, an initiative to create dynamic, ecumenical, inclusive worship spaces to engage in eco-justice concerns (<http://ecojusticeworship.wordpress.com>). ♦

With Special Thanks

CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations to support our work from January 25, 2012 to May 10, 2012. 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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Dr. George Morren
Mr. Harry Gibbs

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: SIX ESSENTIAL LESSONS IN ORGANIZING, continued from page 3

4. Give Everyone Something to do

The more people have an active role in the organization's efforts, the more power your group gains. Give everyone something to do - A task that is simple, manageable and achievable. No one wants to be chair of the fundraising committee, but everyone is usually willing to contribute to a fundraiser, whether it's baking a cake or buying raffle tickets.

No one wants to go door knocking but many people would be willing to take responsibility for talking to five or ten homes/families. Instead of taking the time to do it all yourself, ask people if they would be willing to talk with five or ten families in the neighborhood once every two weeks to check on people, let them know about new information, correct misinformation and keep rumors to a minimum. Ask those who have agreed to talk with other families to report to the entire group at each meeting. This gives them a role, a voice and they'll become more committed to the effort. The more people take an active role in the organization, the more people become vested in the fight, come to your meetings and are willing to take an active role in activities that create pressure for change.

5. Identify Your Opponent and Name Him/Her as Often as You Can

Too often groups talk about a particular corporation or government agency as the "opponent." People can't relate to a government agency or large corporation. Where do you begin? - At town hall, the town council, the city environmental department or economic development division. This is too impersonal and undefined. Instead, name the mayor, the CEO or the head of the agency. People can better understand how to go about approaching the fight if they have a person instead of an unidentified bureaucracy or corporate structure to target. For example, naming the mayor of a town that is proposing to develop a Hydro Fracturing process in the community makes it easier for people to understand how to fight and win, versus

targeting the Town Hall, which it is not as clear. Perhaps more importantly, those decision-makers will feel more pressure after being targeted publicly, and are more likely to give in to your demands.

6. Have Fun, Make it Social

Make the effort fun and social. Have a May Day dance to raise money and to celebrate. Organize a poster contest for children and take the winning poster to your opponent. Enter a float in the local parade. Hold a Walk-of-Concern with your various faith leaders to involve more institutions, or a prayer vigil. Hold letter writing parties where several people get together over pizza and write letters to the elected representative or to the newspaper. Ask the younger people to hold Twitter parties or blog about the issues.

An effort to win in a local community is not just about science or law. It's about people and values. People get involved when they see there's a role for them, that their role is not too difficult or time consuming, when they understand how the group might be able to move an opponent and, when it provides a social value. And finally, celebrate your victories, no matter how big or small! People want to be part of a winning team. ♦



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