

## Bhopal - Courage in the Face of Corporate Crime



## Taking Advantage of the First 100 Days



The Journal of the Grassroots Environmental Movement

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Center for Health, Environment and Justice

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Everyone's Backyard is published quarterly by the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, Inc. The Managing Editor is Stephen Lester and the layout design by Gregory Kolen II. EBY is printed on 100% recycled and 100% post-consumer waste paper, not bleached with chlorine, using low VOC vegetable oil-based inks.



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Library of Congress  
#ISSN 0749-3940.  
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#### On the Cover:

Bhopal organizers send a message  
to the world.

photo: copyright Micha Patault

## LESSONS IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

This exciting election season resulted in the highest turn-out since 1908. How did the candidates generate so much excitement and turn out so many people? It was the “ground game.”

Community organizing was a crucial element that helped turn the election to Barack Obama. It was his ground game that made the difference. Knocking on doors, holding house meetings, and raising small amounts of money - \$10, \$25, \$50 - through the internet were some of the key components. Here in Virginia, a battleground state, not one weekend went by in the past two months without someone, often several people, knocking on my door asking who I’m likely to vote for. This effort paid off in Virginia, a state that hadn’t backed a Democratic presidential candidate since 1964. This ground game worked in other key states as well.

There’s much we can learn from this experience. Rep. John Lewis told the CBS *Early Morning Show* that the nation “witnessed a nonviolent revolution” when Barack Obama was elected president. “A revolution of values, a revolution of ideas—the vote is the most nonviolent instrument that we have in a democratic society.” I think of our work in much the same way. It is value-based and consists of people with a vision for a safe future with new technologies, and economic opportunities—we are part of this revolution.

But how good is our ground game? There isn’t a strategic plan to engage everyday people. There are several very strong efforts in some places, but that is the exception rather than the rule. Think for a moment, when was the last time you knocked on doors to talk about your issues, other than for election-related work? When was your last house party to talk about issues? Have the numbers of people who come to your meetings been decreasing?

We need to take the lessons learned from this campaign and incorporate them into our daily work. We’ve seen the results of organizing and working locally to create change nationally. We can build healthy communities, with healthy economies and environments, if we move out of our comfort zone and build from the ground up. As Barack Obama said election night:

“If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.”

For a Healthy Environment,  
Lois Marie Gibbs

### ABOUT CHEJ

CHEJ mentors a movement building healthier communities by empowering people to prevent harm caused by chemical and toxic threats. We accomplish our work through programs focusing on different types of environmental health threats. CHEJ also works with communities to empower groups by providing the tools, direction, and encouragement they need to advocate for human health, to prevent harm and to work towards environmental integrity. Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for families living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ to continue the journey. To date, CHEJ has assisted over 10,000 groups nationwide. Details on CHEJ’s efforts to help families and communities prevent harm can be found at <http://www.chej.org>.

BY RENEE CLAIRE BLANCHARD, CHEJ's CPOC CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR

## TEN WAYS TO AFFECT THE FIRST 100 DAYS

The 2008 election year has been inspiring and heartbreaking with a mix of everything in between. We listened for a long time to the promises made by the candidates and now as we know who will lead our cities, states, and the nation, we must hold these public officials accountable for these promises as they take office in January.

During the first few months of office, newly elected officials are uniquely susceptible to constituent and industry pressure. This provides your community group with many great opportunities. The first 100 days is not only a time to speak directly with the people just elected, but it is also traditionally a time that public officials set forth ambitious legislative goals. This sets the tone for the rest of the term and provides a glimpse of what's to come.

It can be effective for your group to look at this time period as a single campaign with a series of events building on each other. By being strategic and planning ahead, your group can leverage the first 100 days in your favor. As in everything you do, make sure that these events create opportunities to make your issue personal, and make it rise above the many other stories being told.

Here are ten ways to affect the first 100 days of your public official's administration.

**(1) It's Just A Numbers Game** – The more people in your group, the more recognition it will receive from the public officials in your area during this sensitive time. Whether you knock on your neighbors' doors or stand outside your child's school asking people to attend a meeting, the most important thing is that you get a large number of people sitting at the same table talking about how to make change. Sure, some people won't join you, but it's just a numbers game – the more doors you knock on, the more people you will find to support you. And don't underestimate how much politicians respect this game. They see people who speak out as an indicator that there are hundreds if not thousands more who are upset but have not yet voiced their opinion.

**(2) A First 100 Days Vigil** – Keep a weekly or monthly vigil outside your local politician's office to remind him/her what was promised



during the campaign. Invite a different member of your group to host each vigil and ask people to speak about the reasons they care about this issue.

**(3) A Countdown of Promises Made Blog** – Many communities and neighborhoods have blogs that allow people to get updated information on issues from street repairs to festivals. Start one for the first 100 days with a big clock counting down the days and a tally of promises made/promises kept. If blogs aren't used in your community, make yard signs with a catchy countdown phrase and post them in yards all around town. That way, no matter where your politicians go, they will always be reminded of their campaign promises.

**(4) Letter Writing Campaigns** – Letter writing campaigns allow politicians to hear the same message from a large number of their constituents about the issues that matter the most to them. Hosting a social event where people come together to write letters also allows your group a chance to increase the number of volunteers and supporters as well as get to know each other better.

**(5) Phone Banking Campaigns** – When a politician's voicemail shuts down because hundreds of constituents have left messages, they take notice. One way to maximize phone banking is to call a supporter, find out if they are willing to leave a message, and then immediately forward the call to the public official's voice mail. Keep the event fun by making it a friendly competition between volunteers.

**(6) Visit Your Public Official** – You want your politician to count on your group, not industry,

*Continued on page 10*





# BE SAFE Campaign

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

## Looking for Safer PVC-Free Products? Get CHEJ's New Guide!

Just in time for the holidays, CHEJ is releasing our new guidebook *Pass Up the Poison Plastic – the PVC-Free Guide for Your Family and Home*. We created this guide to empower consumers to find safer solutions to polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl), the poison plastic. The guide lists common consumer products made out of PVC and safer PVC-free alternatives. You can help build consumer consciousness and demand for safer, healthier products by purchasing PVC-free products. By doing so, we can all help to phase out PVC and promote safe substitutes. **To get a copy of the new guide, contact:** [mike@chej.org](mailto:mike@chej.org) or visit <http://www.chej.org>.

## CHEJ Leads Community Visioning Meetings in North Carolina

This fall, CHEJ and our partners at the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League co-organized and facilitated a series of **Community Visioning Meetings** to help grassroots groups targeted for polluting mega-dumps, and other facilities that degrade our health, environment and quality of life. CHEJ's Executive Director Lois Gibbs facilitated brainstorming sessions where community members came up with ideas for environmentally friendly green jobs to lure to their communities, instead of polluting mega-dumps. The meetings drew community leaders from seven different North Carolina counties at four locations over the course of a week. Participants were quite excited about being part of something bigger that can improve the quality of life in their communities. The groups are now moving to the next step of further developing their plans. **Want to bring CHEJ to your community for a similar Community Visioning Meeting? Contact** [mike@chej.org](mailto:mike@chej.org).

## New Report Reveals True Cost of Cleaning Up Nuclear Waste

How much does it really cost to clean up a toxic nuclear waste site? Can we safely contain large amounts of buried radioactive waste which remain hazardous for thousands of years? CHEJ and a coalition of groups commissioned an independent study to address these questions at the West Valley nuclear waste site in New York.

*The Real Costs of Cleaning Up Nuclear Waste: A Full Cost Accounting of Cleanup Options for the West Valley Nuclear Waste Site* compares the true cost of excavating and safely storing radioactive waste with the government's plan to bury and monitor the waste for 1,000 years. The Department of Energy claims that monitoring the buried waste is the most cost-effective way to "remediate" the site. This new study proves DOE is wrong and shows that waste excavation is less expensive and safer. Over 1,000 years, waste excavation costs \$9.9 billion while the monitored burial approach favored by DOE costs \$13 billion, or an estimated \$27 billion if there's a catastrophic release. To view this precedent-setting report, visit [www.chej.org](http://www.chej.org).

## CHEJ's PVC Campaign Honored with a BENNY Award!

CHEJ's PVC Campaign won an award at the 2008 BENNY Awards sponsored by the Business Ethics Network (BEN). This is the second year in a row CHEJ's PVC Campaign has been honored at the BEN conference. These awards celebrate the victories and achievements of top corporate campaign activists. "We are honored by this award, and thank the Business Ethics Network for this recognition. This award highlights the growing movement of people and businesses turning away from toxic PVC products and packaging, which poison communities everywhere they are produced, used, and disposed of," said Mike Schade, CHEJ's PVC Campaign Coordinator.

BY SHERRY FROSH

# BHOPAL – 25 YEARS OF COURAGE IN THE FACE OF CORPORATE CRIME

*Sherry Frosh is a long time volunteer with the Campaign for Justice in Bhopal. She was a key part of the sit-in campaign the Bhopalis undertook this year. She interviewed long time Bhopali survivor leader Hazra Bi from New Delhi by phone.*



photo from Bhopal.net

*Hazra Bi (on right) speaks at sit-in in New Delhi during “Walk Your Talk” campaign.*

Hazra Bi is from Bhopal, India and has been one of several spirited and steadfast warriors in Bhopal’s struggle for justice in the aftermath of the horrific Union Carbide industrial disaster of 1984. At the time of the disaster, she ran from her house with her children and husband, coughing and groaning from the searing methyl isocyanate gas leaked from the nearby factory. She lost her eldest son due to the gas leak, and two more children born later, died in their infancy. She is among the 25,000 people drinking water contaminated by Union Carbide’s toxic waste.

Hazra, 52, was the only person in her family to receive compensation from the \$490 million civil settlement with Union Carbide – a paltry \$350 that was spent within weeks on medical bills, and had to be supplemented with the sale of all her jewelry, and several loans. Her husband remained ill and unable to work. He became increasingly violent and eventually left. Today, famously no-nonsense, voluble and feisty in spirit, she fights on for the six hundred thousand survivors of Bhopal.

This past year, Hazra was one of the architects of the Bhopalis’ “Walk your Talk” Campaign. A group of Bhopalis walked 800 km from Bhopal to New Delhi and lived on the streets of Delhi for four months at a makeshift protest site. They also spent ten days in the infamous Tihar jail. The protestors had two main demands: cleanup and rehabilitation of the gas- and water-affected communities of Bhopal, and pursuit of the legal cases against Dow Chemical, owner of Union Carbide. The demands

were largely met by the Indian government in August 2008. We caught up with Hazra Bi for an update [translated from Hindi].

**SF: You just finished a successful campaign where most of your demands were met. What are some of the memories that stick out about your experience?**

*HB: We had gone with high expectations and a firm resolve – we were away from our families for six months. It was particularly hard for me, as my son is bedridden and needs my help. Despite all the hardships, on the road, in the heat and storms of Delhi, we kept in our hearts the needs and hopes of six hundred thousand Bhopalis. Walking together, children and old people, we did not lose our courage. The one incident that sticks out in our mind is the arrest and long jail sentence in Tihar – I had never dreamed that in our quest for justice, we would be treated in this manner.*

**SF: Can you tell me something of your experience at Tihar jail?**

*HB: Despite the bullying and abuse by the police, we held firm as a group and refused to submit to their insults. Of our group, there were 8 or 9 women that would cry all night, suffering a great deal in the name of their children, their families. The first couple of days we were treated worse than common criminals, beaten, insulted, and given inadequate food.*

*I am especially haunted by the incident when survivor leader, Rasheeda Bi, fell sick; she had palpitations and trouble breathing. We called for the jailers for half an hour, desperately beating our plates, making a racket. They finally arrived after the entire cell had joined us in the shouting. Even then they made her wait until they had filled out paperwork. By the time they took her to get care, she was so ill they had to evacuate her to another hospital for a day. We were so scared.*

**SF: What are your feelings towards the government now? Relief that most demands are being met, or outrage that it is taking so long?**

*HB: We took six months out of our lives for this last protest, along with all the troubles. Yet, nothing is being done, and we continue to suffer. The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and his people are playing politics with our demands – they are spending the money in areas unaffected [by the disaster], and the communities that were affected have not been allocated any resources. They are putting up obstacles to the implementation of the*

*Continued on page 11*

# ACTION LINE

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

## California

**People's CORE** in Los Angeles is working to support the organizing capacity of a group of teachers and parents connected to an elementary school surrounded on three sides by toxic companies. Unexplained health issues are emerging and teachers and parents of students are becoming more alarmed by the lack of explanation about possible causes. CHEJ is providing organizing support in this emerging organizing effort.

Parents in **Los Angeles** are involved in a major fight to stop plans by the LAUSD to build a new elementary school on land that has been rejected several times in the past 20 years because of severe contamination. Parents are sharing information, demanding answers from the school district, and trying to increase public awareness of the contamination at the site selected for the new school. State testing found volatile chemicals including toluene, xylene, and tetrachloroethylene. The group is trying to decide its next steps.

## Delaware

The **Delaware Group** formed to address contamination at the Hercules Research Center in Wilmington. Numerous reports provide evidence of soil and groundwater contamination that threaten public drinking water supplies. Tetrachloroethylene, arsenic, thallium, antimony, and other chemicals have been found in the groundwater, but not at levels that exceed EPA standards. This and other evidence has been presented to numerous decision makers without response. Now a portion of a golf course built on Hercules property is targeted for development. Residents are struggling to address the many facets of this situation. CHEJ is working with the group to help them identify their priorities and is providing technical assistance to help them understand how to use the information they have to move their decision-makers.

## Florida

A new group in **Kenansville** is organizing to stop a sludge composting project. The plan calls for sludge to be dried in a greenhouse-like process that developers promise will produce an "environmentally safe" fertilizer. The community isn't buying it however. The county planning and zoning staff

recommended approval to the planning board that also approved the project despite a large turn-out at the planning board meeting. Leaders left the meeting, however, more optimistic about stopping the project at the next level – the county commission. The group is stepping up its efforts to increase turn-out even more so at the county commission meeting. They hope to persuade the county commissioners to reject the project. CHEJ is providing organizing and technical assistance to the group.

Good news for residents in **St. Lucie County**. Plans to build a 3,000 ton per day gasification plant to burn garbage have been scaled back to a pilot project that would burn between 200 and 400 tons per day. Community opposition has been strong and county commissioners have no answers to questions raised about emissions from the proposed plant. These and other concerns were detailed in a powerful letter written by the president of the St. Lucie Medical Society. The commissioners are hoping to use the results of the pilot project to build public support to allow expansion to full size.

## Georgia

Residents in **Elbert County** are continuing to oppose plans to expand the poultry industry in their county. They've received support from a majority of county administrators and have succeeded in getting a zoning ordinance on a city ballot that would prohibit poultry houses. Their main concerns are health hazards and nuisances like dander and odor. They're trying to raise funds to pay for an ad in the local newspaper that will help educate the community about their concerns.

**Citizens Organized for Pipeline Safety (COPS)** met with state officials to discuss whether pollution from the Transco natural gas booster station is the cause of a cancer cluster in Madison County. State air emissions data show that the booster station, which helps deliver natural gas by pipeline to the northeast, releases a wide range of toxic chemicals including formaldehyde, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides. There is also concern about PCB contamination in soil at the site. The state found no health problems among residents living within 1-mile of the site. Now COPS wants the state to expand its study to 3 miles around the facility. Forty-one cancer cases have been reported around the facility. The company has repeatedly stated that

there is no evidence that the company is harming area residents.

## Indiana

Victory! The BP asphalt plant in Whiting has been cancelled! The asphalt plant was considered a major component of BP's tar sands expansion at Whiting. Due to pressure from the **Calumet Project** and community activists, the City of Hammond required BP to conduct fence-line monitoring and conduct a community health survey before they could expand the facility. BP backed away from both. The **Global Community Monitor** and the Calumet Project are still in litigation about the rest of BP's tar sands expansion plans.

## Louisiana

**Earthjustice** filed a lawsuit in October on behalf of **Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN)**, the **Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN)**, and the **Sierra Club** asking the federal government to regulate the many toxic chemicals released from chemical plants that use vinyl chloride to manufacture PVC, the poison plastic. These plants release more than 500,000 pounds of vinyl chloride, a known human carcinogen, as well as other toxic chemicals into the air each year. Residents in Mossville, the unofficial PVC capitol of America with four PVC plants, have been fighting the EPA



*MEAN members fight against environmental harm.*

to regulate emissions from these plants for over 10 years. Now they are hoping that legal action will be effective.

## Maine

The **Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine** held the "2008 Chemical Olympics" in Portland during the time when the summer Olympics were being held in Beijing, China. The Chemical Olympics highlighted the United State's poor performance in protecting children and adults from exposure to



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## Need organizing help?

Visit [www.chej.org/assistance](http://www.chej.org/assistance)  
or call 703-237-2249 x17.

toxic chemicals in everyday products. U.S. lawmakers were urged to “get in shape” and follow Maine’s lead in preventing harm from dangerous chemicals. Eight countries participated, with Belgium representing the European Union and taking the Gold medal, Canada the Silver, and India the Bronze. The United States finished dead last. View a video of this fun event at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjyRvPmS3oU>.

### Maryland

**Frederick County** is dangerously close to becoming the first U.S. community in almost 15 years to build a new trash incinerator. The proposed burner would accept trash from surrounding counties and be built in partnership with neighboring Carroll County. For several years residents in both Frederick and Carroll counties have overwhelmingly rejected the incinerator through testimony at public hearings, ongoing letters to representatives and local papers, and the founding of opposing civic groups. National and local environmental groups have voiced their opposition, as have historical groups wishing to preserve the Monocacy National Battlefield, an endangered Civil War site. They have also held public forums with guest speakers, visited progressive communities, and proposed non-incinerator alternatives. The county commissioners, however, remain unconvinced despite the prohibitive cost of the incinerator (approx. \$350 million). Residents refuse to give up and hope to raise the national profile of their fight. Building a waste incinerator would not only be a defeat for Frederick County, it also threatens the sustainability of many other communities. To support this effort and for more information see <http://www.wastestudygroup.com>. *Contribution from Sally Sorbello.*

### Michigan

Groups in **Midland** have been fighting Dow Chemical over dioxin contamination in the city and the Tittabawassee River floodplain for years. A new study published in the journal *Environmental Health* bolsters community concerns over dioxin contamination. The study found a statistically significant increased breast cancer rate as women get older, and a higher disease burden in Midland and surrounding areas in close proximity to the dioxin contaminated areas. This comes at a time when Dow continues to avoid the US EPA’s cleanup order and while EPA continues to stall the release of their long-awaited Dioxin Reassessment.

### Nevada

Residents of **Lovelock** want to stop NV Cement from operating a cement quarry in their valley. The residents have the support of the County Commission but the

law director asked the county to take another vote. CHEJ discussed organizing strategies with local leaders who generated a petition opposing the zoning change to permit the plant. Letters were also sent to local, state and federal elected representatives. The residents succeeded in convincing the county commissioners to deny the request by NV Cement for a zoning change. They attribute their success to the large number of people including absentee owners who turned out at the county commission meetings.

### New Jersey

The 33rd Annual Clearwater Festival was held in Asbury Park this past September. The festival, sponsored by the **Monmouth County Friends of Clearwater**, included live music, speakers, and displays. This year’s focus was on environmental justice and featured CHEJ’s Los Gibbs. Folk singer Pete Seeger founded the Clearwater environmental group in 1967 on the Hudson River in New York.

### New York

The **Clean Air Coalition of Western New York** has been making strides in their fight for justice in Tonawanda, an area overburdened by a cluster of chemical plants including a nasty coke plant and one of the largest coal-fired power plants in the state. The group has held several energizing community meetings, taken Bucket Brigade air samples, and received a major grant from the state that will help with their organizing efforts. In October, CHEJ organizers facilitated a 2-day training and strategic planning session for the group.

### North Carolina

Local residents in **Richmond County** are concerned about contamination of well water by chemicals leaching from a former peach orchard. Initial test results prompted state officials to advise residents to limit their time bathing in the water. The group is getting organized and preparing for a public hearing. CHEJ has been providing organizing support and technical assistance.

The **Granville Non-Violent Action Team** (GNAT) continues to build support to stop plans by the office of Homeland Security to build a National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility at an undefined location near Raleigh. Hundreds of local and regional residents attended a public hearing this past summer to send a clear message to the government: Stay away from our community! Speakers raised concerns about the possibility of accidents that could release organisms, threats to nearby water supplies, and the potential development of bio-weapons at the facility. Many local officials who initially supported the plan are now backing off in the face of growing public opposition. Go GNATs!



photo from [www.nobio.com](http://www.nobio.com)

### Ohio

A landfill expansion in Georgetown will come within 1,600 feet of both an elementary and a high school, endangering the health of students who attend these schools. Local residents have formed **Citizens Against Pollution** with a local physician leading the organizing efforts to stop the expansion. CHEJ has been asked to help strengthen the local group’s organizing efforts. So far, letters and petitions have been sent to the Ohio EPA, and the group is now focusing its attention on the Governor and state legislative leaders.

An emerging network of Ohio groups put together a petition asking the Ohio EPA to deny a permit modification sought by First Energy to add more mercury to Lake Erie at its Lake Shore facility in **Cleveland**. Currently, the concentration of the plant’s mercury discharge into the lake averages 2.9 parts per trillion (ppt), higher than the 1.3 ppt average required in its existing permit. First Energy wants the Ohio EPA to approve a variance that would eliminate any limit on their mercury discharge into Lake Erie. According to local organizers, the neighborhood surrounding the plant is in serious jeopardy; residents within a 3-mile radius of the plant are above the 90th percentile nationwide in terms of risk for cancer, neurological hazards, and respiratory hazards. Activists have requested additional time to get more public input regarding the impact on this environmental justice community.

**Citizens AGHAST** in Geneva Township are working to get citizens to vote no on a ballot initiative that would allow Waste Management to expand its landfill. The ballot initiative calls for re-zoning 229 acres that will give Waste Management more than 400 acres to expand its landfill. The new property line will be as close as 16 feet from residential homes. CHEJ is providing organizing support to the group.

**Neighbors for Clean Air** (NCA) and **Ohio Citizen Action** are celebrating a big victory – Eramet announced a \$150 million upgrade to its equipment,

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which will clean up the air and keep the facility competitive, preserving jobs in a very uncertain time. The two groups have been pushing Eramet, a French owned company, for over two years to reduce emissions at its manganese refinery in Marietta. Community members have attended many meetings, displayed yard signs, marched in a parade, carried out research, provided odor and pollution reports and written letters. NCA plans to monitor Eramet's progress to make sure the new equipment is installed. They also hope to leverage their success to encourage other local industries to address the area's many pollution concerns.

## Oregon

Residents in **Wolf Creek** are organizing to stop the Bureau of Land Management from endorsing



photo from ksuwild.org.

*Wolf Creek residents organize to prevent BLM logging.*

a plan to log over 2,000 acres of trees, much of it old-growth forest. The logging project threatens local water quality and wildlife including the Wolf Creek Sanctuary which depends on natural stream water during the summer. The logging also threatens the habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl, Winter Steelhead and Coho Salmon. 528 acres of native old-growth forests would be removed and converted into dense fiber plantations. There would also be 3.2 miles of new road construction, which would further fragment habitat and bleed sediment into creeks.

## Pennsylvania

The **Alliance for a Clean Environment (ACE)** in Stowe came up with a clever suggestion for what to do with the Occidental Chemical Superfund site once the site is fully cleaned up – turn it into a solar park! The idea is to cover a portion of the site with photovoltaic panels that generate clean, renewable electricity. This idea is not unique. Several other Superfund sites, the most highly contaminated toxic waste sites in the country, are already tagged as “Brightfield” sites including sites in Hanford, WA and Brockton, MA. ACE is more concerned that the OxyChem site is properly cleaned up before they get too far down the road of what to do with the site once the cleanup is complete.

## Rhode Island

**Environmental Neighborhood Action Committee of Tiverton (ENACT)** is continuing its efforts to get the state to clean up contamination attributed to the New England Gas Company that has impacted 36 acres and 130 homes in Tiverton. ENACT has struggled to keep people involved as the cleanup planning has dragged on since 2003 when the contamination was first discovered. CHEJ's Lois Gibbs met with group leaders to brainstorm ways to increase the capacity of the group and keep their efforts focused. The cleanup is finally expected to begin next spring.

## Texas

Local organizers in **Guy** have been involved in a long battle with the Texas Railroad Commission over using an orphan well for dumping municipal waste by injection. A 90-day extension for public comment was granted. Area residents are gathering petition signatures asking that the applicant's permit request be denied. Conversations are being pursued with leaders of the neighboring county commissions who oppose the permit request and efforts are under way to increase public participation at an upcoming hearing in Austin.

## Virginia

**Concerned Citizens of Giles County (CCGC)** has formed to oppose the Cumberland Park Project, a landfill for coal combustion waste located in the flood plain of the New River. The landfill will not be lined and is a clear threat to human and environmental safety. The project was conceived by a school board organization (the Giles County Partnerships for Excellence) and the regional electric power company (AEP) as a disposal solution for its coal combustion waste from a nearby power plant. These groups are using a regulatory loophole, the “beneficial use” clause, to avoid having to deal with the environmental impact of the coal waste. Although the project has begun, the group remains vigilant and steadfast in its resolve to stop the project. CCGC is challenging the legitimacy and transparency of Partnerships for Excellence and its accountability. They are collaborating with numerous environmental groups, working with a local elected official on new policy initiatives, setting up video monitoring of the site, and testing wells located next to the site. CHEJ continues to provide organizing help to the group.

**Hopewell Citizens for Good Government** put up a good fight to stop an Ethanol plant from locating in their neighborhood. According to news accounts, the city was split over the Ethanol plant. Most residents did not want to see this kind

of operation located in an urban area where its potential toxic impact could harm citizens. Close to 300 citizens signed a petition opposing the plant. Yet four city council members ignored the will of the people and voted to approve the project. One Council member who voted for the plant was not re-elected. The group has launched recall petitions on the mayor and council representatives of wards 1, 4 and 7. CHEJ is continuing to provide organizing help.

The fight against coal is heating up in Virginia. In an act of non-violent civil disobedience, more than 25 activists from around the country entered and blocked the construction site of Dominion Virginia Power's new coal-fired power plant in Wise County. Eleven people locked themselves to steel drums at the facility with a banner reading “Renewable Jobs to Renew Appalachia.” These brave community leaders were arrested. Several hours later, **Rainforest Action Network** activists in California infiltrated the Bank of America's annual investor's conference and projected photographs from the action in Virginia behind the Dominion Virginia CEO as he spoke. The images stayed up for 15 minutes. Local groups have fought the Wise County plant through every available legal means. Hundreds of people have turned out at rallies and hearings, and over 45,000 people have signed a petition sent to the Governor opposing the plant.

## Wisconsin

The **Madison Environmental Justice Organization (MEJO)** has started a fish testing campaign to raise awareness of the lack of data on toxic chemicals present in local fish. While there is limited data on mercury and PCBs, there is virtually no data on other substances such as lead, arsenic, cadmium, copper, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). MEJO feels that additional testing is needed to ensure that the fish people are eating is safe. They are also hoping to convince the city's board of supervisors to post fish advisory notices at the shoreline where people fish as opposed to the city's website or in a brochure. ♦

### SUPPORT CHEJ's IMPORTANT WORK!

To make a donation, contact  
703-237-2249 x 27

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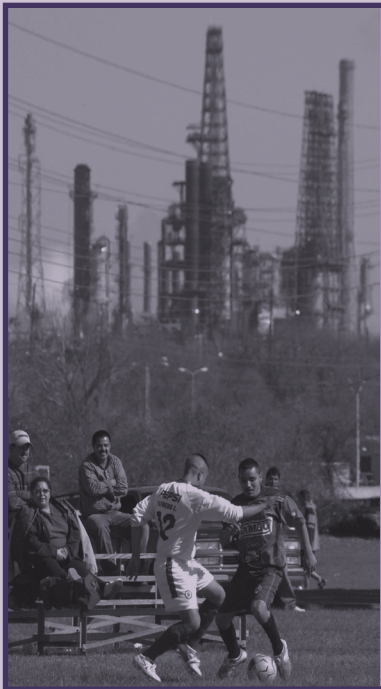




A CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THREATS TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH

# Child Proofing Our Communities

## Take Action: Demand That Schools in Your Community Are Not Built on Toxic Dumps



On December 22, 2007, President George W. Bush signed into law the Energy Independence and Security Act. Among some of the first U.S. legislation on climate change, there was a small section that mandated the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to develop national comprehensive school siting guidelines. This was a huge victory for children's health!

As we enter the 12 month mark of an 18-month deadline, we must continue to show our concern for this important issue. Little has come from EPA on this

matter, so we must tell our state and federal leaders that we have not forgotten and they must push EPA to develop these guidelines. In a 2005 report entitled *Building Safe Schools* released by CHEJ and the Childproofing Our Communities (CPOC) campaign, we wrote about the aging state of our nation's school buildings. The majority of our nation's schools are already 47 years old and, because of budget cutbacks, our school districts are finding it increasingly difficult to find affordable land for new schools. This means that school boards are allowing new schools to be built near contaminated land and, in more cases than we really know, on top of contaminated land. This is unacceptable.

The siting of a school is no easy task, but we must put the health of our children first. Children are not just little adults; they eat, drink, and breathe at much higher rates than adults, their growing bodies readily absorb more harmful contaminants, and their

developing immune system makes them more prone to diseases and disorders caused by exposure to toxic chemicals.

There are several things you can do to ensure that good guidelines are developed so that schools in your area are not built on contaminated land.

(1) *Learn about your state's laws on school siting.* Check out our website [www.childproofing.org](http://www.childproofing.org) and find out how strong your state is on this issue. Then share what you have learned with your neighbors.

(2) *Call your local school board and express your concern.* Remind them about your state laws and how the lack of strong legislation is putting your child's health at risk. Ask your local school board to pass a strong ordinance that outlaws the siting of a school on contaminated land or near contaminated sites.

(3) *Contact your elected representatives at the national, state, and local levels*—ask them to support school siting regulations to protect school children from exposure to toxics. In 2005, CPOC published comprehensive model school siting legislation that can be used as an example for your school district. You can find it by visiting: [http://www.childproofing.org/school\\_siting\\_model\\_legislation.htm](http://www.childproofing.org/school_siting_model_legislation.htm).

By voicing your concerns to the people that make the decisions of where schools in your area are built, you will be standing up for those most vulnerable to the harmful impacts of toxic exposure. Our elected officials and government agencies need to continue to hear from each of us on this important issue. Together we can make our schools safe and healthy.

For more information, contact Renee Blanchard at 703-237-2249 x21 or [rblanchard@chej.org](mailto:rblanchard@chej.org).

for information. Visiting your public official on a regular basis helps tell a more personal story about your campaign. Visits can include a few individuals, your entire group or specific groups, like moms on Mondays and teachers on Tuesdays.

**(7) Letter to the Editor** – Sending letters to the editor of your local newspaper can help raise the profile of your community fight and help get the attention of the decision makers. Industry often uses this tactic as a way of gaining community support and your group can also use it to voice your thoughts on important issues.

**(8) Get Heard At Public Meetings** – Some public meetings include a ‘specialist’ who gets to tell the industry’s story before real community members get a chance to speak. Think about other ways you can get your voice heard at meetings. Hold a press conference minutes before the start of a public meeting, bring signs and wear shirts that state your message. Some groups have even held their own alternative meeting and invited the public officials to attend. By placing a large nameplate in the chair of the invited officials in the front of the room, you will get great visuals if he or she doesn’t show.

**(9) Bird-dogging** – Bird-dogging is a creative event inside or outside a speaking event of the decision maker. It should be fun, creative, attract attention, and bring the community together. Some communities rewrite popular songs and sing concert-style, essentially taking over the original event, but it can be as simple as wearing the same color, marching parade-like to an event, or just standing quietly throughout a public official’s speech. The key is creativity. By creating a *Google Alert* for your targeted politician, you will have the option to receive daily news updates about their public appearances. This allows you to plan your bird-dogging events in advance and make sure that



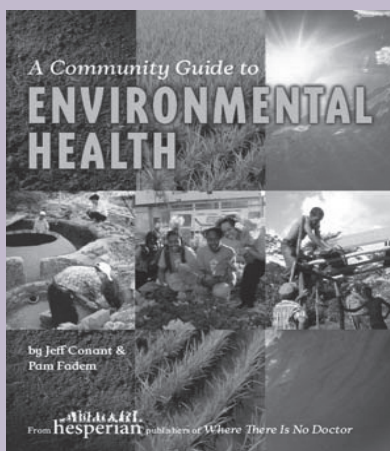
photo by Rebecca Van Damm, Greenpeace USA, 2008.

Bird-dogging candidates in Bloomington, Indiana.

at every step of the way your public official is reminded of their promises.

**(10) Hold a Toxic Tour** – Take a tour of the people and places impacted by the pollution. You could start at the doorstep of the people responsible for the contamination in your community, stop at the sites themselves, or the offices or homes of the people who can make responsible parties cleanup the sites, and then end at the office of your local politician. This is a great way to tell your community’s environmental health story. Inviting reporters, neighbors and politicians can help make this activity an interesting and inspiring event.

The first 100 days of the administration of your local or state political official can be an invigorating time for your group. With strategic planning and escalating tactics, your group will be able to leverage your power as citizens to make sure the issues you care about most are getting the attention they deserve. Good luck and don’t forget to have fun! ♦



## Great New Resource

*A Community Guide to Environmental Health* is an excellent general reference guide that describes how our health is affected by the world around us and how our activities affect the health of the world. It is targeted to people living in small villages or rural areas with limited resources, but may also be useful to others. This highly illustrated guide makes it clear that the way we use natural resources affects our health and well being. The tools, knowledge, and inspiration provided by this guide can help you take charge of your environmental health. Published by Hesperian; for more information, visit <http://hesperian.org/EHB.php>.

# 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, 2008 and October 31, 2008. We wish we had the space to acknowledge each and every one of CHEJ's donors in these pages because all gifts, regardless of size, are very much appreciated. Thank you for your support!*

## BEQUEST

*CHEJ received a legacy gift from the estate of Eugene Foster. We sincerely thank him and his family for this generous act.*

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Women's Community Cancer Project  
Western New York Council on  
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*BHOPAL, continued from page 5*

*promised Commission. There has been comprehensive neglect, and not a single step has been taken to improve healthcare or provide any employment.*

[Note: The Government of India has been moving forward with some promises. Announcements in October 2007 proclaimed that the medical research on the effects of the poisoning would be restarted and clean water provided by 2009. After years of broken promises, the Bhopalis will wait to see results before truly celebrating.]

**SF: Your grand-daughter Nagma was, at 11, one of the youngest children at the protest site. She even went to jail for a night where she was beaten, but came out with a brave attitude and vociferously participated in the rest of the protest. What does she say about those times?**

*HB: Nagma has a firm resolve when it comes to participation in the struggle. She says that she wants to follow in the footsteps of her grandmother. Whereas I cannot read or write, she is studying in*

*an English school now, so that she can effectively lead the struggle. But I would also like to mention some of the other children who have struggled with us – for example Sarita. You would be hard put to find another young lady like her – she speaks confidently in front of large gatherings, she is very intelligent. We are blessed for all our wonderful kids.*

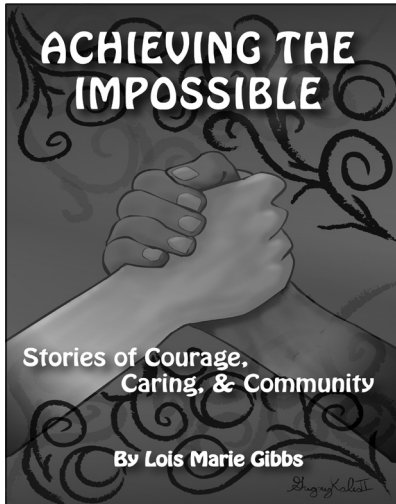
**SF: With the 25th Anniversary [December 2-3rd 2009] in sight, is there anything in particular you would like to say to your international supporters?**

*HB: It has been 25 years, and we still haven't gotten our justice. We would like to extend our solidarity to all the people living in places where Dow is spreading its poisons. Once Bhopal gets its justice, Dow will think a thousand times before taking a single step where it is operating or where it plans to operate.*

**More information about the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal is available at: [www.bhopal.net](http://www.bhopal.net) - [www.truthaboutdow.org](http://www.truthaboutdow.org). ♦**



# ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE: STORIES OF COURAGE, CARING AND COMMUNITY



By Lois Marie Gibbs

Read this collection of heart-warming, humorous and inspiring short stories about how ordinary people have been creating extraordinary change in their communities. Imagine dressing up like Marge Simpson with huge blue hair to attend a public meeting to stop a nuclear waste dump; or holding your Labor Union's Awards Ceremony on the steps of the county jail, where your keynote speaker was being held; or Mike Farrell's (M\*A\*S\*H\*) journey through chemical alley in Louisiana. These stories span the 30 years since the heroic struggle of the Love Canal Homeowners Association.

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