

# EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

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## DRILLING FOR NATURAL GAS



**WHY PERSONAL CHANGE DOES NOT EQUAL POLITICAL CHANGE**



The Journal of the Grassroots Environmental Movement

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

Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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Center for Health,  
Environment & Justice, Inc.  
P.O. Box 6806  
Falls Church, VA 22040-6806  
(703) 237-2249  
chej@chej.org - www.chej.org

#### On the Cover:

*Residents in Albany, NY rally against  
proposed natural gas drilling.*

*Photo by Times Union & Paul Buckowski*

## APPROACHING 30 YEARS OF SUPERFUND

2010 marks the 30th Anniversary of the Superfund program. This program was established out of the problems at Love Canal in Niagara Falls, New York to provide funds to clean up America's most toxic sites. President Jimmy Carter signed the law on December 11, 1980, just before leaving office.

As we approach the anniversary date, I think back to October 2, 1980. On that day, President Jimmy Carter came to Niagara Falls. I stood next to him on stage as the Governor was speaking. President Carter spoke softly to me as he pretended to listen to the Governor. He said that he was going to sign the new Superfund bill that had just passed through the House (September 23rd) when it reached his desk. The polluters are going to pay for cleaning up their toxic waste sites from a pool of funds collected through fees. He was pleased to explain that, if another Love Canal is discovered, the money will be there to help those innocent families. New communities won't have to struggle as the Love Canal community had. I felt proud at that moment that our working-class community was able not only to reach our goals but to help put in place a program for others.

Unfortunately, the Superfund Program got off to a rough start. Ronald Reagan took office and attempted to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency and ignore the new Superfund program. These acts led to Congressional investigations resulting in the resignation of EPA administrator Anne Gorsuch Burford. Rita Levelle, the administrator of the Superfund Program was convicted of lying to Congress, sentenced to six months in prison and fined \$10,000.

Despite all the setbacks during the first years of the program, Superfund has been very successful. The program has contributed to cleanup efforts at hundreds of contaminated sites. The Right-to-Know legislation and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry were later added to complement the program's ability to provide information. Several communities were evacuated and rivers, lakes and streams have been restored. Superfund has been a powerful tool to make the polluters pay through enforcement actions and the fees.

Today, the Superfund Program is bankrupt. In 1995 the "polluters pay fees" legally expired and they have not been reinstated. On the 30th Anniversary of this program, the taxpayers, you and I, are paying to clean up toxic waste sites. This is a critical program that protects human health and our environment. President Obama said that he would support reinstating the "polluters pay fees" component of Superfund in 2011. CHEJ is organizing communities to ask Obama to make this anniversary year the year that these Superfund fees are reinstated. Taxpayers are tired of bailing out corporations.

Lois Marie Gibbs,  
Executive Director

### ABOUT CHEJ

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

BY ANNE RABE, CHEJ'S BE SAFE COORDINATOR

## DRILLING FOR NATURAL GAS: HYDROFRACKING RUN AMUCK



photo by Times Union &amp; Paul Buckowski

*Residents in Albany, NY feel state is rushing to approve drilling for natural gas.*

Across the country, there is growing opposition from communities threatened by natural gas drilling as evidence grows that the high-risk technology of hydraulic fracturing can pollute drinking water with chemicals and methane gas. Residents in communities from Wyoming to Louisiana to New York are being targeted for gas exploration, as interest grows in tapping into vast gas fields across the country. Fueling this interest are economic incentives intended to help the U.S. become more energy independent as well as exemptions from requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act achieved by the gas industry several years ago.

Hydraulic fracturing, also called “hydrofracking,” involves injecting millions of gallons of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure down and across horizontally drilled wells as far as 10,000 feet below the surface. The pressure from this mixture causes the shale rocks to crack. The sand provides space for the natural gas which is released from the shale to flow back up through the injection well. There it is captured and stored for distribution. About 90% of the oil and gas reserves in the U.S are extracted using hydrofracking.

Although this process has been used in the oil and gas industry for over 60 years, only recently has it been found to be effective in retrieving pockets of hard-to-reach natural gas reserves. As a result, hydrofracking has become a popular drilling method in “unconventional” fields in states that tend to be more populated and unaccustomed to gas and oil exploration, such as Pennsylvania and New York. Unconventional fields have been targeted by Exxon and other major corporations as a major growth area.

A major concern with this process is the large number of toxic chemicals that are used and the fact that companies do not have to disclose what chemicals they are using. These chemicals serve many purposes including reducing pressure friction, increasing the recovery of the water, and reducing contaminant formation in the collected gas. Although these chemicals only make up a small part of the overall mixture, up to 260 chemicals are used. Many of these substances are toxic, like the cancer-causing benzene. Other chemicals commonly used include naphthalene, ethyl benzene, toluene and xylene. Exposure to these chemicals can lead to liver damage, reproductive effects and damage to the central nervous system. Several can cause cancer.

Millions of gallons of this contaminated mixture are injected into wells when exploring for natural gas. Some of the water is recovered with the gas, but most of it does not come back out. Typically between 65 and 91 percent of the fluid remains in the ground, raising fears about long-term contamination. The millions of gallons of contaminated water injected into the ground can mix with fresh clean water used to provide drinking water for nearby residents.

Other issues include the vast amount of water used in the process which raises concerns about the depletion of water reservoirs and how companies will deal with the large amounts of tainted wastewater which is collected and needs to be treated. This water is usually stored in lagoons on-site prior to treatment. These lagoons can overflow contaminating streams and ponds and nearby land. The vast amount of contaminated wastewater can also overload sewage treatment plants, which are often not built to handle such large loads.

Hydrofracking is a technology pioneered by Halliburton. In 2004, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declared it posed little threat. The next year, Halliburton successfully lobbied Congress to exempt it from the Safe Drinking Water Act. Due to the groundswell of public concern, Congress recently passed a law requiring EPA to investigate whether hydrofracking has contaminated water supplies. Community fears have risen as reports of contamination are released and industry focuses on drawing natural gas from shale, such as the nation's largest deposit, the Marcellus shale, which stretches from Virginia to New York.

The most immediate hazard from this aggressive style of drilling is polluted drinking water. Wells have been polluted in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wyoming, and some wells contaminated with methane gas have blown up. Rancher Donny Nelson said, “We are fighting to coexist with the gas

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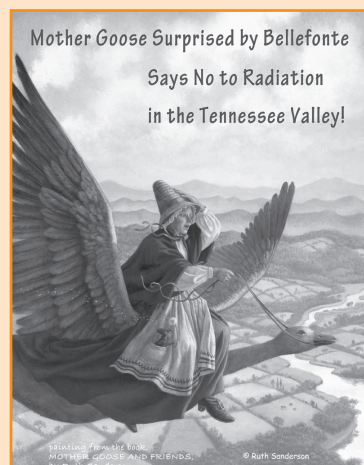


# BE SAFE Campaign

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

## Dangerous Money Sinkhole: Nuclear Power

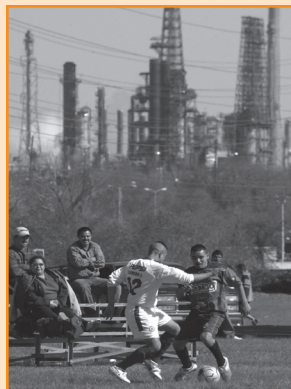
CHEJ is working with community leaders in Alabama and New York to develop compelling messages and a multi-faceted publicity plan that will enhance their campaign against proposed nuclear reactors. CHEJ is providing trainings on crafting effective messages and holding



media events, and distributing fact sheets from our new Media & Messaging Tool Kit ([www.chej.org/media-tool-kit.html](http://www.chej.org/media-tool-kit.html)). Groups then strategize on the best messages for their target audiences and identify a series of publicity activities, ads and media events to hold in the coming year. Armed with a publicity plan and a

budget, CHEJ assists in the group's efforts to raise funds for advertisements. For instance, in Alabama one message frame is: Danger - The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has a responsibility to put safety first in our valley. Another frame is: Money - TVA has wasted our time and taxpayer dollars at Bellefonte. The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and the Bellefonte Efficiency & Sustainability Team are launching a series of radio ads, leaflets, media events and other publicity activities to spread the word in the Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia region that nuclear power is dangerous and a money sinkhole. Their first action was a successful Mother Goose Pond Tea Party at the TVA's hearing at the Goose Pond Civic Center which received widespread media coverage (*see graphic above*). If your community is fighting a proposed reactor and wants to hold a Messaging and Publicity Plan Meeting, contact CHEJ at [anne@chej.org](mailto:anne@chej.org).

## Get Plugged in to CHEJ's New PVC-Free Schools Campaign in New York



In 2010, CHEJ is kicking off a brand-new PVC-free schools campaign in New York. We're working to get key school districts around the state to introduce and pass policies to reduce and phase out the purchase of PVC building materials and school and office supplies when safer alternatives are available. We're also planning on working with

student activists at key universities to pilot the campaign. We need your help to make it a success!

### Here's how you can get plugged in to the campaign in New York:

- 1. Endorse the campaign!** We're seeking endorsement for the campaign from environmental and labor groups to health, faith-based and parenting groups! Contact [mike@chej.org](mailto:mike@chej.org).
- 2. Educate parents, teachers and students.** Organize a screening of Blue Vinyl and Sam Suds for your PTA, teacher's union, or concerned students.
- 3. Organize a mini-campaign in your community.** Encourage your school district or town to adopt a healthy PVC-free policy to avoid the use of PVC building materials and office supplies in favor of safer cost-effective alternatives.
- 4. Go to or organize at a college.** Organize a campaign on your campus to enact a university-wide PVC-free procurement policy.

BY DERRICK JENSEN

## WHY PERSONAL CHANGE DOES NOT EQUAL POLITICAL CHANGE

Would any sane person think dumpster diving would have stopped Hitler, or that composting would have ended slavery or brought about the eight-hour workday, or that chopping wood and carrying water would have gotten people out of Tsarist prisons, or that dancing naked around a fire would have helped put in place the Voting Rights Act of 1957 or the Civil Rights Act of 1964? Then why now, with all the world at stake, do so many people retreat into these entirely personal “solutions”?

Part of the problem is that we’ve been victims of a campaign of systematic misdirection. Consumer culture and the capitalist mindset have taught us to substitute acts of personal consumption (or enlightenment) for organized political resistance. *An Inconvenient Truth* helped raise consciousness about global warming. But did you notice that all of the solutions presented had to do with personal consumption—changing light bulbs, inflating tires, driving half as much—and had nothing to do with shifting power away from corporations, or stopping the growth economy that is destroying the planet? Even if every person in the United States did everything the movie suggested, U.S. carbon emissions would fall by only 22 percent. Scientific consensus is that emissions must be reduced by at least 75 percent worldwide.

Or let’s talk water. We so often hear that the world is running out of water. People are dying from lack of water. Rivers are dewatered from lack of water. Because of this we need to take shorter showers. See the disconnect? Because I take showers, I’m responsible for drawing down aquifers? Well, no. More than 90 percent of the water used by humans is used by agriculture and industry. The remaining 10 percent is split between municipalities and actual living breathing individual humans. Collectively, municipal golf courses use as much water as municipal human beings. People (both human people and fish people) aren’t dying because the world is running out of water. They’re dying because the water is being stolen.

Or let’s talk energy. Kirkpatrick Sale summarized it well: “For the past 15 years the story has been the same every year: individual consumption—residential, by private car, and so on—is never more than about a quarter of all consumption; the vast majority is commercial, industrial, corporate, by agribusiness and government [he forgot military]. So, even if we all took up cycling and wood stoves it would have a negligible impact on energy use, global warming and atmospheric pollution.”

Or let’s talk waste. In 2005, per-capita municipal waste production (basically everything that’s put out at the curb) in the U.S. was about 1,660 pounds. Let’s say you’re a die-hard simple-living activist, and you reduce this to zero. You recycle everything. You bring cloth bags shopping. You fix your toaster. Your toes poke out of old tennis shoes. You’re not done yet, though. Since municipal



waste includes not just residential waste, but also waste from government offices and businesses, you march to those offices, waste reduction pamphlets in hand, and convince them to cut down on their waste enough to eliminate your share of it. Uh, I’ve got some bad news. Municipal waste accounts for only 3 percent of total waste production in the United States.

I want to be clear. I’m not saying we shouldn’t live simply. I live reasonably simply myself, but I don’t pretend that not buying much (or not driving much, or not having kids) is a powerful political act, or that it’s deeply revolutionary. It’s not. Personal change doesn’t equal social change.

So how, then, and especially with all the world at stake, have we come to accept these utterly insufficient responses? I think part of it is that we’re in a double bind. A double bind is where you’re given multiple options, but no matter what option you choose, you lose, and withdrawal is not an option. At this point, it should be pretty easy to recognize that every action involving the industrial economy is destructive (and we shouldn’t pretend that solar photovoltaics, for example, exempt us from this: they still require mining and transportation infrastructures at every point in the production processes; the same can be said for every other so-called green technology). So if we choose option one—if we avidly participate in the industrial economy—we may in the short term think we win because we may accumulate wealth, the marker of “success” in this culture. But we lose, because in doing so we give up our empathy, our animal humanity. And we really lose because industrial civilization is killing the planet, which means everyone loses. If we choose the “alternative” option of living more simply, thus causing less harm, but still not stopping the industrial economy from killing the planet, we may in the short term think we win because we get to feel pure, and we didn’t even have to give up all of our empathy (just enough to justify not stopping the horrors), but once again we really lose because industrial civilization is still killing the planet, which means everyone still loses. The third option, acting decisively to stop the industrial economy, is very scary for a number of reasons, including but not restricted to the fact that we’d lose some of the luxuries (like electricity) to which we’ve grown accustomed, and the fact that those in power might

*Continued on page 10*

# 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.*

## Alabama

**No Hub 4 McCalla** has formed to address plans by the Norfolk and Southern Railroad Company to build a railroad hub 250 feet from an elementary school in McCalla. The group is concerned that diesel emissions, PCBs, and contamination from other pollutants will affect the children attending the school. "They may need the rail hub, said Pat Breden, a member of the group, "but it should not be so close to an elementary school." More than 500 people showed up at a public meeting about the proposal. Although the governor and many local politicians are supporting the proposal, public sentiment is definitely in opposition.

## California

In a major victory for the residents of the embattled Latino farm workers community of Kettleman City and their environmental justice allies, corporate giant Waste Management, parent company of Chemical Waste Management, abandoned their controversial attempt to dump radioactive wastes from the Santa Susana Field Laboratory at the Kettleman Hills hazardous waste landfill. Waste Management's decision came in response to months of furious protest by **El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio/People for Clean Air and Water** along with numerous other organizations. "This is a great victory for our community," said Maricela Mares Alatorre, Kettleman City resident and spokesperson for El Pueblo. "This proves that as long as the people are vigilant and not complacent, we can protect our community because the government won't protect us." CHEJ board member Esperanza Maya is a founding member of El Pueblo.

**Moms For Clean Air (MCA)** remain on hold as the County Supervisors in Petaluma again put off making a decision on whether to give a permit to Dutra to build an asphalt plant within 3 miles of over 60 schools, dozens of playgrounds, neighborhoods, restaurants and workplaces including Shollenberger Park, a multi-use recreational park that is considered one of the premier bird sanctuaries in North America (see *Moms take on Asphalt plant in Winter 09 issue of EBY*). The supervisors are likely hoping that the group will lose interest as time passes, but MCA remains vigilant in keeping the pressure on.

## Florida

**Save Our Aquifer (SOA)** in Cocoa uncovered test results showing that the Canaveral Port Authority released wastewater with high levels of arsenic into the surrounding aquifer and nearby storm water storage ponds. SOA is asking for an investigation into whether the port authority properly reported these findings and how they went about addressing the arsenic spikes. These findings fuel the group's concerns that the wastewater being stored by the port authority in deep underground wells is contaminating the local groundwater and aquifers (see photo).



Photo from [www.saveouraquifer.org](http://www.saveouraquifer.org)

*Save Our Aquifer's message to the Canaveral Water Authority.*

## Georgia

**Citizens for Public Awareness** in Elbert County are opposed to a proposed waste-to-energy incinerator near the South Carolina border that would burn tires, wood waste, and sewage sludge trucked in from a 90-mile radius. The proposal by GreenFirst is one of a rash of incinerators proposed around the state that have residents scrambling. Residents are skeptical about GreenFirst's intentions and believe that Covanta, the giant incinerator company, is really behind the plan to build incinerators in this and many other communities around the state. Larry Winslett of the **Georgia Sierra Club** told local newspapers that "there's not enough wood" in Georgia for the number of waste-to-energy plants proposed by GreenFirst, a total of 20 plants according to documents filed with the state regulatory agency. The county supervisors have put off a vote until at least March so that they can gather more information about the proposal.

## Idaho

More than 70 organizations from across the country delivered a letter to the Environmental Protection

Agency in late January urging them to address serious environmental injustices at one of the nation's largest toxic waste sites— Bunker Hill Lead Mine Federal Superfund site in Kellogg. The groups called on the newly appointed EPA Directors of the Superfund and Environmental Justice programs to correct the environmental injustices of the past when an unsafe cleanup plan was decided on by the agency under the Bush Administration. CHEJ, Sierra Club, Breast Cancer Fund, Just Transition Alliance and many other groups urged EPA to improve the cleanup plan in support of the **Silver Valley Community Resource Center's** struggle for environmental justice.

## Illinois

Congratulations to **Incinerator Free Lake County (IFLC)** who helped convince a committee of the Lake County Board of Supervisors who voted to remove incinerators as part of the county's solid waste plans. IFLC organized and generated tremendous pressure on the county supervisors. More than 1,700 county residents signed a petition opposing incineration. "I think we've made our case against incinerators and incineration-type facilities," said Barbara Klipp, speaking on behalf of the group to a local newspaper. The group's main concern is the toxic emissions that come out of incinerators. The group is pushing for sustainable solutions and wants the county to enhance and develop its recycling and waste reduction programs.

## Kentucky

The **Kentucky Environmental Federation (KEF)** in Berea is working with city officials to address the development of the Berea Community Park on an old landfill site. The city began developing the site before issues were raised about the safety of building the park on the old landfill. In response, the city hired a consultant to evaluate the site who proposed taking only a few samples at the site. CHEJ reviewed the sampling plan and advised KEF that more testing was needed. KEF is now working with the city to determine what additional testing should be done. CHEJ is continuing to provide technical support to KEF.

## Louisiana

Residents of Mossville are pleased with the EPA's decision to finally crack down and place a substantial limit on all toxic chemicals released from PVC plants. This is a huge victory for **Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN)**, the **Louisiana Environmental Action Network**, and **Earth Justice** along with various environmental coalitions, who support limiting plant emissions as the only way to prevent the chemicals from these plants from damaging the health of the community. "We live among chemicals that leach into our water, our food, and our children's



# ACTION LINE

## Need organizing help?

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

bodies,” said Edgar Mouton, a retired chemical plant employee and leader of MEAN. This is a huge stepping stone for preventing harm to future generations of residents in communities situated near PVC plants.

### Massachusetts

**Don't Waste Massachusetts** (DWM) and environmental groups across the state celebrated when the Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs announced its decision to keep its moratorium on building new incinerators including waste-to-energy plants that use gasification technology and anaerobic digestion. In addition, the state is close to passing extended producer responsibility (EPR) and expanded bottle bills, both of which will reduce waste targeted for landfills and incinerators. This is a huge victory that seemed hopeless a year ago. DWM still has hopes the Patrick Administration will realize the importance of adopting proven Zero Waste strategies as the best approach for managing the state's waste.

### Michigan

Residents near the Hooker Chemical plant in Montague are still worried about the long term health problems that they may have suffered as a result of the exposures from the chemical facility and have begun plans to conduct their own health study of the residents. Working with an epidemiologist at the state health department, local leaders are developing a registry of people who lived near the one-time petrochemical complex. The group has been using Facebook and other social networking tools to find hundreds of former residents. The group is not quite sure how they will proceed, but they are committed to creating a registry that can serve as the basis for a health study.

### Minnesota

Residents of Minneapolis are pleased that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has denied requests from Hennepin County to increase the burning capacity at the county's incinerator. Instead, the MPCA is requiring plant officials to maintain a more elaborate permit, which will require more public scrutiny. Many are delighted at the MPCA's decision, including State Rep. Frank Hornstein, along with various other Minnesota legislators. While the operator is still in the process of applying for another permit, citizens are ready

to oppose any threats the company might throw their way.

### Missouri

Residents on the west side of Kansas City are concerned about plans by Kansas City Power & Light to build a second substation in their neighborhood. **Westside Community Acton Network** (WCAN) has been working hard to make improvements in their neighborhood and they feel that this project is not the kind of development they want. There already is a substation in the neighborhood that prospective businesses and residents shy away from (see photo below) and the group feels that another substation will be more of the same. WCAN also says that there are already too many pollution sources in the neighborhood and it's time for the neighborhood residents to decide the fate of their neighborhood. CHEJ is providing organizing support.



KCP&L substation at 19th Street and Cherry in Kansas City, MO.

### New Jersey

Residents in the Ironbound section of Newark have been living with the pollution from the largest garbage incinerator in the state for 18 years and it's not getting any easier despite claims by Covanta Energy that it's "a soldier in the war against global warming." Residents feel that their concerns about health risks continue to be ignored. "Is there anything we can say to get them to do something?... We are breathing more and more lead, dioxin and other pollutants," said Ana Baptista of the **Ironbound Community Corporation**. Records acquired from the state by the group show that plant emissions of particulates, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide violated Covanta's permit more than 900 times in the past 5 years. Covanta has now applied to renew its permit and the community is gearing up to stop them.

The USEPA working with the state Department of Environmental Protection told the residents of Pompton Lakes that they will no longer be restricted to using a contractor selected by DuPont

to install vapor mitigation systems in their homes. This is a major victory for **Citizens for Clean Pompton Lakes** (CCPL) who has been fighting for EPA to take over the cleanup. High levels of trichloroethylene (TCE) have been found evaporating into more than 450 homes from contaminated groundwater coming from a nearby DuPont manufacturing facility. "This is amazing news," said Lisa Riggiola, a former borough councilwoman and a leader of CCPL. "I hope this is the first step towards getting our neighborhood cleaned up." The decision comes less than a week after EPA Region I Administrator Judith Enck responded to CCPL's demand to get involved.

### New York

**Community Advocates for Safe Emissions** (CASE) had a victory in January when Attorney General Andrew Cuomo announced an agreement with Lafarge, one of the nation's largest cement companies, to slash their toxic air pollution emissions. The settlement requires them to greatly reduce nitrogen oxide and sulfur oxide emissions, both of which are respiratory irritants. CASE is also asking the state environmental agency to require more reductions in mercury emissions in a proposed permit renewal.

**Partnership for Onondaga Creek** (POC) declared victory after more than 10 years of fighting to convince the state to scrap plans to build 3 treatment plants to handle wastewater from the city of Syracuse. Instead, green infrastructure - low impact development options - will be used including planting trees and installing vegetative roofs, rain gardens, permeable pavements, and rain barrels to manage wastewater. "We are pleased that no more neighborhoods will be impacted like we were ..." stated Lionel Logan, President of POC. The victory is bittersweet for POC as the group lost its struggle to stop a wastewater treatment plant from being built in its neighborhood forcing 35 families to be relocated. This effort coalesced the community into a strong environmental justice advocacy group that became involved in local issues. The next step for the group is to make sure that the new jobs resulting from these new activities go to people in their community.

The **Clean Air Coalition of Western New York** and the residents of Tonawanda scored an enormous victory this winter when the USEPA announced they're ordering Tonawanda Coke to clean up their act of state and federal pollution violations. The EPA has ordered the company to comply with the Clean Air Act, fix wastewater leaks, stop dumping coal tar sludge, and comply with the NY Air Plan. This comes only one month after the EPA raided the plant and arrested the plant's "environmental control manager" on criminal charges for violating environmental laws. The Clean Air Coalition of WNY, which CHEJ has been assisting, has been organizing for several years to hold the company accountable for their air pollution.

# ACTION LINE

## North Carolina

**The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League** (BREDL) in Glendale Springs is launching a state-wide campaign - Phase-Out Perc NOW - to assist residents across the state that live near an estimated 2,000 dry cleaning sites. Whether by accident, sloppy operations, or intentional releases, the chemical used to clean clothing - perchloroethylene (PCE) or "perc" for short - has contaminated soil, groundwater, drinking water wells, and surface waters near these sites. Perc gets into groundwater which can affect drinking water and it can evaporate and travel through soil and enter nearby homes through the process of vapor intrusion. PCE was found in the air of homes only 150 feet from the One Hour Martinizing dry cleaner in Durham. BREDL is working with the local residents to help get these sites cleaned up. For more information contact Sue Dayton at 336-525-2003 or sdayton@swcp.com.

## Ohio

Residents on the south side of Columbus welcomed the news that the Sanimax rendering plant was shutting down. The plant which turned animal carcasses, grease and used cooking oils into tallow and other products used in cosmetics and animal feed was purchased by Darling International, a Texas company that recycles food-processing byproducts. Darling then decided to shut down the operation. The plant had a history of bad odors and questions about cleanliness and was often the target of complaints from nearby residents. "I'm sure any residents within a mile radius of the plant are happy to see it go," said Teresa Mills, an activist with the **Buckeye Environmental Network**. The plant was located in a residential neighborhood where it never should have been allowed.

Environmental groups and residents across the state cheered when a U.S. District Court judge ruled that the state is violating the Clean Air Act by letting small businesses ignore air pollution limits. The judge's decision struck down a state law passed in 2006 that exempted small businesses like auto-body shops and gas stations that release less than 10 tons of air pollutants per year from all air pollution laws. The Clean Air Act requires businesses to comply if they generate more than 1.8 tons of air pollutants per year. The **Sierra Club** filed suit against the Ohio EPA for failing to enforce the Clean Air Act arguing that the state never got approval from EPA to raise the small business exemption from 1.8 to 10 tpy. The federal judge agreed and wrote in this decision, "The state violates an emission standard or limitation each time it fails to enforce it."

## Pennsylvania

The **Pocono Environmental Coalition and Wildlife Society** (PEC) is getting organized to address

plans to build the Northampton Community College in Tannersville next to the former Butz landfill, a Superfund site where groundwater contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE) forced the installation of a municipal drinking water system for 49 residents who were on well water. The proposed school site is down gradient from the old landfill site and PEC is concerned that no current testing of the groundwater has been done to determine if there are any risks to the students who will use the site. TCE and other volatile chemicals can evaporate from the contaminated groundwater and enter homes or buildings built above the plume. PEC wants testing done to address these concerns and has contacted CHEJ for organizing and technical assistance.

The **Pine Creek Headwaters Protection Group** and residents in Tioga County are concerned about the affect that 172 gas drilling permits will have on their groundwater and surface water. The county sits over the Marcellus Shale which has been targeted for gas exploration (*see article on Fracking in this issue*). To address concerns raised by residents, the Pennsylvania College of Technology held a workshop to train people to become "Waterdogs" to monitor and report on the numerous gas drilling operations proposed in the area. The training included how to recognize health and safety issues and the environmental problems associated with gas well drilling. The trained Waterdogs were given a log book and showed how to observe and record potential hazards.

## Rhode Island

Environmental groups throughout the state are relieved at landfill director, Michael O'Connell's decision, to forgo adopting waste-to-energy disposal methods for the state. The groups voiced their opposition to waste-to-energy projects and how they are being misrepresented to the public. "Waste to energy is a waste of energy," said Meredith Lee, Community Organizer for the **Toxics Action Center**. Sheila Dormody, the director of **Clean Water Action's** Rhode Island affiliate concurred, "None of these methods would be a real solution to handle our waste problems." O'Connell's decision to renounce establishing a power plant promotes a big policy change, bolstering the current ban on incinerators.

## South Carolina

**Serious Chester County Residents Against Pollution** (SCCRAP) is organizing to oppose plans by Covanta Energy to build a 1,600 tons per day waste-to-energy incinerator in Chester County. The county supervisors rushed to approve a zone change for the proposed plant in order to meet a deadline to get the project started in order to qualify for federal stimulus funds. More than 100 people opposing the proposed plan packed the supervisors meeting, but they still voted to approve the zoning change. The SC Department of Health and Environmental Control must now approve air quality and solid waste permits and is holding a public hearing in late



Photo by Travis Jenkins/The NCR

*More than 200 people pack "unofficial" public hearing on proposed incinerator in Chester Co, SC.*

February. The town council of Richburg which is located in the county passed a resolution against the proposed incinerator arguing that not enough information about the proposal has been released to the public. Covanta has yet to apply for any permits. Residents vow to continue to fight the incinerator. CHEJ and BREDL are providing support to the residents.

## Texas

The **Community In-Powerment Development Association** (CIDA), the **Sierra Club** and local residents celebrated this winter when it was announced that 20,000 tons of PCBs would no longer be coming to their environmental justice community of Port Arthur to be incinerated. Veolia Environmental Services wanted to import the PCBs from Mexico for incineration. "Our community in Port Arthur, Texas has been living for years under a siege of toxic chemicals in the air," said Hilton Kelley, Executive Director of CIDA, a local community-based organization. "We don't need PCBs burned here because it will bring more toxic chemical hazards to our air and bodies." Kelly added, "CIDA believes that it's time for the Veolia incinerator to close its door because they do not take into consideration the health and well-being of the citizens of Port Arthur, Texas when burning toxic waste or encouraging other companies to send their toxic waste here." ♦







A CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THREATS TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH

# Child Proofing Our Communities

## Greening Schools Inside and Out

CHEJ is launching a new campaign in Ohio and New York to protect school children and teachers from attending schools built on or near contaminated sites or toxic facilities. The problem of unsafe schools was first discovered in 1978 when the Love Canal landfill containing 20,000 tons of toxic waste was found next to the 99th Street Elementary School in Niagara Falls, NY. This finding was a warning to avoid building schools on contaminated sites. Yet many schools continue to be built on contaminated land: the Royalton-Hartland School in Middleport, NY, is polluted by pesticides from the adjacent FMC plant; PS 65 in Ozone Park in New York City sits atop a plume of trichloroethylene (TCE) from a Superfund site that once made airplane parts; and the Soundview Educational Complex in the South Bronx has high levels of lead and mercury in its soil. In Ohio, the EPA found the air outside an elementary school in Marietta contained manganese levels 23 times higher than what EPA considers safe.

We can prevent our children from being exposed to toxic chemicals at school by requiring comprehensive environmental testing at candidate sites before locating a new school, and by locating schools far from hazardous incinerators, landfills and industrial plants. In recent years, several states have passed school siting policies, including New Jersey, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. In California, the Los Angeles School District has perhaps the most health-protective policy in the nation. At the federal level, the USEPA is drafting guidelines for siting new schools to be released later this year. CHEJ plans to support efforts in New York and Ohio as well as at the federal level to address this growing concern. For more information, contact [anne@chej.org](mailto:anne@chej.org).

## New Resource from CHEJ: Animated PVC-Free Schools Website



CHEJ has unveiled a new resource to educate parents, teachers and school administrators about the hazards of PVC in schools – an animated interactive PVC-free schools website. This website

enables viewers to click through the school and identify where PVC is “hiding” and find safer PVC-free products in over 20 different product categories. The website identifies PVC in flooring, roofing, lunchboxes, backpacks, 3-ring binders, playground equipment, and more and provides safer alternatives to each material or product.

### Here's how you can help get the word out about this new website

1. **Visit** the interactive website at <http://www.besafenet.com/pvc/thisvinylschool>
2. **Spread the word!** E-mail parents, teachers, school administrators, and bloggers you know about the new site. Contact CHEJ to get a sample e-mail announcement you can forward: [contact@mike@chej.org](mailto:contact@mike@chej.org).
3. **Organize a presentation** for your local PTA using the website as a way to tell the story of where PVC is lurking in your school and what safer alternatives exist.
4. **Have a website or blog?** Post a web banner on your site promoting this great new resource. Download a web banner at <http://www.besafenet.com/pvc/thisvinylschool>
5. **On Facebook, MySpace or Twitter?** Post an update or Tweet about the site to your friends, fans and followers! Contact CHEJ for sample announcements: [mike@chej.org](mailto:mike@chej.org).

*DRILLING FOR NATURAL GAS; HYDROFRACKING RUN AMUCK, continued from page 3*

industry in North Dakota. Over the years, we've dealt with emissions, seismic damage, spills, reclamation problems, and too many other issues to list." In Louisiana, Darlene Lipp said fracking fluids spilled into her pasture, where more than a dozen cows drank it and died.

Last fall, Cabot Oil and Gas Corporation temporarily suspended its fracturing operations in Pennsylvania after three spills. The company was fined \$120,000 for contaminating homeowners' wells, but the fines did not help Virginia Switzer, whose water was polluted when gas leaked from a nearby well. She worries that if she tries to sell her home, no one would buy it. "Can you imagine the ad? 'Beautiful new home, Bring your own water,'" Ms. Switzer said. "We're like a dead zone."

Gas companies are facing strong opposition as New York State considers permitting the technology. The New York City Mayor called for a ban in the City's watershed, which supplies water to nine million people.

Over 400 people attended a rally at the State Capitol in Albany opposing drilling until more is learned about the environmental impacts, especially on groundwater and

drinking water. Down the street there was another rally of 300 people who supported the drilling including farmers, landowners, and business leaders. Many supporters are behind the drilling because they have sold the mineral rights to the gas companies who will pay them a monthly fee if the drilling is approved. These payments will help financially struggling farmers and landowners in a tough economy. There's also the industry promise of "thousands" of jobs to boost the economy.

Recently, New York's environmental agency's union, representing 2,000 engineers and professional staff, called for a one-year moratorium until more studies are done. At the federal level, several Congressmen have introduced legislation that would require companies to comply with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and to disclose the chemicals they use. In the court of public opinion, hydrofracking is viewed as an unsafe science experiment that is having profound health and environmental consequences. ♦

*Sources: New York Times, 12/8/09 and 11/4/09; Houston Chronicle 12/11/09; Albany Times Union 1/26/10; ProPublica, 12/28/09; www.worc.org; Toxic Chemicals on Tap: How Natural Gas Drilling Threatens Drinking Water, Environment America 11/4/09; Drilling Around the Law, Environmental Working Group, 1/20/10.*

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*WHY PERSONAL CHANGE DOES NOT EQUAL POLITICAL CHANGE, continued from page 5*

try to kill us if we seriously impede their ability to exploit the world—none of which alters the fact that it's a better option than a dead planet. Any option is a better option than a dead planet.

Besides being ineffective at causing the sorts of changes necessary to stop this culture from killing the planet, there are at least four other problems with perceiving simple living as a political act (as opposed to living simply because that's what you want to do). The first is that it's predicated on the flawed notion that humans inevitably harm their landbase. Simple living as a political act consists solely of harm reduction, ignoring the fact that humans can help the Earth as well as harm it. We can rehabilitate streams, we can get rid of noxious invasives, we can remove dams, we can disrupt a political system tilted toward the rich as well as an extractive economic system, we can destroy the industrial economy that is destroying the real, physical world.

The second problem—and this is another big one—is that it incorrectly assigns blame to the individual (and most especially to individuals who are particularly powerless) instead of to those who actually wield power in this system and to the system itself. Kirkpatrick Sale again: "The whole individualist what-you-can-do-to-save-the-earth guilt trip is a myth. We, as individuals, are not creating the crises, and we can't solve them."

The third problem is that it accepts capitalism's redefinition of us from citizens to consumers. By accepting this redefinition, we reduce our potential forms of resistance to consuming and not consuming. Citizens have a much wider range of available resistance tactics, including voting, not voting, running for office, pamphleting, boycotting, organizing, lobbying, protesting, and, when a government becomes destructive of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we have the right to alter or abolish it.

The fourth problem is that the endpoint of the logic behind simple living as a political act is suicide. If every act within an industrial economy is destructive, and if we want to stop this destruction, and if we are unwilling (or unable) to question (much less destroy) the intellectual, moral, economic, and physical infrastructures that cause every act within an industrial economy to be destructive, then we can easily come to believe that we will cause the least destruction possible if we are dead.

The good news is that there are other options. We can follow the examples of brave activists who lived through the difficult times I mentioned—Nazi Germany, Tsarist Russia, antebellum United States—who did far more than manifest a form of moral purity; they actively opposed the injustices that surrounded them. We can follow the example of those who remembered that the role of an activist is not to navigate systems of oppressive power with as much integrity as possible, but rather to confront and take down those systems. ♦

*Derrick Jensen is an activist and the author of many books, including What We Leave Behind and Songs of the Dead. Reprinted with permission from Orion Magazine. This article first appeared in the July/August 2009 issue of Orion Magazine.*

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CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations to support our work between October 31, 2009 to December 31, 2009. 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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## Award for Environmental Reporting

The Columbia Graduate School of Journalism announced that a *USA Today* investigation into the smokestack effects of toxic air around America's schools has won the 2009 John B. Oakes Award for excellence in environmental journalism. CHEJ worked closely with the reporters during the concept stage of this series on schools and toxic air. Congratulations to Blake Morrison and Brad Heath, the *USA Today* journalists who wrote the stories.



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