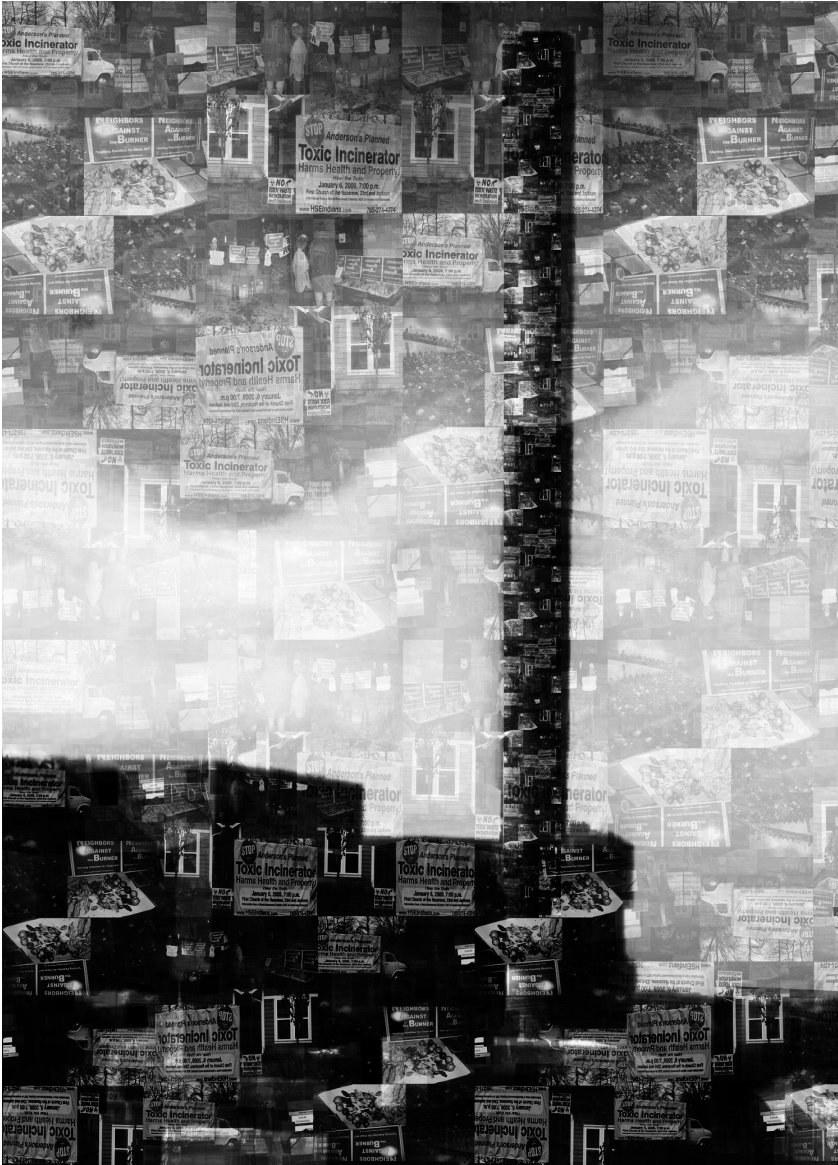


EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

VOL. 27 No.1 SPRING 2009



Opposition to Incinerators in Disguise

The True Costs of Cleaning up Nuclear Waste



The Journal of the Grassroots Environmental Movement

www.chej.org

Center for Health, Environment and Justice

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On the Cover:

Incinerator Collage

Image arranged by Gregory Kolen II

21ST CENTURY ORGANIZING

As an organizer I was fascinated, as were many colleagues, by the basic organizing carried out so successfully in the recent campaign to elect President Barack Obama. I was also astonished to see 1.8 million people in Washington, D.C. for the inaugural events. Many came not only to celebrate a new president but to engage in the process of change beyond that historical event. And, remarkably, the American people are full of hope at a time when the country is in despair due to the poor economy, high unemployment, two wars, etc. So, what can we learn from this unique chain of events?

One key learning was that the internet played a big role in the change. *"One of my fundamental beliefs from my days as a community organizer is that real change comes from the bottom up and, there's no more powerful tool for grassroots organizing than the Internet,"* said President Obama.

Everyone I've talked with is trying to figure out how to replicate Obama's on-line organizing effort or get his lists. But it takes more than getting a large number of names on a list to change public opinion and involvement. You need to find ways to use the list, to break it into manageable chunks, and to organize it so that you use some names for one purpose and others for another.

The Obama campaigners credit the Internet's social networking tools as playing a big part in his win and setting the tone.

Another lesson is that actively involving people in your campaign helps you win. It's called field organizing - the art and science of turning supporters into active, connected volunteers, and organizing them to systematically go out and talk to and persuade others.

Obama's campaign took this work to unprecedented levels with their effective mobilization of millions of committed supporters. This effort started with a commitment to community organizing conveyed by Obama himself. The campaign then committed resources to hire organizers who turned supporters into volunteers, and who organized people into teams, and empowered them to organize their neighborhoods and communities. Your group may not have resources to hire organizers, but you can begin by training your volunteers to be organizers.

Finally, the campaign built a technology network that supported the organizing by tying people tightly together through e-mails, texting, and an on-line community, and by managing the huge number of volunteers and data collected on-line. They used a website to give volunteers on-line tools that supported their direct voter-contact work and raised the resources needed to fund these operations.

We can all learn from these lessons to support our own organizing work.

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 MIKE SCHADE, CHEJ's PVC CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR

OPPOSITION TO INCINERATORS IN DISGUISE

Grassroots Movement Fired Up

From Red Bluff, California to Anderson, Indiana, community, environmental health, and environmental justice groups are fighting back against proposals to build plasma arc, pyrolysis, gasification, biomass including burning chicken poop, waste-to-energy and other “incinerators in disguise” that are popping up across the nation. While these new technologies differ in some ways from traditional garbage incinerators – they generally present the same host of environmental health problems.

Incinerators in Disguise

In the 1980s and 1990s, hundreds of municipal solid waste, hazardous waste, and medical waste incinerators were shut down or defeated across the country. A highly organized network of grassroots community groups was responsible for these victories, which led to a nationwide reduction in dioxin air emissions of over 90% from 1987 to 1995.

Since 2003 we've seen a resurgence of incinerator proposals, many masked as plasma arc, pyrolysis, gasification, and other types of new “incinerators in disguise” technologies. The same toxic cocktail of chemicals can be released from these incinerators as from traditional incinerators, including dioxins and furans, mercury and other heavy metals, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, hydrogen chloride, sulfur dioxide and more. Some of these pollutants can cause cancer and many threaten public health at even very low levels. Tests from municipal solid waste in a pyrolysis facility in southern California found more dioxins, VOCs, NOx, and particulate emissions than existing garbage incinerators in the area. These facilities waste energy and often have technical and financial problems. Many also argue they have “zero emissions,” a claim that has repeatedly been shown to be untrue.

Recent Victories Coast to Coast

Over the past year, the movement against incinerators and for zero waste is gaining momentum from coast to coast. Some of the highlights include:

- The largest incinerator in the world, located in the city of Detroit, Michigan, may be shut down for good. Last year, the city decided not to renew its contract to send its trash to the incinerator and instead, plans to expand its recycling efforts. The incinerator has cost the city approximately a billion dollars more than if the city had chosen to emphasize waste reduction and recycling with limited landfill disposal - money that is desperately needed for the city's schools and other public programs.
- In January 2009, the Sacramento City Council voted unanimously to kill a controversial plasma arc incinerator project that they had been considering for the last year. The



photo by Hoosiers for a Safe Environment

company, USST, and the city staff had promoted the plasma arc technology as a safe way to treat large amounts of municipal solid waste and generate electricity. Greenaction and La Raza Network led the campaign that proved that key company claims were not accurate.

- In Anderson, Indiana, Hoosiers for a Safe Environment celebrated in January 2009 after securing a big victory -- the Mayor announced to a standing room only crowd of almost 1,000 concerned residents that the proposed plasma torch facility would not be supported.
- A study released in December 2008 by the Tellus Institute in Boston, commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, found that “gasification and pyrolysis facilities are unlikely to play a major role in MSW [municipal solid waste] management in Massachusetts by 2020.”
- In November 2008, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to end a proposed plasma arc project after the company was unable to provide data to prove their claims the facility wouldn't release any emissions. Greenaction and the Pajaro Valley Coalition for Environmental Justice organized strong opposition. The facility was proposed near a migrant farm labor camp in Watsonville, CA.
- Neighbors Against the Burner in St. Paul, Minnesota, defeated a “biomass” burner in Minneapolis in June and convinced the pollution control agency to specifically define biomass to exclude Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) or other garbage.
- In June 2008, Red Bluff and Tehama County, California residents, Citizens for a Healthy Community and Greenaction celebrated a major victory defeating InEnTec's proposed plasma arc medical waste incinerator facility. Community members fought the incinerator for three-and-a-half years.
- A proposal to build a plasma arc incinerator in St. Lucie County, Florida was scaled back by about 80 percent in 2008. This proposal is still being held from moving forward by what one St. Lucie County supervisor claimed as “29 major outstanding issues.”

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.

CHEJ Launches PVC-Free Schools Campaign

CHEJ's PVC Campaign has convinced some of the world's biggest retailers and corporations to phase out PVC products such as toys, shower curtains and packaging. Building on those successful efforts, we are launching a new campaign targeting PVC use in schools.

Why Schools Should Go PVC-Free Now:

- Congress has recently banned phthalates in children's toys, yet PVC materials that contain phthalates are widespread in schools.
- Recent studies connect phthalates and PVC in building materials with asthma in children and adults.
- Children are required by law to spend as much as eight hours a day in school, so school districts have a responsibility to provide healthy school environments.
- The average age of a public school building is nearly 50 years old. One-third of schools need extensive repair and replacement, and President Barack Obama has pledged to invest in schools.
- There is a growing trend towards building "green" schools coast-to-coast.
- Building materials such as PVC flooring represent the largest share of the PVC market, and schools are huge institutional purchasers that can have a significant impact on the marketplace.

How Can I Help?

- **Organize a screening of Blue Vinyl or Sam Suds** with your PTA/PTO or with concerned students.
- **Encourage your school** to renovate or build with PVC-free building materials.
- **Encourage organizations** such as PTAs/PTOs, or teacher's unions, to endorse the campaign.
- **Get involved today!** If you're interested in taking action, contact CHEJ at mike@chej.org or 212-964-3680.



Help Your Community Go Green

Want to help green the marketplace and promote safe and healthy products? Check out CHEJ's new Green Purchasing Tool Kit at www.besafenet.com.

You can download the best local and state green purchasing programs in America. The Green Purchasing Tool Kit includes model policies, resources and fact sheets. From start to finish, this kit helps you develop and pass policies to green your community and promote environmentally-friendly products. It includes the following two resources:

- *How to Pass a Green Purchasing Policy* is a Fact Sheet that walks you through the steps to pass a policy in your town, city, county or state.
- *Buying Smart: Experiences of Municipal Green Purchasing Pioneers* is a valuable report by the Green Purchasing Institute that includes a Greening Government Resource List.

You can download model purchasing policies from Buffalo, Los Angeles, New York City, Portland, San Francisco and Seattle, and state policies from CA, MA, ME, NJ, NY and WA. Help your community go green in 2009 by passing a Green Purchasing policy! **Want help strategizing how to do it?** Call CHEJ/BE SAFE at 518-732-4538 or email at annerabe@msn.com

BY ANNE RABE, CHEJ's BE SAFE COORDINATOR

THE TRUE COSTS OF CLEANING UP NUCLEAR WASTE



State Senator Catharine Young at Buffalo news conference on West Valley report. She's joined by CHEJ's Anne Rabe (on her left), and report authors and activists.

How much does it cost to clean up a toxic nuclear waste site? Can we safely contain buried waste which is radioactive for thousands of years? CHEJ and a coalition of groups commissioned an independent study to address these and other questions at the West Valley nuclear waste site in New York State. The study took a full cost accounting (FCA) approach, a precautionary tool that considers all the costs of a hazardous problem, including long-term health and environmental costs often ignored by industry and the marketplace.

The NY State Legislature funded the study which was conducted by economists and scientists from Synapse Energy Economics, Tufts University, State University of NY at Fredonia and Radioactive Waste Management Associates. *The Real Costs of Cleaning Up Nuclear Waste: A Full Cost Accounting of Cleanup Options for the West Valley Nuclear Waste Site* compared the costs of digging up and storing the excavated waste versus leaving the waste buried on-site for 1,000 years.

The West Valley site is located south of Buffalo, NY. For six years in the 1960's, Nuclear Fuel Services (NFS) reprocessed nuclear fuels in the country's only commercial facility of this type. After problems arose, NFS abandoned the site and the government took responsibility for the cleanup. The site holds approximately 2 million tons of radioactive waste and dirt, much of which will remain radioactive for tens of thousands of years, some for millions of years. The Department of Energy (DOE) favors leaving the buried waste on-site claiming it is cost-effective. The FCA study shows that their position is based on a false premise.

The FCA study compared the cost of the two primary cleanup options: 1) Waste Excavation which involves digging up the waste and disposing of it off-site; and 2) Buried Waste which

leaves the wastes buried on-site. The study had the following findings.

✦ **Digging up the waste would be less expensive than leaving the buried waste on-site.** Over 1,000 years, waste excavation presents the least risk to a large population and the lowest economic and social cost. Waste excavation costs \$9.9 billion while the buried waste approach costs \$13 billion—and \$27 billion if just one catastrophic radioactive release occurs.

✦ **Waste excavation poses significantly lower risks to future generations.** Leaving buried waste on-site poses a risk to people for thousands of years. In contrast, waste excavation leaves behind a contamination-free site after an estimated 73 years.

✦ **Leaving buried waste on-site is highly expensive and does not protect the public health as erosion controls can fail and release dangerous radionuclides.** The safest and most economically viable option is to fully excavate the waste buried at West Valley. The study recommended that DOE explore retrievable, monitored, above-ground waste storage at a more stable site and noted that the full cost of site remediation should be factored into decisions being made for new reprocessing and nuclear power plants.

Economists found that DOE's cleanup options analysis was unrealistic as the agency used a 200 year time period that was far too short to reflect real costs, and did not adequately address realistic risks. This new study extended the analysis to 1,000 years, a first step in setting a period more in line with the decay times for high-risk radioactive waste—yet not nearly long enough for the most dangerous radionuclides. This analysis found that the maintenance costs over this period was so high that leaving the waste buried on-site would end up costing nearly 25% more than excavating and removing it.

Precautionary Approach

Because the costs of leaving wastes buried on-site can not be fully known in advance, the experts' recommendations were by necessity based on a precautionary model of preventing harm, especially when there is credible evidence that harm is likely to occur. Leaving the waste buried for 1,000 years is likely to result in a release that would have expensive and disastrous consequences. Therefore, it is prudent to excavate and clean up the waste while we still know what is in the ground, how to handle it, and have continuous government oversight.

Cancer Deaths and Drinking Water Costs

In its current condition, the site poses a significant danger to people who live along nearby creeks, and to people who live in Buffalo and near Lakes Erie and Ontario due to the risk of a radionuclide leak polluting water supplies. The water replacement costs if there were just one radioactive release are \$272 million dollars in the first year, and then decline to \$27.5 million annually to maintain water treatment plants. The study

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ACTION LINE

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

Alaska

A group of students in Elim protested Governor Sarah Palin's push for uranium mining during the middle of the Presidential campaign. The organization, **Elim Students Against Uranium** (K-12), spoke out against the fact that Gov. Palin and the state approved a lease proposal to explore for uranium in an area without the knowledge, consent or approval of the citizens of Western Alaska. Since learning about the mining proposal, the students have researched the effects of uranium mining, created educational posters, organized a community meeting to share their findings and build support, and even organized a protest when the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race traveled through their town.



photo from www.dkef.org

Villager protests uranium mining as Iditarod race passes through Elim.

California

The recent discovery of trichlorophenol (TCP) in groundwater near the footprint of a new Target store being built next to the Frontier Fertilizer Superfund site in Davis has raised questions about the wisdom of the plan. The **Frontier Fertilizer Superfund Oversight Group** organized by a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) from the EPA is pushing the agency to do additional testing for TCP and to reconsider the adequacy of the cement slab foundation of the Target building to protect against vapor intrusion of TCP. EPA is resisting any further testing, but the residents are continuing to push the agency.

Congratulations to **Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice** and to **Pajaro Valley**

Coalition for Environmental Justice in Santa Cruz and **La Raza Network of Sacramento** who fought and defeated proposals to build gasification/plasma incinerators in their communities (see feature article on incinerators). Greenaction provided organizing support to both efforts.

Colorado

A group of neighbors in **Berthoud** are organizing to get further testing after petroleum chemicals were found buried near their homes. It seems that buried petroleum based products were knowingly dumped on land that has now been developed into a subdivision. Residents have found volatile chemicals in the air inside some homes. The residents are planning to form a group to address the contamination. CHEJ is providing organizing and technical assistance.

Delaware

In mid-November, **Global Community Monitor** (GCM) released a preliminary study of dust samples collected by volunteers using air monitors near Claymont Steel that showed excessive lead and manganese is settling on cars, windows and porches. GCM presented the information to a crowd of 75 people, including the plant manager, gathered at Claymont Elementary School. Eight of the 37 samples collected contained levels of manganese that exceeded EPA standards; four contained lead levels that exceeded EPA standards. Residents who live within a mile of the mill collected most of the samples. Levels of the particulates were higher when the wind was blowing toward their homes. Before being sworn in as Vice-President, Senator Joseph Biden sent a letter to the EPA asking them to investigate these pollution concerns.

Florida

Residents in **Kenansville** celebrated when they heard that a developer had withdrawn his application to construct a Solar Sludge Dryer to treat municipal waste water sludge. Neighbors felt the technology was not safe enough to protect the health of those living near the facility. The group focused its efforts on the county commissioners who had to approve the project. CHEJ provided organizing help and a technical review of the proposed operation. The owner withdrew the application after learning the

County Commission was not going to approve their request due to the efforts of the citizens.

Congratulations to residents in **Tallahassee** who successfully opposed the construction of a biomass incinerator at Florida State University. Biomass Gas & Electric abandoned its plan to build the incinerator at the school site several days before a public meeting to address concerns raised by the public including the location of the plant in a residential neighborhood. Opponents were worried about health effects from air emissions, odors, and noise. The county Health Advisory Board supported these concerns by voting unanimously to recommend against building the plant in a residential neighborhood. Activists pledged to oppose BG&E if they consider going elsewhere in the state.

Georgia

Residents in **Athens-Clarke** continue to oppose the expansion of the county's landfill despite support from county commissioners who feel they have no choice but to approve the expansion. Residents were especially angry when consultants hired by the county to evaluate whether the site was suitable for a landfill concluded at a public hearing in January that the site was suitable even though they have not completed their review and made it available to the public. The controversial expansion has polarized segments of the community, many of whom feel that the existing landfill has already contaminated local groundwater. The commissioners argue that without the landfill expansion, they will run out of disposal space in 2 to 4 years. Residents vow not to give up.

Indiana

Hoosiers for a Safe Environment celebrated last January when the Mayor of Anderson announced to a standing room only crowd of almost 1,000 concerned residents that he would not support the proposed plasma arc waste treatment plant targeted for the city's south side. The decision overrode the approval given to the project by the city's Board of Zoning Appeals and reversed the city's position on the incinerator much to the delight of the crowd many of whom had opposed the proposed plant since last summer. The city was swayed not only by the community's opposition but by the lack of a track record by the company. Congratulations! (see Incineration feature).

Maryland

Hundreds packed a public hearing before the **Frederick** Board of County Commissioners to plead their case against a proposal by Wheelabrator Technologies to build a garbage incinerator. More than 50 speakers spent their allotted 5 minutes

ACTION LINE

Need organizing help?

Visit www.chej.org/assistance
or call 703-237-2249 x17.

telling the commissioners why they should oppose the incinerator. To prevent the crowd from getting out of hand, the Commission President required that the residents wave their hands in the air rather than applaud or whoop in support. Residents are weary but hopeful that they can still stop the plan by convincing the commissioners to vote against the proposal.

Michigan

Residents in the **Upper Peninsula** are organizing to stop a uranium mining project by Rio Tinto. Four groups including a Native American group have joined forces to challenge the legality of the permitting process. CHEJ is providing organizing assistance to help strengthen the coalition.

The Lone Tree Council in Bay City, along with several national environmental organizations, charged the US EPA with secretly meeting with Dow Chemical to cut a deal to clean up the largest dioxin contaminated site in the country. More than 50 miles of river downstream from Dow's global headquarters are contaminated with dioxins from Dow's discharges. EPA had rejected Dow's proposed cleanup plan more than a year ago, but a last minute deal by the Bush administration reopened the negotiations. Dow is now hoping to convince EPA to accept its cleanup plan under the little-used Superfund Alternatives Sites (SAS) program that does not include many public input provisions typical of normal Superfund site cleanups. Lone Tree Council activists are concerned that a decision made behind closed doors would not be made with the best interests of the public or the Great Lakes in mind.

New Jersey

The **Edison Wetlands Association** (EWA) held a protest in December to bring attention to contamination leaking from the Akzo Nobel/Basell industrial site in Edison. EWA is concerned that chemicals from the site are leaking into the Raritan River. Testing done by the group found several carcinogens including benzene at levels 860 times state standards. The group plans to continue its protests until the state takes action to stop the pollution.

The Fort Monmouth Earth Renaissance Peace Alliance (FMERPA) is concerned that the US Army may not be doing enough to clean up several contaminated areas as part of the Army's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. Forty-three sites on military property were identified as potential contaminated sites and 21 of these sites were targeted for sampling to determine the extent of contamination on these sites.



Executive Director of the Edison Wetlands Association, Robert Spiegel, leads demonstration outside Basell USA chemical company in Edison.

A review of the site assessments by CHEJ science staff identified vapor intrusion from contaminated groundwater as a major issue to address. FMERPA is following up on this recommendation.

New York

The Clean Air Coalition of WNY is gaining momentum in their campaign against Tonawanda Coke. The group convinced both the County Legislature and Town of Tonawanda to pass resolutions calling on Tonawanda Coke to reduce their benzene emissions. The County resolution states, "The County of Erie encourages Tonawanda Coke and other area manufacturers to develop and implement toxic-use-reduction plans and install state-of-the-art air pollution control equipment to significantly reduce the use and release of benzene and other hazardous chemicals into the community." The resolutions came after the NYS DEC found benzene levels in the ambient air almost 100 times above state guidelines.

Friends and Residents of the Gowanus Canal is organizing to stop the Toll Brothers from building condominiums on a toxic Brownfield site in Brooklyn. CHEJ is providing organizing support to help the group develop a clear strategy to address this issue.

Residents in the **Greenpoint** section of Brooklyn are organizing to address groundwater contamination with trichloroethylene (TCE) and perchloroethylene (PCE) in soil beneath an abandoned dry cleaning business. Vapors evaporating from the water are moving upwards into buildings built on top through a process called "vapor intrusion" (see EBY Summer 2007). These TCE/PCE vapors have contaminated many homes built in the area. In December the state agreed to test the air in 450 homes to evaluate the extent to the problem which has many residents quite worried. CHEJ is working with local activists.

The **Geneva Area Earth Alliance** (GAEA) is fighting a \$100 million gasification proposal by

Casella Waste Management in Geneva. The group is concerned about the viability of the technology, the company's stability, and the cost of the project. GAEA is also concerned that the company is trying to push the project through before county officials can fully analyze it. CHEJ is providing organizing support.

North Carolina

Two community "visioning" meetings were held in January hosted by local chapters of the **Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League** and **CHEJ**. These meetings focused on "green economic" ideas that the community could move forward on rather than accepting a mega dump or other polluting facility that degrade the environment. One meeting, held in Duplin County, was the group's second visioning meeting. At the first meeting, the group identified three major ideas: setting up a recycling center; establishing farmer's markets along a highway heavily used by beach goers; and considering several green industries that involve solar or bio-based products. The group is making great progress. The recycling center is moving forward. The approval to rezone the land chosen for the center was granted the day of the meeting. The center will accept white goods first and build from there. The group also set up a committee called FIG to explore how to establish roadside farmer's markets and is hoping to have a plan in place by this coming spring. The idea of bringing in a solar/bio based business to the county was discussed and remains a viable idea that the group continues to explore. The second meeting was held in Alamance County where the group had its first conversation about what their vision for the county would look like. Here leaders developed a list of ideas that will be explored over the next few months. This is very exciting work. As several leaders expressed, "it's fun to be for something."

Citizens for a Safe Environment of Eastern NC has been fighting an incinerator proposal by Fiberwatt in Sampson County for several years. The plant would burn a mixture of chicken poop and sawdust (chicken litter) to create energy. "It might be Green but it sure isn't Clean" is how local citizens describe the proposal. This rural farming community, which produces Mt Olive Pickles and other agricultural products, is baffled by why the county invited Fiberwatt into an area that relies heavily on local farming as its economic base. The incinerator would release dioxins, arsenic and other toxic chemicals that would threaten hogs, chickens, cows and vegetables grown locally. The community is determined to stop the facility from being built and is planning a major rally next month and a full page ad in the local paper.

photo by Aaron Houston

ACTION LINE

Ohio

Citizens Against Pollution (CAP) is continuing its efforts to close the Brown County landfill in Georgetown. CAP has been fighting a proposed expansion that would have brought the edge of the landfill very close to a school and to homes. The group organized and pressured the OH EPA to deny the expansion. The agency did approve the expansion but scaled back the original proposal because of the issues raised by the residents. CHEJ is working with CAP and local organizers to develop a strategy to close the landfill.

Ohioans for Health, Environment & Justice (OHEJ) and other concerned citizens crashed a series of meetings held across the state this past summer by the Ohio Regulatory Reform Task Force. The purpose of the meetings was to solicit a deregulation wish-list from business and industry leaders. OHEJ felt that the Task Force also needed to hear from the public about the merits of deregulation. Although the Task Force refused to include the testimony offered by OHEJ and other groups and individuals, those who testified felt empowered by taking steps to have their voices added to a public dialogue that could pose potential harm to the public. When Task Force leaders were confronted about the people's voices being excluded from the final document, they implied that the hearings were intended to find ways to improve corporate profitability, not to protect public health.

Oklahoma

This is one of the craziest situations we've heard about in some time. The local housing authority in **Picher** thought they had found a great way to solve their housing shortage – move families with small children into empty housing abandoned because of proximity to the contaminated Tar Creek Superfund site. More than \$60 million has been spent by the federal government since 2005 to buy out the homes of all the residents and businesses in the area because of high levels of lead contamination and other heavy metals left after decades of lead and zinc mining at one of the largest Superfund sites in the nation. The director of the local housing authority felt it was safe to bring the families in so long as they “practice proper safety tips such as thorough hand washing to remove any lead residues they might pick up in the area.” Hopefully, the housing authority will come to its senses before allowing families with small children to move into these contaminated homes.

Pennsylvania

The **Norry Neighbors** are trying to get the EPA to conduct more testing at an old landfill that was turned into a park along the western branch of the Susquehanna River in Northumberland. Recent testing identified several areas with high levels of

contamination, especially along the banks of the river. Residents are concerned that children swim in this area and that the park is used for a youth baseball league all summer long. The Norry Neighbors want the park shut down until the testing has been completed and the landfill cleaned up.

Tennessee

Mountain Justice is providing organizing support to residents impacted by an enormous coal ash spill in Harriman. In December, a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) retaining pond holding over 1 billion gallons of coal ash (the material left after the coal is burned) collapsed releasing the toxic waste onto farm land and into the water ways below the pond. State legislators want to use some of the federal stimulus money to clean up the mess. CHEJ has been working with Mountain Justice activists in support of the local people.

Texas

A proposal to expand a Republic Services landfill in **Northeast Travis County** near Austin is being opposed by neighbors who took their concerns to an administrative law judge. Neighbors say the landfill is already too big and that the expansion would make it taller than Mt. Bonnell, a popular tourist area that offers views of downtown Austin. Republic wants to make the landfill 75 feet taller. Activists say they have been fighting the landfill for about eight years, and they have had enough. CHEJ is providing organizing assistance in support of the group's efforts.

Residents in **San Antonio** are organizing to address dioxin exposures resulting from cleanup of a contaminated site being targeted for development by the San Antonio Housing Authority. SAHA is excavating and removing contaminated coal ash buried on the site years ago to build 252 income-sensitive apartment units on the lot. The ash is contaminated with dioxins, polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons and heavy metals. Residents are concerned that winds are spreading the contaminated dust throughout a residential neighborhood located adjacent to the site. CHEJ is working with local residents to address the situation.

A landmark bio-monitoring study by researchers and **Citizens for Environmental Justice** found elevated levels of chemicals in the bodies of residents who live in the Hillcrest neighborhood of Corpus Christi near several oil refineries. The study found volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) in both blood and urine samples. Some residents had benzene levels 14 times higher than levels found in gas station attendants in Mexico and 280 times



photo by Greg Schwartz

San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) digging up coal ash at a site that was shut down for environmental problems 10 years earlier.

those in the general population. Hillcrest residents, most of whom are people of color and low-income, reside adjacent to two major oil refineries and tank farms as a result of past racial zoning by the city of Corpus Christi.

Virginia

Local activists in **Blacksburg** are concerned about the high rates of death and illnesses near the Radford Army Ammunition Plant. They are concerned that their drinking water may be contaminated by chemicals coming from the Radford facility. CHEJ is helping the residents form a group and get organized.

Wisconsin

Residents in **Kenosha** continue to pressure the state and the city's school board to address contamination on the recently constructed Brass Community Elementary School built on a Brownfield site. Part of the original contaminated industrial site where the school is located is now being developed for private homes and activists are worried that dust and pollutants generated by the continued construction are affecting the children attending the school. Activists have captured violations on film and have sent the photos to the state Department of Health in hopes that the state will respond to protect the children at the school. ♦

SUPPORT CHEJ'S IMPORTANT WORK!

To make a donation, contact
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Child Proofing Our Communities

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

February 13 National Day of Action on Green Cleaning in Schools

This past February, CHEJ's Green Flag Schools Program hosted the first of its kind National Day of Action on Green Cleaning in Schools. Students, teachers, administrators and parents held events to help raise awareness of the importance of switching to certified green cleaning products and practices. Take a look at CHEJ's Flickr page to view pictures from all the events! www.flickr.com/photos/chej.

USAToday Series on Air Pollution and Schools

Did you know there is no federal law banning the building of a school on or near a contaminated site? Individual states aren't doing much better, as there are few laws at the state level to compensate for this lack of leadership by our federal government. Our children deserve better.

In December 2008, *USAToday* released a series of three articles that exposed these disturbing findings. The articles highlighted the lack of laws at the federal and state levels and the growing trend to build schools near pollution sources. The authors ranked over 127,000 schools nationwide and showed that we are putting our children in danger right where they need the most protection – where they learn and play for over seven hours a day for the majority of the year.

In 2005, CHEJ along with several organizations released a report entitled, "Building Safe Schools: Invisible Threats, Visible Actions." This report included a comprehensive model for school siting legislation and a 50 state survey that summarized existing siting laws in each state. This

report was used to help get a Congressional mandate as part of the Energy Independence and Security Act in 2007. This mandate requires EPA to develop school siting guidelines by June 2009. Given that EPA has dragged its feet for over twelve months now, it is unlikely they will meet this deadline.

As concerned community members, there are several things you can do to raise awareness on this important issue and make sure that the EPA develops the strongest and most comprehensive guidelines possible:

- ✓ Call your state legislators and ask him/her to sponsor a school siting bill this legislative session.
- ✓ Attend your local school board meetings and ask them to pass a policy that no schools will be built on or near contaminated areas in your school district.
- ✓ Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper explaining why you are concerned about this issue.
- ✓ Attend the next meeting of your local PTA/PTO and discuss ways your community can support passing a state bill that will prevent irresponsible school siting.
- ✓ Call the EPA Administrator (202-564-4700) and express how important the federal guidelines are to your community and ask for them to be strong, comprehensive, and released on time.

These are just a few ways to get you started. Feel free to get creative and discuss others ways to raise awareness with your friends, family, and neighbors. To find out how to get involved and learn how your school ranked in the *USAToday* study, check out www.childproofing.org/school_siting_take_action_now.htm.

Organizing to Win Zero Waste Solutions

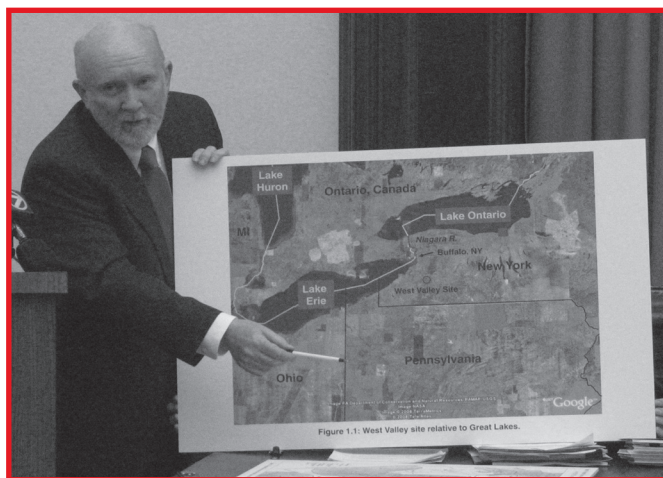
These huge victories could not have been achieved without the hard work and dedication of community members banding together and forming strong grassroots neighborhood organizations from the bottom-up. Key tactics and strategies they've employed include:

- Door-to-door community outreach to recruit neighbors and build their base;
- Developing educational leaflets about the problems of incineration;
- Putting direct pressure on local elected officials – pushing them to oppose incineration;
- Framing their campaigns around health impacts and global warming;
- Highlighting how incinerators could decrease property values;
- Creating innovative websites such as <http://www.hseindiana.com> with easy-to-digest information on the problems of incinerators and simple ways folks can get involved;
- Passing out yard signs so neighbors can show their support;
- Getting the media to cover their issues every step of the way;
- Debunking the myths that these facilities release “zero emissions” and pointing out that facilities have little-to-no real-world testing data to back up such claims; and
- Highlighting the financial and technical problems experienced by similar technologies and businesses around the world.

Community members aren't just saying “not in my backyard” but instead are demanding innovative “zero waste” solutions that create green jobs, save natural resources, and conserve energy. Community members fighting these Incinerators in Disguise as well as landfills are working with the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) to fight incinerators and promote zero waste all around the world. Here in the U.S., in February, scores of activists gathered in Detroit, for the Zero Waste Communities Conference – a gathering to strengthen the movement for just and sustainable alternatives to waste incinerators and landfills – sponsored by GAIA and co-sponsored by CHEJ and many other groups. Many of these activists are connected together through a national incinerators e-mail list-serv.

If your community is faced with a proposed plasma arc, pyrolysis, gasification, biomass, waste-to-energy or other incinerators in disguise – organize your community! We've compiled some key resources that will help you get organized and learn more about the dangers of incinerators in disguise. Access these resources at www.chej.org/incinerators-in-disguise. ♦

found that leaving buried waste on-site is a public health threat to future generations. In one scenario, if just 1% of the radioactivity leaked from the site, over 800,000 Lake Erie water users would be exposed to substantial radiation. In another scenario, if just 1% of the radioactivity leaked, over 400,000 people drinking Lake Erie water from one water treatment plant would be exposed to radiation resulting in up to 334 cancer deaths.



Geology Professor Mike Wilson of SUNY Fredonia reveals the severe erosion problems at the West Valley site.

Dangerous and Powerful Erosion

For the buried waste option, the study found a probable risk of losing institutional site controls. First, there is the improbability of thousand-year continuity in government and language. Of the governments that exist today, only Iceland has an unbroken lineage spanning 1,000 years. While something called the English language has existed for centuries, it changes fast enough so that modern readers cannot understand words written a thousand years ago. The authors concluded there is no reason to assume that DOE could adequately address safety and communication issues with on-site buried waste over a 1,000 year period.

There is also the fundamental problem of erosion which is a powerful and fast moving force as the site sits on a geologically young landscape. Unless erosion controls are rigorously maintained, the study predicted disposal areas could be breached in less than 1,000 years and as quickly as 150 years. This breach could result in a catastrophic failure, leaking radioactive wastewater into Lake Erie.

The study concluded that burial of nuclear waste over the long-term is a flawed approach both because of the scientific uncertainty in predicting geological events and because waste burial compromises the rights of future generations to equal treatment and free, informed consent. CHEJ, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Citizens' Environmental Coalition and the Coalition on West Valley coordinated the study. As far as we know, this is the first time a full cost accounting approach was applied to a site cleanup. To view the report and fact sheets, visit www.besafenet.com. ♦

With Special Thanks

CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations to support our work between November 1, 2008 and January 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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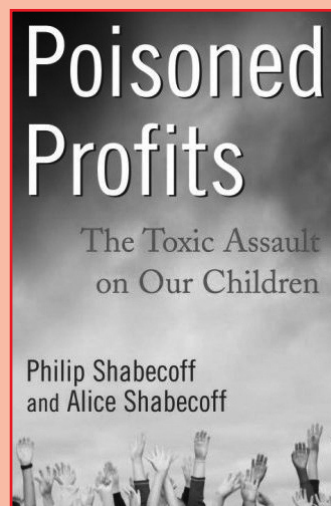
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Great New Resource: Poisoned Profits - The Toxic Assault on Our Children

Why is one out of three American children sick with autism, ADHD, asthma, birth defects, cancer and other chronic illnesses? Why is infertility on the rise and the ratio of male babies dwindling? Read *Poisoned Profits: The Toxic Assault on Our Children*, by veteran NY Times environmental journalist Philip Shabecoff and his wife Alice Shabecoff.

Like a crime story, the authors show the victims through riveting stories that connect the exponential increase of toxic chemicals in our everyday lives to this epidemic among the children of baby boomers, and point to polluting corporations as the perpetrators, aided by scientists-for-hire and a disinterested government.

This uplifting book offers solutions including policy changes needed to convince manufacturers that they can avoid toxic chemicals and still make profits, and provides guidance to protect our children and bring about these changes. Powerful and eminently readable, POISONED PROFITS is a wake up call that is bound to inspire talk and force change. To learn more, go to www.poisonedprofits.com.



HELP IS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY!

What's the outlook for your group and campaign in 2009? Worried about how the economy will impact the progress of your work? What if you could reach out to new people and gather the momentum and funding you need to win? **Hurry and join now for our next training call on April 21st!**

CHEJ is offering an exciting new benefit in 2009, *exclusively* for groups and individuals that join us at the \$100 level or higher. Get all the answers you need and more when you participate in five **leadership training calls** on long-term planning, working in coalition, community health surveys and more with CHEJ staff and other experts.



Check out **additional** member benefits at <http://www.chej.org/members.htm>.



*To join, send a check for \$100, or enroll in our **monthly giving program** for just \$9 per month, and make automatic contributions from a checking account or credit card. Or, four of your group members can chip in \$25 each to make the donation! You can also donate online now at www.chej.org/donate.htm or contact Jo A Kim at **703-237-2249 x 27** or jkim@chej.org*

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