

# EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

Vol. 24 No. 2 Summer 2006



## RAISING THE BAR

THE U.S. EPA SETS LANDMARK CLEANUP STANDARD FOR DIOXIN

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

PLASTICS MADE FROM PLANTS INSTEAD OF TOXIC CHEMICALS

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THE JOURNAL OF THE GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Center for Health, Environment and Justice

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### On the Cover:

Louise Blanks of East Arcadia, NC joins the protest in Sandyfield opposing a plan for five new landfills in the state.  
*See Action Line, p. 7 for more.*

photo by David Smith, *Fayetteville Observer*

# DAMU SMITH

## 1952-2006

The movement has lost a genuine leader, Damu Smith. "This is a monumental loss for so many movements and organizations. He touched the lives of so many, and will no doubt continue to inspire even more," said John Passacantando, Greenpeace's Director. As I thought about John's words, I realized how right he was, but how inadequate the word "monumental" sounds having known Damu. I realized that there is no word in our language that truly expresses the loss for the many movements in which Damu played a role.

For more than thirty years, Damu's activism has included vigilance in the fight against apartheid in South Africa and efforts to expose gun violence, police brutality and government injustice. He worked to effect peace and a freeze on nuclear weapons as Associate Director of the Washington office of the American Friends Service Committee, and advocated for environmental justice as a national toxics campaigner.

CHEJ knew him best around his work on toxics. Damu became the first coordinator for environmental justice for the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice, and in that capacity experienced first hand how chemical dumping and other environmentally toxic corporate practices impact the health and lives of poor and African American communities. He also organized Toxic Tours in the South for Greenpeace, taking celebrities such as Alice Walker, Haki Madhubuti and others to an area in Louisiana known as "Cancer Alley." Damu was instrumental in helping grassroots organizations confront Shell Oil for its dumping practices and force a proposed PVC plant out of Convent, Louisiana.

Damu serves as a model for others, especially young adults. At the age of 17, he made a commitment to himself, that his life's work would be around fighting for justice. My favorite story about Damu occurred years ago in New Orleans. We were in a strategy meeting working to relocate families living on a Superfund site. Damu brought three young men with him to the meeting. Afterwards, we went outside and I overheard him telling the young men, "that was a power meeting ... we just put in place a plan that will change this injustice in New Orleans and you were part of it ... How do you feel? Are you ready to do more? See ... we can have and take power if we work together." I quietly chuckled, thinking, go on, Damu, keep telling them they can change the world – because that's the only way it's going to happen – getting more and more young people involved.

We will miss Damu's passion and his vision for change.

For a healthy environment,  
Lois Maire Gibbs

## ABOUT CHEJ

The Center for Health, Environment and Justice is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization that provides organizing and technical assistance to grassroots community organizations nationwide. The Center was founded in 1981 by Lois Gibbs, who together with her neighbors won the relocation of more than 900 families from their neighborhood after it was contaminated by chemicals leaking from the Love Canal landfill in Niagara Falls, NY.

The Center's mission is to help people build democratic, community-based organizations to address public health and environmental threats. We believe strongly that the best way to solve local problems is from the bottom up, when the people directly affected speak for themselves and have a meaningful role, as equals, in any and all decisions that affect their lives, homes and family. Our focus and resources are devoted to helping local community based organizations form, grow, and become effective in achieving their goals.

BY KIRA NAOMI VENTURA

## RAISING THE BAR

### 30 PPT CLEANUP STANDARD SET FOR DIOXIN

Cleaning up dioxin contamination took a major turn for the better when the USEPA set a “contaminated soil remediation cleanup goal” of 30 parts per trillion (ppt) at the Escambia Wood Treating Company (ETC) Superfund site in Pensacola, Florida. This is the best cleanup standard for dioxin levels in soil anywhere in the country and establishes a major precedent. Now communities across the United States can point to this decision and use this value as the gold standard for cleaning up dioxin contaminated soil.

#### Impacting Communities Nationwide

This decision comes at a critical time for many communities that are struggling to find a cleanup standard for dioxin contaminated soil. In Midland, MI, residents have been fighting with Dow Chemical to clean up residential property contaminated with dioxin caused by the flooding of the Tittabawassee River; in Providence, RI, residents have been trying to determine how much cleanup is needed at an old industrial site targeted for a new school; and in Port Angeles, WA, the state is arguing with a paper mill company over how much dioxin to cleanup at their site. These and other communities are struggling because, after more than 15 years of analysis and review, the federal EPA has yet to finalize their health assessment report on dioxin. This report is currently being reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences which is due to release its findings this summer. Even then, however, the report is not likely to be finalized. The Bush administration has no interest in seeing this report completed, as it could prompt regulators to develop stricter dioxin cleanup standards.

Consequently, states are on their own to define an appropriate cleanup level for dioxin in soil. In Michigan, the standard is 90 ppt, but Dow insists this number is too low and is arguing that the state use the federal EPA’s “action level” value of 1,000 ppt that was used in 1980 to move residents at Times Beach, Missouri. Now that the EPA has set a precedent and defined 30 ppt as the cleanup goal for the ETC site in Pensacola, this more accurate value, based on current toxicological data and risk evaluation, can be cited in arguing that 30 ppt be used at other sites.

#### Creating Mt. Dioxin

Achieving this cleanup goal at the Escambia site did not come easily. The company operated in the heart of Pensacola for more than 40 years, closing its doors in 1982 and leaving in its wake unlabeled chemical drums and leaching containment ponds that exposed those living nearby to dioxin and other contaminants. Yet it wasn’t until 1991 that EPA stepped in to address this contamination. The agency’s first act was an “emergency removal action” that entailed moving 225,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil into one enormous, noxious pile. While doing this, EPA workers wore shiny, moonsuit-esque protective garb, but few measures were taken to safeguard the health of nearby families. When money for the project ran out in 1992, the on-site heap was covered with the large scale equivalent of plastic wrap and abandoned.

Dubbed “Mount Dioxin” by locals for its sheer size, the 26-acre Superfund mountain contains frighteningly high levels of one of the most hazardous substances known to science. Dioxin levels as high as 1,009 parts per billion (ppb), more than one thousand times the EPA “action level” used to evacuate families in Times Beach, were found on site.

It wasn’t long before cases of cancer, respiratory disease, organ dysfunction, and other ailments began cropping up among the 925 residents within a quarter mile of the site. To protect their neighborhood from this ominous threat, community members formed the group Citizens Against Toxic Exposure (CATE) and began fighting for a proper cleanup.



*Aerial view of Mount Dioxin in Pensacola, Florida.*

#### CATE Wins Relocation

For over thirteen years, CHEJ has helped CATE steadily approach this goal. With our support, CATE’s efforts yielded nearly 100 written comments to EPA demanding relocation for the residents closest to the site. When EPA announced in 1996 that it would relocate a mere third of those who needed it most, CHEJ staffers, including Lois Gibbs, joined CATE in Pensacola to garner local opposition. Battling the suffocating August heat, members of CATE went door to door to talk with local citizens. Much to the surprise of the EPA, over 350 citizens crammed into the local church to voice their opposition to the agency’s inadequate plan at a public hearing.

That October, CHEJ designed and raised funds to place a full-page ad in the Florida edition of USA Today, depicting children from the ETC site beside then-President Clinton’s quote that “children should never have to

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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.

## TAKING PRECAUTIONARY ACTION: A ROADMAP FOR SUCCESS

As this issue goes to press, the First National Conference on Precaution, *Taking Precautionary Action*, is getting underway in Baltimore, Maryland. An exciting array of precautionary policies will be featured at this ground-breaking meeting. A key goal of the conference is to develop plans and activities people can take back home to help advocate for precautionary action in their community. If you were unable to attend, you can find these next steps, as well as numerous policy initiatives and other highlights from the meeting at the BE SAFE website.

Among many key presentations will be Joan Reinhardt Reiss from the Breast Cancer Fund, who will describe the first Precautionary Principle Ordinance in the nation, which was passed in San Francisco. Per Rosander of International Chemicals Secretariat in Sweden will explain the European Union's REACH policy that requires complete toxicity information before a chemical is used and the use of safer alternatives for highly toxic chemicals. Diane Takvorian of the

Environmental Health Coalition will outline California's landmark Environmental Justice Action Plan that integrates precautionary approaches, cumulative impacts and improved public participation into state regulatory activities. More than 35 workshops and sessions are planned.

*Pioneer of Precaution* awards will be given in several categories including to community, statewide, and national groups, government, academic, and industry leaders, journalists and publications, and to key individuals who championed the precautionary principal. Read about these awards and find out more about the conference at our website: <http://www.besafenet.com>.

**If you want to work on a precautionary action policy or program in your municipality or state**, contact BE SAFE for resources and assistance at [anne@besafenet.com](mailto:anne@besafenet.com) or call CHEJ's BE SAFE Coordinator Anne Rabe at 518-732-4538.

## WE'RE WINNING! PVC DEMAND DECLINES IN 2005

CHEJ's PVC Campaign is sending ripples throughout the chemical industry, as PVC demand and production is showing signs of slowing. Check out the recent buzz:

- A plastics packaging recycling expert reported at a recent meeting that, **"As much as one-third of PVC currently being used in packaging may be converted by the end of the year."**
- Dow Chemical had this to say in a recent corporate quarterly report, **"Despite solid sales growth in Europe, vinyl chloride monomer volumes also fell year-over-year, reflecting weaker global industry demand for polyvinyl chloride."**
- The American Chemistry Council had this to say about the shift, **"Total PVC demand, inclusive of domestic demand and exports, was 502 million pounds lower in 2005 compared to 2004. . . other PVC markets saw declining demand including siding profiles, wire and cable, film and sheet, and fencing and decking."**

## TOP 5 WAYS TO TAKE ACTION FOR SAFE CONSUMER PRODUCTS

- 1) **Sign Up for the PVC Action Network**  
Get involved by joining the PVC Action Network. You will receive monthly e-mail action alerts and campaign updates (no more than two a month). Log onto [www.besafenet.com/pvc](http://www.besafenet.com/pvc) and click on "sign up" today!
- 2) **Purchase Safe, PVC-Free Products**  
Look for a "3" inside, or a "V" underneath, the recycling symbol to identify PVC packaging. Some PVC products have a distinct odor, such as vinyl shower curtains.
- 3) **Help Build the Campaign and Spread the Word**  
Tell friends and family about PVC's toxic impact on our health and environment. Contact us for PVC flyers to distribute.
- 4) **Organize a Blue Vinyl Screening**  
Hold a public viewing of Blue Vinyl, a humorous documentary that examines PVC's toxic lifecycle. This film won the Excellence in Cinematography Award at the Sundance Film Festival.
- 5) **Pass a Local PVC-Free Purchasing Resolution**  
Get your local church or town to pass a toxic-free purchasing policy to phase out the purchase of PVC products. We have model PVC-free purchasing policies that have been passed from New York City to Seattle, WA.

Contact Mike Schade, PVC Campaign Coordinator, at 212-964-3680 or [mike@besafenet.com](mailto:mike@besafenet.com) to get involved in any of these efforts.

BY MIKE SCHADE, CHEJ PVC CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

### PLASTICS FROM PLANTS INSTEAD OF TOXIC CHEMICALS

Did you know that before the chemical revolution, our society was based on materials made from plants, such as corn, soy and sugar beets? Plants, not oil, used to be the primary raw material used to produce chemicals, paints, construction materials, clothing, and other household materials. In fact, the first plastic ever developed was a “plant based plastic,” a cotton-derived product designed to replace ivory. Henry Ford was a proponent of plant based plastics and he developed a demonstration vehicle in 1941 whose seat covers, dashboard, wheel, and tires were made from plant based materials. Unfortunately, this all changed when the chemical industry hijacked the plastics market and introduced low-cost toxic plastics made from oil.

#### A Positive Shift in the Marketplace

But in recent years, the market has changed dramatically, driven by both the rising price of oil and growing concerns about the health and environmental impacts of plastics. Today, numerous manufacturers are beginning to use or develop plastics made out of renewable materials, such as corn, sugar beets, sugar cane, wheat, rice and sweet potatoes. Plant based plastics (also called bioplastics or biobased plastics) can be produced using several different processes including starch conversion, microbial conversion and genetic modification of plants.

In the U.S., the primary company manufacturing bioplastics is NatureWorks, owned by Cargill. They can produce 300 million pounds a year of a plastic called PLA, or poly lactic acid, that is made from corn grown in Nebraska and Iowa. Starch from the corn is extracted and converted into dextrose (sugar) and then into lactic acid by fermentation. The lactic acid is further refined into pellets that can be made into different end-products. Other companies manufacturing plant based plastics include Dupont, BASF, Eastman, Proctor & Gamble, and Cereplast.

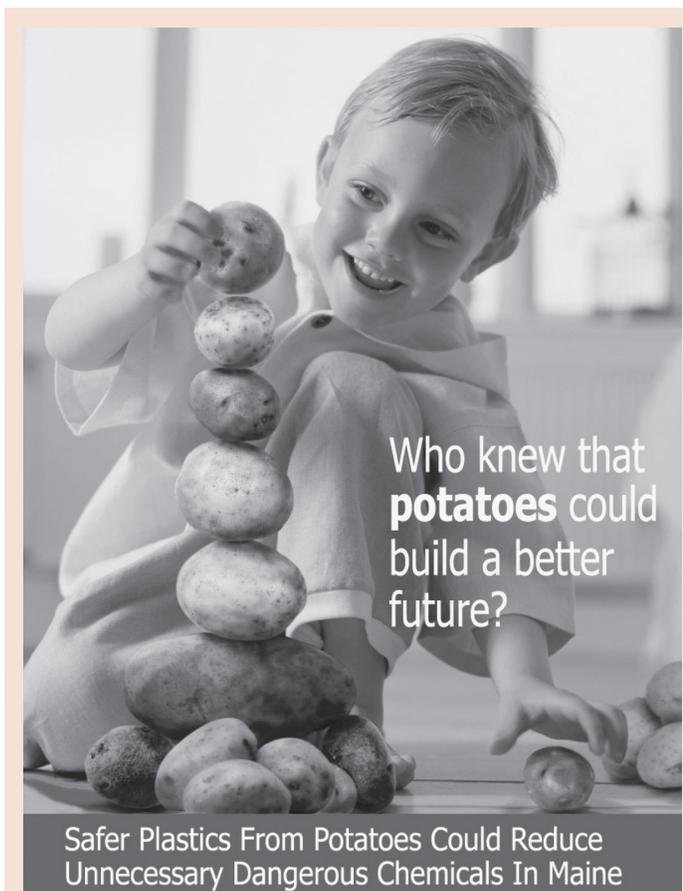
Sales of NatureWorks’ plastics have taken off in the past year, with large manufacturers and retailers increasingly using them in their packaging and products. Companies like Newman’s Own and Wal-Mart are using bioplastics in their packaging and products. The end plastic products, indistinguishable from those derived from petrochemicals, are used to create food packaging, disposable cups and forks, water bottles, auto parts, carpeting, compact discs, bedding materials, and other consumer products (see Box).

In Europe, bioplastics are even more popular. Consumption doubled between 2001 and 2003. An Italian company called Novamont manufactures a plant based plastic called Mater-Bi that is used in many similar applications to PLA, including food packaging and disposable food service items. Production is expanding across the globe where capacity for biobased plastics is around 800 million pounds, and is expected to top 1.3 billion pounds by 2008.

#### Plant Based Plastics – An Alternative to PVC, the Poison Plastic

Plant based plastics provide an alternative to conventional plastics, especially for polyvinyl chloride (PVC), that relies heavily on extremely toxic feedstocks and additives that have devastating impacts on our health and environment through their production, use and disposal. Many of the chemicals used in PVC production are linked to cancer, birth defects, reproductive harm, and a host of other health problems. In contrast, biobased plastics are generated using renewable materials by converting plants such as corn into plastic. The production of bioplastics can help contribute to rural economic development, providing a steady income for farmers. It also uses fewer fossil fuels compared to petrochemical plastics, even after accounting for the fuel needed to plant and harvest the corn or other feedstocks.

*Continued on page 10*



*The Environmental Health Strategy Center placed this compelling full-page ad in a Maine newspaper to help spur the development of biobased plastics in Maine.*

#### EXAMPLES OF PRODUCTS USING PLANT-BASED PLASTICS

Plastic bags - *BioBag*  
Water bottles - *Biota Water*  
Wall carpets - *Interface*  
Car floor mats - *Toyota*  
Deli containers - *Wild Oats Brands*

Electronics packaging and products - *Sony*  
Disposable forks and knives - *Cereplast*  
Produce packaging - *Wal-Mart*  
Cups for smoothies - *Mrs. Fields*

# 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 our 25 years of operation. We welcome and encourage contributions.*

## CALIFORNIA

Over 250 local residents from the San Joaquin Valley communities of Patterson, Grayson and Westley were joined by environmental justice allies from around the state in a rally and march for environmental justice against the Covanta garbage incinerator. The lively march began with a quiet blessing from local community leaders, giving thanks to the contributions of Cesar Chavez to the ongoing struggles for justice everywhere. A diverse array of residents including a large number of youth, along with environmental justice activists marched peacefully with roaring chants of "Si se Puede!" "We Want Clean Air!" "Queremos Justicia!" and "Close Covanta!" The march and rally was organized by the **Grayson Neighborhood Council and Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice**, with strong participation and support from local youth including **Gente de Aztlan network a Solution**. *Contributed by [www.no-burn.org](http://www.no-burn.org).*

After polluting Bay Area communities for more than 77 years, the PG&E Hunters Point power plant, one of California's dirtiest and oldest power plants, officially closed on May 15th. The long fight to shut down this out-of-date plant ends in victory for the Bayview Hunters Point residents of San Francisco, **Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice**, and allies living near the plant. "This is a great victory for Bayview Hunters Point, for our children and the community," said Tessie Ester, representative of the **Huntersview Mothers Committee** who lives across the street from the plant. "Although we will be celebrating this great victory for environmental justice, we must now begin fights against other polluting industries in our community," said Marie Harrison, of Greenaction.

Congratulations to the **Global Community Monitor Resource Center** who opened its new office in the Bernal Heights neighborhood of San Francisco.

## FLORIDA

The **Saufley Field Citizens for Closing the Dump** held a rally at a church in Pensacola that was attended by more than 400 people including invited state and county leaders and government officials. The residents were fuming over uncontrolled fires that have been burning on and off for months at the Saufley Construction and Demolition Landfill. They have repeatedly complained of asthma problems, foul odors, noise and truck traffic to no avail. Debris at the landfill has been piled so high that it towers over the neighboring homes. State tests confirm that the landfill is polluting the local groundwater with benzene, iron, aluminum, sulfate, and manganese. The group wants the landfill shut down and has successfully pressured the Escambia County Commissioners who passed an ordinance to control the landfill operations. Congratulations Saufley residents!

**Environmental Alliance of Northern Florida (EANOF)** in Mayo is getting organized to stop a plan to build a coal pulverizing plant that will burn coal to produce energy and that has targeted their community because of the availability of free water! All of the energy generated would go to homes outside the county. EANOF is concerned about emissions of mercury and other toxics from the proposed plant. Mayo is also the home of several other polluting plants and has decided that "Enough is EANOF!"

## GEORGIA

Holding signs saying "Save Our Children" and "Clean Air 4 Kids," members of the **Glynn Environmental Coalition (GEC)** gathered outside the Hercules Plant in Brunswick on a rainy Saturday to call for an end to "foot-dragging" and for immediate clean up of the 39 toxic sites on its property. CHEJ Executive Director, Lois Gibbs, joined the protest stating, "Our communities and our children deserve better treatment than continuing to be human guinea pigs for chemical experimentation." For the past 18 years, Hercules has avoided cleaning up these sites frustrating and angering local residents. Bill Owens, president of GEC said, "Hercules claims it is a good neighbor, but good neighbors don't act like this...The GEC will learn what we can from Ms. Gibbs and use that knowledge to clean up our town."

## ILLINOIS

Congratulations to **River Rescue** and to others in Peoria who helped orchestrate a year long battle to convince their county commissioners to reject a permit application to expand a hazardous waste landfill. Residents circulated petitions, distributed flyers and barraged the commissioners with phone calls, emails and letters asking them NOT to approve the permit expansion. The group put up hundreds of signs all over the city pleading their case. The landfill has been accepting hazardous waste for more than 30 years and the community decided that they had been the dumping ground for hazardous waste in the Midwest long enough. The group plans to continue its organizing efforts to shut down the landfill.

The **Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)** is unhappy with the USEPA's proposed cleanup plan for the Celotex Superfund site located on the southwest side of Chicago. The Celotex site once made asphalt roofing materials and is heavily contaminated with polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). The cleanup

plan calls for covering the 2 acre site with porous clay and gravel and digging up contaminated soil in a few nearby residential yards and disposing the soil in an "EPA-approved landfill." The key point of disagreement is the agency's use of a one-in-ten-thousand cancer risk level to define the residential areas to be cleaned up. LVEJO wants the agency to use the more traditional and protective risk value of one-in-a-million which will require more cleanup in the residential neighborhood which consists of the largest Mexican American population outside of East LA. LVEJO is hopeful that EPA will reconsider its approach, but is prepared to escalate its organizing pressure if they do not.

## LOUISIANA

The **United Steelworkers (USW)** union and the **Deep South Center for Environmental Justice** are teaming up to form a progressive partnership to rebuild parts of New Orleans that are still in shambles well over 6 months since Hurricane Katrina devastated the city. Through the "Safe Way Back Home" initiative, USW hopes to lend their expertise to help address one of the most pressing problems facing New Orleans: toxic soil. "Others have done a lot of work in the last 30 plus years to divide labor and environmentalists and its been hard work to break down the barriers," said Jim Fredericks, Assistant Director of the Health, Safety and Environment Dept. at USW. "We share more than we differ and we truly need to continue to find our common initiatives."



*Joined by CHEJ's Lois Gibbs, center, members of the Glynn Environmental Coalition of Brunswick, GA demand that Hercules, a former toxaphene plant, clean up its 39 toxic sites.*

## MICHIGAN

"Schools + Landfills = Disaster." That was the sentiment of Northville parents that prevented construction of a \$25.24 million elementary school on land suspected of posing environmental dangers. The proposed site for the school, located near the Onyx Arbor Hills Landfill, was pulled from consideration for fear that voters would vote down funding for the school if the site remained an option. Public officials insisted that the site was safe, despite testing that revealed a leaking underground storage tank less than a mile from the proposed site, and methane gas emissions from nearby landfills. One local resident echoed the concerns of many parents, "If there's no contamination now, that doesn't mean that later some won't push up somewhere. It's important to have a well-suited place for young children."

# ACTION LINE

## MINNESOTA

EPA continues to slap on fresh band-aids to address contamination of Cass Lake homes from the St. Regis Superfund site. In their latest effort, EPA thoroughly cleaned dioxin and arsenic-contaminated dust from about 30 homes in the neighborhood that continue to be plagued with rare cancers and diseases that share “no definitive link” to contamination at St. Regis, according to the Minnesota Department of Health. “Why didn’t they use that money in a better fashion than hire somebody to come in with a moon suit and wipe your walls down, or maybe vacuum out your sofa?” said a member of **Heal Our Mother Earth**, a group that works closely with the Cass Lake families. “I think it’s a waste of money. They should have used it to help those people in a real way.” EPA hopes to finalize the St. Regis cleanup plan (20 years in the making) by the end of the year. In the meantime, the free house cleaning will continue.

## NEW JERSEY

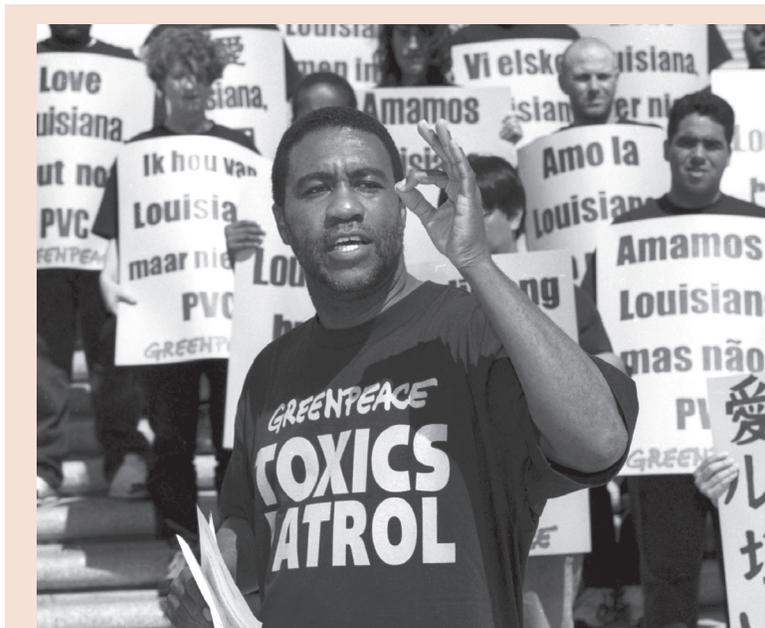
Parents are getting organized in response to alarming health effects from a school built atop a 1920s asphalt plant. Five teachers at an Ocean City school, who all taught in the same kindergarten classroom, have been diagnosed with cancer. Three of them have since died. School officials shut down that wing of the school and relocated students to other classrooms in the building. Indoor air tests taken from the abandoned areas showed little contamination according to the school officials. But CHEJ’s Science Director reviewed the report and found the testing inadequate and recommended additional testing be done including soil testing. Concerned parents are continuing to get organized with support from CHEJ.

Residents in Dover Township are working together to block Frontier Fuel’s proposed junk-to-ethanol plant at the Ocean County Remanufacturing Center. The proposed plant would convert tires and wood chips into ethanol, or ethyl alcohol, which would then be trucked from the site and blended with gasoline to create motor oil. Many residents are concerned about the safety of the plant, which would be the first waste-to-ethanol facility Fuel Frontiers has ever constructed. “I love this area, and I love this town, but you would think we’d have learned our lesson by now when it comes to something like this,” said one concerned resident.

## NEW MEXICO

**Citizen Action New Mexico** (CA NM) is continuing its efforts to win cleanup of contamination at the Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque. A recent report released by the Lab predicts that PCE contamination leaking from the site will reach Albuquerque’s drinking water aquifer as early as 2010. The dump contains an estimated 100,000 cubic feet of radioactive and chemical

waste from nuclear weapons research buried in unlined pits and trenches. Sandia has asked the state to allow it to cover the dump with 3 feet of dirt and monitor the site indefinitely, rather than conduct clean up at the site. CA NM is fighting this band-aid approach.



**DAMU SMITH**  
1952-2006

Damu Smith, an environmental justice and civil rights movements leader (See commentary on page 2).

## NEW YORK

After five long years, the **Hickory Woods Concerned Homeowners Association** is celebrating the City of Buffalo’s decision to finally offer homeowners a concrete, fully funded offer for their homes, which were built by the city on land they knew, or should have known, was contaminated with lead and cancer-causing chemicals. The finishing touches are being put on a \$1.5 million buyout plan of about 60 homes in the South Buffalo neighborhood. “This is what we’ve been waiting for,” said Russell Radder, a longtime Hickory Woods homeowner. “It seems like they finally put something down on paper.” The buyout plan includes funds to cleanup five contaminated lots and improving several neighborhood streets.

Leaders from over 25 environmental groups including **CHEJ**, **Citizen’s Environmental Coalition**, **NYPIRG**, **Mid-Hudson Chapters of the Sierra Club**, and the **Beacon Sloop Club**, signed a letter asking Senator Stephen Saland of Poughkeepsie to sponsor legislation that would require testing of private wells when properties are transferred. “You represent people living in two federal Superfund sites in East Fishkill,” read the letter spearheaded by Debra Hall of **Hopewell Junction Citizens for Clean Water**. “The residents at both these sites drank cancer causing contaminated water for at least 20 or more years without

knowing it.” With a well-testing law set to take effect in Dutchess County this summer, the groups are pushing for legislation to require the testing state-wide.

**Residents Against Mining** (RAM) in Averill Park are getting organized to stop plans to operate a 76-acre industrial hard rock quarry in southeastern Rensselaer County. RAM is concerned about drilling, blasting, rock crushing operations and truck traffic that will start as early as 6 am and how this will affect nearby homes and families, and the quality of life and the environment of the neighborhood. The community is considering a number of strategies including rezoning the property, amending the Land Use and Development Regulations, and denying the zoning permit.

## NORTH CAROLINA

**Scotland County of Tomorrow** (SCT) is gearing up to continue a landfill battle they thought they’d already won. Not long after Waste Management, Inc. initially proposed a new bioreactor landfill, county commissioners voted NOT to consider any new landfill proposals in the county. However, Waste Management changed its tactics and a new “local” group emerged supporting the landfill and forcing the commissioners to reconsider their decision and form a committee charged with assessing landfill proposals. The committee includes members of SCT and the

new group that SCT suspects may be tied to Waste Management – an “astro-turf” group. CHEJ is providing organizing assistance to SCT.

In a related situation, citizens across the state are saying, “No more dumping on our communities!” **Citizens for a Safe and Vibrant Community**, the **NC Environmental Justice Network**, and the **NC Conservation Network** teamed up in May to co-host an Anti-Landfill rally in Sandyfield. The groups are protesting five large proposed landfills – “mega-landfills” – that, if approved, would make NC the fourth largest waste-importing state in the nation. They realize that importing out of state trash is no more than a short-term revenue fix for communities that could be devastated by long-term environmental problems caused by the waste.

## PENNSYLVANIA

**People Protecting Communities** (PPC) in Rush Township celebrated a major win last March when the Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization voted 8-7 to table consideration of the proposed Interstate 80 interchange that Resource Recovery LLC needs to economically operate a proposed 5,800-acre landfill that would straddle the Rush and Snowshoe Townships county line. PPC organized a successful campaign to oppose the “Interchange to Nowhere.” More than 200 people packed

# ACTION LINE

the meeting room, pouring out into the hallway. Speakers submitted petition signatures from 99% of the people who live along the threatened local roads. The decision upheld the county's original decision made in September 2005. CHEJ has provided organizing support to PPC.

The **Pennsylvania Environmental Network** (PEN) has joined the **Chemical Weapons Working Group** (CWWG) and scores of Indiana residents are calling on the U.S. Army and DuPont to use on-site neutralization to detoxify the chemical nerve agent VX in Newport, IN, rather than transport the partially neutralized agent across several states to a Dupont plant in southern New Jersey to complete the treatment which might include incineration. Governors in NJ and DE have already stated their opposition to the transport plan. PEN is firmly backing the CWWG and local Indiana residents who have been arguing that on-site neutralization is the most viable, economical, and reasonable choice for the nerve agent.

## RHODE ISLAND

Another victory, and more progress has been made in the battle to ensure school children are safe from contaminated land in Providence! Coming off a recent win in which precedent-setting cleanup standards were won for two schools that were built on top of a former city dump, Providence residents are now celebrating the agreement to cleanup contaminants at the site of a future high school and YMCA, formerly the site of the Gorham silverware manufacturing company. A series of court orders requires a site-wide cleanup, and community involvement in the ongoing cleanup process at the site. Residents, organizers, scientists, academics and students came together in an unprecedented collaborative to ensure safety at the site, according to Steve Fischbach, a community lawyer representing the site's Reservoir Triangle neighbors.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

Congratulations to the **Pine Island Community Association** (PICA) in Myrtle Beach who successfully defeated a plan to expand the work hours of an operating asphalt plant to 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week. The plant's owners wanted to take on new government contracts necessitating increased hours of operation, but this required a change in zoning which was denied in March. The largely African American community surrounding the plant has been struggling with high rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses as a result of the plant's current operation levels. Led by PICA's efforts, the community immediately rallied to contest the permit proposal by repeatedly calling the Department of Health and Environmental Control and members of the County Council to voice their opposition to the zoning change and by attending Council meetings and writing to local officials. This hard work paid off when the permit application was denied. CHEJ provided scientific and organizing support to PICA.

## TEXAS

Congratulations to residents of rural Kaufman, about 30 miles from Dallas, who successfully organized and convinced the Board of Adjustments (similar to County Commissioners) to order the shut down of the Dallas Crown Slaughter House. The Board declared the plant a public nuisance and ordered it to close its doors by September 30, 2006. The community has complained of foul odors and air emissions for years. Robert Eldridge

who lives next to the facility and who led the fight against it, said he was pleased by the decision. "I'm very happy with the decision they made," he said. "We just want to be able to breathe again."

## UTAH

In a major victory in the decades long struggle to stop high level radioactive waste dumps targeted at Native American lands and communities, a provision in the 2007 Defense Authorization Bill will create the Cedar Mountains Wilderness Area, effectively blocking the preferred train route for delivery of radioactive wastes to the Skull Valley Goshutes Indian Reservation. The wilderness designation was hard won by an unlikely coalition of Utah Republican congressmen, wilderness, environmental, and anti-nuclear groups, and anti-dump Goshutes. The **Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance** spearheaded the non-governmental efforts, aided by national and grassroots environmental allies.

## VIRGINIA

Congratulations to residents of Falls Church who convinced their School Board to pass a "zero emissions" policy requiring school buses to turn off their engines while loading and unloading children and students from the buses. This victory closely followed another triumph for the community when the School Board voted to switch from using conventional diesel oil to biodiesel in April. This decision reflects a growing trend nationwide to use precautionary approaches to protecting children.

## GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE

Six extraordinary grassroots leaders from around the world received the 2006 Goldman Environmental Prize this past April. This annual award recognizes outstanding achievement in protecting the environment and provides a \$150,000 award to the recipients. Lois Gibbs, Executive Director of CHEJ, received the Goldman Environmental prize for North America in 1990, the award's inaugural year. This year's winners were Craig E. Williams (North America), Silas Kpanan Ayoung Siakor (Africa), Yu Xiagang (Asia), Tarcisio Feitosa da Silva (South & Central America), Olya Melen (Europe), and Anne Kajir (Islands & Island Nations). For more information, go to [www.goldmanprize.org](http://www.goldmanprize.org).

## WASHINGTON

Responding to findings from a study examining the lead content of 158 popular, children's lunchboxes conducted by the California-based, **Center for Environmental Health**, state officials in Washington are scrambling to pull the potentially hazardous products off the shelves while further testing is conducted. One of the lunchboxes tested exceeded the Washington state limit for lead in packaging by 560 times. "Evidently, the lead in there exceeds the legal limit, so it's not a question of whether we should" pull the products, said Jan Teague, President of the Washington Retail Association. "It's not safe." "Kids

play with lunchboxes...and it's really just something that should not have lead in it at all," said Ivy Sager-Rosenthal of the state-wide environmental group, **Washington Toxics Coalition**.

## WEST VIRGINIA

Residents in St. Mary's are getting organized to demand cleanup of oil refinery contamination that has plagued the town for years. Groundwater contamination has been so severe that the city has had to change its water supply twice. With many members of the community still relying on well water, local citizens have had enough. Although the refinery is no longer in operation, Quaker State refuses to take responsibility for the cleanup. CHEJ has been providing organizing support and advice as the group held its first official meeting.

**Mountain Justice Summer** took the lead in a series of protests recently by members of the Sludge Safety Project. The protests were organized around the Coal Quality Expo in Huntington, and included a candle light vigil outside the hotel where many expo attendees stayed and a march to the convention center where the Expo was held. The protests were aimed at getting the word out about the continued atrocities committed by the coal industry against the people and communities of West Virginia through sludge operations and mountaintop removal. "An event like this is outreach for future events and for people who need to know about mountaintop removal," said William Dodson, the organizer of the event.

## WISCONSIN

**Madison Environmental Justice Organization** in Madison got hit with one of the strangest proposals we'd heard about in some time. The Madison Gas & Electric (MGE) power plant has come up with a unique solution to its mercury emissions generated by burning coal, its traditional fuel - burn plastics instead. The plant has been burning plastic waste (mostly polyethylene according to the company) from a nearby Oscar Mayer plant for years, but now, they want to dramatically increase the amount of plastic it burns by burning what it calls "plastic derived fuel" (PDF). The problem is, MGE refuses to tell the public what substances are in the PDF or what's in the emissions from burning the PDF. MEJO is asking lots of questions, but not getting any answers which is raising a lot of red flags. MEJO plans to stay on top of the situation and make sure that MGE doesn't trade one evil for another.

## INTERNATIONAL: INDIA

In a victory for survivors of the tragedy at Bhopal, the 21 year old chemical disaster that killed approximately 3,800 and permanently disabled thousands more, India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, conceded to four of the six long standing demands of the **International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal**, paving the way for cleanup of the still contaminated site and the establishment of a national commission for medical and economic rehabilitation in Bhopal. The agreement brings an end to hunger strikes, demonstrations and vigils performed by Bhopal survivors, American supporters, and non-resident Indians in 17 U.S. cities over the past three months. "It's a momentous victory for the indefatigable spirit of the Bhopalis," said Kirankumar Vissa, Director of the Association for India's Development, an organization of Indians living in the U.S. with 40 chapters.



# Child Proofing Our Communities: A CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THREATS TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH

## SUMMER CLEANING?

*CPOC doesn't do windows, but we can help you get yours sparkly clean ...the healthy way.*

Clean schools, daycare centers and homes are a foundation to keeping our children healthy, but the recent antibacterial, fragrant, deodorized craze has created a different understanding of what "clean" means. In most circles, fragrant- and bacteria-free equals clean. But recent studies have found that chemicals in traditional cleaning products, especially fragrances and antibacterial products, can actually do more harm than good.

That's why CHEJ has been working with groups across the country on Green Cleaning programs in schools and day care centers. Simply put, green cleaners are products that are designed to reduce or eliminate hazardous substances in cleaning products. This means not only that hazardous substances are not released into the environment when you're cleaning, but also that you're not contributing to polluting the communities where cleaners are manufactured or disposed of.



It used to be that "green cleaners don't work, are expensive, and nearly impossible to buy," but these days, you can find green cleaners in pretty much any local supermarket, and schools can purchase them from over 37 different companies. Cleaning contractors are popping up left and right offering green cleaning services. And, schools and homes that use green cleaners find that they cost LESS and work as well or better than traditional products.

Get in on the fun and call us today to switch to green cleaners in your school, daycare or home! Your newly clean and green school will also then be eligible to become a Green Flag School for leadership in this area! (see [www.greenflagschools.org](http://www.greenflagschools.org))

If you want to join state-wide team activities, join CPOC as we work with groups in New Jersey, Florida and Virginia on green cleaning policies in schools and daycare centers. For more information, contact CHEJ c/o Stacey Gonzalez at [sgonzalez@chej.org](mailto:sgonzalez@chej.org).

## THE GREEN FLAG PROGRAM: COMING TO A TOWN NEAR YOU



CHEJ's Green Flag program is hitting the road this summer! Take advantage, and help your school get trained to become a Green Flag Team! Green Flag trainers will share the basics on the program which includes a primer on children's environmental health and a description of the four issue areas, and helps participants brainstorm how to get started and make a plan of action.

RSVP to CHEJ c/o Sherman Ludwig at (703) 237-2249 x 17 or at [ludwigsv@chej.org](mailto:ludwigsv@chej.org) to reserve your spot today! Trainings are limited and priority is given to groups with representatives from several schools.

### Child Proofing Our Communities

Center for Health, Environment and Justice ★ P. O. Box 6806 ★ Falls Church, VA 22040-6806  
(703) 237-2249 ★ [childproofing@chej.org](mailto:childproofing@chej.org) ★ [www.childproofing.org](http://www.childproofing.org) ★ [www.greenflagschools.org](http://www.greenflagschools.org)

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Biobased plastics are also compostable, leading to many environmental benefits. These plastics won't break down in regular landfills or in your backyard compost, but they can be effectively composted in a large-scale facility (though not in leaf composting operations), where it will degrade within 45 days. Compare this with conventional plastics that can take over 100 years just to begin the degradation process.

### Despite the Benefits, Significant Challenges Remain

Despite numerous environmental and health benefits of plant based plastics, significant environmental challenges need to be addressed including the impacts of industrial agricultural production, the use of harmful additives, and the impact on recycling infrastructure and markets. Conventional corn production uses significant amounts of toxic pesticides that can adversely impact groundwater and surface water, leads to soil erosion, and impacts soil production and wildlife habitats. In addition, much of the corn made into NatureWorks' plastic is genetically modified. Many environmental organizations are working to address the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in NatureWorks' feedstock.

One concern raised by recyclers is the impact that bioplastics have on the recycling of conventional plastics. Biobased plastics, such as PLA, cannot be mixed with conventional plastic such as PET because the materials are not compatible for recycling purposes. PLA itself can be recycled but at present, the infrastructure to separate and recycle this material does not exist in the U.S. Until these problems are solved, the most sustainable disposal option for biobased plastics is composting. Clear labeling of biobased plastics is critical to ensuring that these materials are properly disposed of in composting facilities.

### Marketplace Trends Favor Biobased Plastics

Despite these concerns, more and more companies recognize the benefits and are switching to biobased plastics as they become increasingly financially competitive in response to rising fuel prices. Wild Oats became the first grocery store in North America to switch to plant based plastics, at first paying 50% more for biobased takeout containers. They took a chance and are now reaping the benefits as their customers are drawn to purchasing compostable containers. Even with rising oil prices, they are paying less today than they would for traditional plastic. Wal-Mart recently

switched to biobased food packaging, involving 114 million produce containers, saving the equivalent of 800,000 gallons of gasoline and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by over 11 million pounds.

### You Can Help Shift the Marketplace

The prospect of a plant based economy, driven by biobased plastics, is incredibly exciting, and offers a promising safer alternative to petrochemical plastics such as PVC. There remain important questions that need to be answered about the environmental and public health impact of these facilities. As we move forward, numerous environmental, health-based, and sustainable agriculture groups including CHEJ are working together to answer these questions and to encourage more companies to switch to plant based plastics, and at the same time, ensure these plastics are truly sustainable. Contact CHEJ if you'd like to get involved in this growing campaign to ensure your family's products are safe for our children, homes, and communities.



### HOW CAN I IDENTIFY BIOBASED PLASTICS?

You can help build support for safer products by supporting companies using biobased plastics. Look for the "NatureWorks" insignia generally found on the underside of PLA packaging such as food cups and the "compostable" logo (see graphic above) signifying a product is compostable. Not all "compostable" products are made from biobased plastics.

### For More Information

Links to an association and key manufacturers producing plant-based plastics.

**The Biodegradable Products Institute** – <http://www.bpinworld.org>

**Cereplast** – <http://www.cereplast.com>

**Metabolix** – <http://www.metabolix.com>

**NatureWorks** – <http://www.natureworkslc.com>

**Novamont** – <http://www.novamont.com> ☼

# GoodSearch

SUPPORT CHEJ... BY SEARCHING THE INTERNET!

Now you can help raise money for CHEJ simply by searching the Internet with **GoodSearch.com!** Powered by Yahoo!, GoodSearch.com is like any other search engine, except that it shares its advertising revenue with charities. **So every time you search the Internet using GoodSearch, CHEJ will receive a donation!**

Just follow these steps:

1. Go to [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) and type "Center for Health, Environment and Justice" into the "I'm supporting" box and click "verify"

2. Start searching!

You can keep track of the money you've raised for CHEJ by clicking on the "amount raised" button under CHEJ's name.

**The more people who use the site, the more money we'll earn, so please spread the word!**

# With Special Thanks

CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations that made critically important donations to support our work between February 3 and May 12, 2006. 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.

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(Gifts of \$100 – \$999)

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Steven C. Hill

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### Matching Gifts

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Verizon

*Continued from page 3*

live near a hazardous waste site.” Two days later, EPA granted relocation to all 358 families—the third largest relocation in Superfund history.

## EPA's Plan to Clean up the Site

In the years following this incredible victory, CATE worked to prevent further excavation while families negotiated buyout prices for their homes. It wasn't until August of 2005 that EPA released a halfhearted cleanup plan. On the bright side, the plan provided for the permanent relocation of an additional 65 families and a dramatic cleanup standard of 30 ppt. However, the proposal also included the on-site burial of 567,000 cubic yards of dioxin-contaminated soil in plastic-lined pits covered with plastic and clay.

The agency revised this plan in October of 2005 in response to community pressure. EPA agreed to solidify a small percentage of the waste and bury the rest, but they refused to adopt Florida's residential standard for dioxin in soil of 7 ppt that CATE and others had been arguing for. CATE also voiced concerns about the plastic cells that would contain the waste, but EPA officials insisted that their worries were unfounded. But a great deal is banking on the liner's durability: beneath Mount Dioxin rests the aquifer that serves as the sole source of drinking water for hundreds of thousands of Escambia County residents.

Upset with EPA's cleanup plan, CATE took action again. When EPA announced plans for a public meeting at a local church to discuss the cleanup plan in small separate groups, CATE said “No way.” They locked

EPA staff out of the church and insisted that they address the community as a whole, which the agency had no choice but to do.

In February of 2006, the EPA finalized its plan to cleanup the ETC site to a level of 30 ppt dioxin. Although CATE had been pushing for a cleanup goal of 7 ppt, the group gained impressive ground. EPA's original plan called for a dioxin cleanup of between 1,000 and 5,000 ppt. It was due to CATE's persistence and the availability of a restrictive statewide cleanup standard that EPA ultimately agreed to use the more protective Florida commercial/industrial cleanup standard of 30 ppt.

This new level is truly groundbreaking. The cleanup will remove as much as 150 times more dioxin than was called for in EPA's original plan. CATE is still unsatisfied with aspects of EPA's proposal and plans to continue pushing for a more thorough remediation. Yet this landmark cleanup standard is a momentous step toward achieving environmental justice not only for this Florida community, but for others, nationwide, facing similar threats. ❁

## FIND OUT MORE

The EPA's decision to use 30 ppt at the ETC site is documented at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/region4/waste/npl/nplfn/escambiaou1oilrod0206fl.pdf>  
For more information about dioxin cleanup levels, contact CHEJ  
Science Director Stephen Lester at 703-237-2249.

## 25 REASONS TO SUPPORT CHEJ DURING OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR!

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**ANNISTON AL:** Monsanto compensated residents \$40 million for PCB contamination  
**TUCSON, AZ:** Dangerous cleanup plan for TCE-contaminated water blocked  
**OAKLAND, CA:** Medical waste incinerator shut down by grassroots coalition  
**PUEBLO, CO:** Chemical weapons destroyed by a safer means than incineration  
**NEWTON, CT:** Community closed elementary school infested with toxic mold  
**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA:** Hazardous soil incinerator defeated by grassroots group  
**PENSACOLA, FL:** 358 families relocated away from community contaminated with carcinogens  
**TAYLOR, GA:** Residents blocked hazardous waste incinerator  
**CHICAGO, IL:** Ordinance prohibited any waste from being incinerated in the city  
**KANSAS CITY, KS:** Residents defeated proposed landfill that would have destroyed a historic site  
**NEW ORLEANS, LA:** Community shut down school built on Agriculture Street Superfund Site  
**WOBURN, MA:** Court linked childhood leukemia to wells contaminated by WR Grace  
**STATE OF MARYLAND:** Landmark legislation passed requiring schools to reduce pesticide use  
**TIMES BEACH, MO:** Residents won relocation away from dioxin contaminated soil  
**CHOCTAW TRIBE, MS:** Tribe blocked incinerator from being built on their land  
**WARREN COUNTY, NC:** Community won 12-year fight to stop low-level radioactive waste dump  
**BAYONNE, NJ:** Citizens blocked sludge incinerator  
**LONG ISLAND, NY:** Community shut down preschool day care center build on contaminated land  
**STATE OF OHIO:** Legislature passed 20-year moratorium on building new incinerators  
**CENTRALIA, PA:** Residents relocated away from 20-year underground mine fire  
**WARD COUNTY, TX:** Radioactive waste dump blocked by grassroots group  
**PORTSMOUTH, VA:** 160 families living next to lead foundry relocated  
**SEATTLE, WA:** 14 families win relocation and shut down methane gas-leaking landfill  
**TUCKER COUNTY, WV:** Residents blocked landfill from taking out-of-state waste  
**NATIONWIDE:** CHEJ-led coalition passed policy protecting U.S. children from pesticide testing

**YOU** can help more communities like these win! Please make a generous donation to CHEJ so we can reach out to communities in need and build a safer, healthier world for us all.

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