

EVERYONE'S BACKYARD

Vol. 19, No. 2 ♦ Summer 2001



YOU CAN BEAT CITY HALL—JUST ASK THE FAMILIES FROM SOUTH BUFFALO
RESISTING POWER: SAYING “No” TO POWER PLANT EXPANSION IN ARIZONA

The Journal of the Grassroots Movement for Environmental Justice
Center for Health, Environment and Justice

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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. Hundreds of people living near contaminated sites around the country contacted Lois as her efforts and those of her neighbors captured national attention and proved, for the first time, that toxic waste is not an abstract issue but one that's in everyone's backyard.

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. We do this by providing information, advice, training, and support. We also refer callers to other grassroots groups who are working on the same issues or fighting the same polluter.

CHEJ can help your newly formed group:

- ◆ learn how to conduct successful meetings
- ◆ raise funds
- ◆ define a strategic plan to accomplish goals,
- ◆ network with others
- ◆ hold news briefings and press conferences
- ◆ identify experts to assist with technical or scientific issues and questions

For more established groups, CHEJ can provide guidance and assistance on issues such as keeping people involved over the long haul, organizational structure and board development, one- to five-year strategic planning, building working coalitions, developing campaign and issue strategies, media training and assistance, and expanding beyond your existing geographical area.

CHEJ has staff scientists who can answer many of your questions and who can review technical documents and tests results you need help with. The center also has bilingual staff who can respond to requests for information and organizing assistance in Spanish.

Currently, CHEJ is coordinating three national campaigns:

- ◆ *Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign*, which is working to educate the public about the health threat posed by dioxin and to move all levels of government to take steps to eliminate the sources of dioxin
- ◆ *Child Proofing Our Communities*, devoted to protecting children from pesticides and toxic chemicals in schools and day care facilities
- ◆ *Health Care Without Harm*, aimed at stopping the incineration of medical waste and eliminating the use of medical devices containing toxic materials.

We invite local groups to become part of these campaigns

The center has a unique library of books, reports, government documents, subject and corporate files, and videos that may have just the information you need. Don't hesitate to contact us. ◆

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◆ The release of *Poisoned Schools: Invisible Threats, Visible Actions* generated extensive media coverage nationwide. Communities have begun using the report to support their efforts to protect children from contaminated school sites and pesticides. See page 21.

◆ The EPA's Dioxin Reassessment is finally on Administrator Whitman's desk, despite the efforts of the chemical industry to suppress it. See page 19.

◆ *EBY's* report "Understanding 'Low-Level' Chemical Exposures" in last summer's issue (vol. 18, no. 2) was named one of the top 25 censored stories of 2000 by Project Censored. For a review of *Censored 2001*, see page 22.



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Our expanded Action Line provides more coverage of local organizing. See page 9.

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Everyone's Backyard is published quarterly by the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, Inc. The editor is Ron Nicosia. Design and Production is done by *Page Artistry*, Rochester, NY. Printed by Ecoprint of Silver Spring, Maryland. The cover and text are 100% recycled, 100% post-consumer waste paper, not bleached with chlorine. Printed using low-VOC soybean inks.

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YOU CAN BEAT CITY HALL—JUST ASK THE FAMILIES FROM SOUTH BUFFALO

BY LOIS GIBBS

On February 22, Buffalo's mayor Anthony Masiello announced that the city will evacuate families living in the Hickory Woods neighborhood. Eighty families fought for over two years to get evacuation from this polluted community. This victory is well earned and desperately needed.

In his announcement, the mayor stated that he was "committed to making the families whole." One resident questioned the ability to someday becoming "whole" after living in a home contaminated with toxic chemicals. Jennifer Blake, a homeowner, commented, "I'm really happy that the city council has taken this step. But I'm very angry and hurt that the city has let things go this far. I'm afraid to have more children." She continued, "My son Matty has been robbed of ever having a normal life. He is six years old and legally blind with severe, global developmental delays. My husband and I will spend the rest of our lives caring for Matty."

Homes in Hickory Woods were built by the city of Buffalo and subsidized by the state with funds from the Affordable Housing and Housing and Urban Development programs. The development was intended to provide homeownership for low-income families who were first-time buyers. The first homes were constructed in 1985—five years *after* the

evacuation of 700 families living near the toxic waste site at nearby Love Canal in Niagara Falls. Hickory Woods is located across the street from the abandoned LTV Steel Superfund site—which should have been enough, given the city's familiarity with Love Canal, to raise red flags and stop the project. But the city, eager for the redevelopment funds, built the homes there anyway.

In 1995, the city of Buffalo contracted with developer Omega Homes to build eleven additional homes. Now, ten years after the first homes were built, questions were raised about the safety of the neighborhood because of its proximity to the Superfund site and evidence of coke wastes (from the LTV steel production) in the yard of a local resident. The city asked Omega to sign a waiver of liability for the city of Buffalo and accept the property "as is." Concerned about the reports of environmental problems in the neighborhood, Omega walked away from the project when the city was unwilling to provide proof that the site was environmentally clean. Another developer took the contract to build the remaining homes, but in 1998 construction was halted again after contamination was found in the soil.

Initial testing found contamination throughout the community in yards and vacant lots. Residents' fears grew as tests results revealed cancer-causing chemicals, lead, and

other wastes. Many of the residents had watched the Love Canal crisis unfold from 1978 to 1980 and understood that it was going to take a collective effort to resolve this problem. In the fall of 1999, families that had been concerned individually about the contamination in their yards got together and formed the Hickory Woods Concerned Homeowners Association (HWCHA). Two years later, they had won a commitment from the city to relocate the families.

LESSONS

There are many lessons other groups working on environmental risks to human health can take away from the Hickory Woods organizing efforts. Here are some of the most important:

In a very short time, the group figured out what would meet the needs of the entire community (goals) and who had the power and ability to give it to them (target). They were disciplined and focused on their target and found creative ways to keep up the pressure and expand their support.

The group's primary goals were to have additional testing done and to secure permanent relocation for the families at risk. The families knew that both the testing and the relocation were going to cost a lot of money and knew, in part from following the Love Canal story, that

they needed to be visible and focused in their efforts.

The group began by exploring who was responsible for the situation and who had the funds to cover the costs of testing and relocation—a power analysis. Residents first looked at the polluter—LTV Steel. They concluded that going after LTV didn't make sense because LTV had declared bankruptcy. LTV was no longer operating in Buffalo and wasn't a household name that you could build a campaign against.

The group next considered going after the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA had been helpful in collecting and analyzing 600 plus samples that cast doubt on the city's original analysis, which had showed no problem. However, the EPA seemed an appropriate target because it had the funds and the authority to act. The downside was that HWCHA didn't want Hickory Woods on the National Priority List (Superfund) because of the high criteria to qualify for relocation and the long-waiting list for cleanup. The families needed relocation immediately.

Finally, the group explored going after the City of Buffalo. The city had built on the property, ignored the "red flags" during development of the property, and continued to ignore serious contamination found later in yards of residents who, at one time, were forced to evacuate temporarily while a limited cleanup took place. The city is also local, where officials are accessible, making it easier for HWCHA to exert pressure and influence them. HWCHA, then, decided to tar-

get the city and let the city figure out where it would get the funds.

CREATIVE, STRATEGIC AND PERSISTENT

Hickory Woods families were incredibly creative in their efforts. First, they profiled the council members to figure out who was likely to be supportive and who would be resistant. They already knew that the mayor was unsupportive, refusing even to discuss the situation with the neighborhood.

They looked at each of the council members, found allies there, and used these council members to pressure other members to support the city taking action. In a very short time, they received full council support for two powerful resolutions supporting relocation.

Hickory Woods families celebrated their victory but continued their efforts. Since they needed the mayor to agree to relocation before anything could be done, HWCHA began to target him in street demonstrations. Each member of the group, children included, wore a small, red flag with a stick on it. These flags stood for the "red flags" the city had encountered but wouldn't address in

developing the property. The flag pins not only demonstrated solidarity among residents but proved an effective image for getting their message out. Each time the media covered the story they described the pins as symbolizing the "red flags" the city ignored. As a result, pressure remained focused on the city and the mayor.

HWCHA built support for their group in several ways. They went to other city government agencies such as the Environmental Management Council and asked for letters supporting them to be sent to the mayor. The group held a "Bipartisan Bash" in March of 2000 where they leafleted people outside of a city/ county/ state-level meeting that was discussing the Hickory Woods situation. Families testified at many meetings, moving their audiences with stories of human suffering and convincing them of the need for relocation with solid scientific information. When, at one informational meeting, the mayor's representative made a remark about the red flags to the group, an outraged young mother of an infant stood up and yelled: "I don't need a red flag...My 6 month old son's diaper is my red flag because when I change his diaper it's full of blood...That's the red flag that I live with every day."

Hickory Woods folks conducted on-going letter writing campaigns with their local, state, and national legislative officials. These letters provided updates and asked for support when HWCHA needed outside pressure on a specific issue. The group was focused—always asking for specific actions they knew the official had the



Lois Gibbs joins residents on a toxic tour of Hickory Woods. Courtesy of Judy Robinson.

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RESISTING POWER: SAYING “No” TO POWER PLANT EXPANSION IN ARIZONA

BY RON NICOSIA

With nineteen new power plants either approved or planned, Arizona will be able within a few years to generate enough electricity power to serve twenty million people—more than three times the population of the entire state. Behind this rush to build is the prospect of immense profits to be made selling power to California.

In Gilbert, a Phoenix suburb, residents have served notice that this profiteering has a human cost that no community should have to pay. Residents are fighting to prevent one of the nation's largest utilities from expanding a power plant located in the middle of a residential community. Opponents of the expansion organized early, educated themselves and the community on the dangers of living next to a power plant, and have raised obstacles to the licensing of the new plant at every step of the way.

A DONE DEAL?

No buffer zone stands between Salt River Project's 300-megawatt San Tan plant and the communities that surround it. The closest homes are a mere 250 feet from the plant, and within a two-mile radius there are 40,000 residents and 21 schools. Emissions from the anti-

quated plant—built twenty-five years ago and never updated—are a major contributor to the poor air quality in Gilbert, which has one of the highest rates of asthma in the state.

Press reports last spring that the town council had signed an “inter-governmental agreement” with Salt River Project (SRP) allowing the utility to build a second plant on the site stunned the community. In return for landscaping and road improvements, Gilbert's compliant town council had given its official approval to the construction of a new 825-megawatt natural gas plant—making the facility among the largest ever planned so close to a residential community.

The *Arizona Republic* and local media quickly endorsed the plan. SRP itself launched a massive public relations campaign—holding open houses in the public schools, sending flyers out to all households in Gilbert, taking out full-page newspaper ads, and increasing its sponsorship of events in the town—to promote itself as a good neighbor, acting responsibly to meet the growing energy demands of the area.

The small group of neighbors and friends that started Citizens Opposed to San Tan (COST) tapped into feelings of deep distrust of both the local government and the utility. COST distributed flyers outside of SRP

open-houses questioning the need for the plant. COST expanded quickly. Its first meeting at the public library in late spring last year drew over 300 people. By June, COST had its own web site and through phone and email outreach had developed a network of supporters in the community. By the summer, COST was ready for its first demonstrations, attracting 150 people to a protest outside of the plant. At the city's fourth of July celebration, COST set up a booth and collected 500 signatures. By August, more than 2,500 people had signed COST's petitions.

CHALLENGING A GIANT

Opponents of the expansion face a corporate giant with deep pockets. A quasi-governmental entity, Salt River Project is subdivision of the state with the legal status of a municipality. SRP is the second largest power utility in the nation and has a reputation as the most powerful organization in Arizona. One member of Gilbert's town council is an SRP employee, and the mayor, also a member of the council, has publicly acknowledged that SRP helped pay off her campaign debts. While seeking the council's support, SRP maintains that Gilbert has no legal authority over the utility.

How could SRP be stopped? Opponents of the plant researched the statutes governing utilities and decided to contest the certificate of environmental compatibility that SRP would need from the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC). Fourteen people stepped forward and filed with the ACC to serve as “intervenor,” entitling them to documents filed with the ACC and giving them the right to cross-examine witnesses at public hearings. Each intervenor researched a specific issue—e.g., air pollution, water usage, electromagnetic fields, property values. Opponents of the expansion throughout the community worked with the intervenors, mostly through email, contributing information and suggestions.

Hearings before the Arizona Power Plant and Transmission Line Siting Committee started in September and continued through twenty public sessions to the middle of February. The unprecedented length of the hearings reflected the extraordinary preparation of the intervenors—and kept the issue before the public eye. Through its website, email lists, and monthly meetings at the public library, the intervenors kept opponents of the expansion updated and mobilized them for demonstrations at key hearings.

COST and the intervenors mounted a powerful challenge to SRP’s propaganda campaign. SRP’s message was that the alternative to the new plant was a “California-style energy crisis” with rolling black-

outs and higher costs. Opponents of the plant made the case that Arizona was becoming a fuel farm for California. SRP has in fact already set up a power merchant—New West Energy—that is a major supplier of electricity to California. But, above all, opponents of the plant focused on health and safety issues that concerned the whole community.

◆ SRP claimed that because it was installing state of the art technology and strict emission controls, the expansion would reduce pollution from the plant. But opponents of the plant showed that SRP was manipulating the figures—overstating how much the existing plant was running and underestimating how much the new plant would be running. The new plant would emit hundreds of additional tons of nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter, worsening the already severe asthma problem in the area.

◆ Opponents focused considerable attention on SRP’s use of high-polluting diesel fuel at the old plant, which has increased dramatically the last couple of years. In the first three months of 2001, San Tan had already burned *eight times* what it had burned

in all of 1999. Complaints of respiratory problems in Gilbert rise dramatically during periods when the plant burns diesel fuel.

◆ Opponents also brought to the community’s attention the safety risks involved in the use of huge amounts of ammonia—Gilbert’s resources are completely inadequate to deal with a large spill—and in the tripling of the electromagnetic fields around the plant.

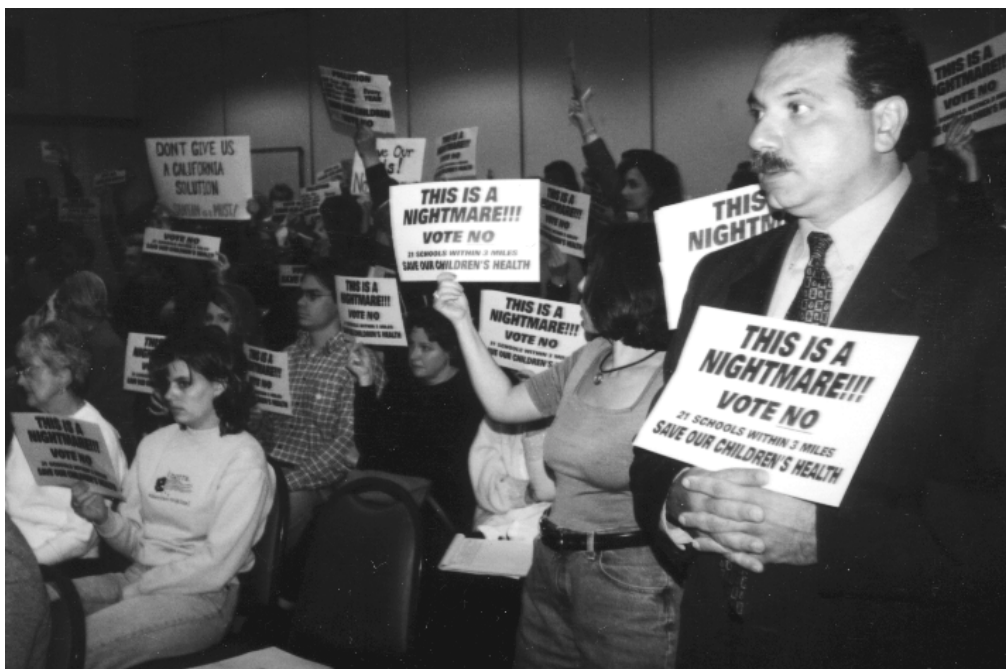
SAN TAN’S OPPONENTS HAVE IMPACT

In February, the Arizona Line Siting Committee announced that it would recommend SRP be granted a certificate of environmental compatibility (CEC). However, the committee added thirty-four conditions intended to ensure that SRP complies with federal and state standards—a sign that the critics had made themselves heard. Two hundred opponents of the expansion turned out to hear the committee’s decision.

During February and March, COST campaigned hard to elect a vocal opponent of the power plant as

mayor, distributing flyers and making phone calls up to the last minute on election day. The winner gained fifty-eight percent of the vote, winning in eighteen out of twenty districts—a major victory for opponents of the expansion.

At two town council meetings in early March, COST members introduced the idea of a resolution



Opponents of the plant at final hearing of the Arizona Power Plant and Transmission Line Siting Committee. Photo by Jim Parrault.

of opposition. Subsequently, opponents of the plant worked with a sympathetic council member to develop and pass the resolution. The powerful resolution detailed the pollution and health risks posed by expansion. It cited “unquestionable, widespread resident opposition” to the new plant and it committed the town to officially oppose the expansion until the issues raised in the resolution were properly resolved. The 3-2 vote in favor of the resolution on April 3—to the cheers of hundreds of opponents of the expansion at the council meeting—was another major victory.

These successes increased the pressure on the Arizona Corporation Commission and raised expectations among the opponents of the plant. But in the last quarter century, the ACC has never denied approval to the construction of any plant, and on April 26, it granted SRP the necessary certificate of environmental compatibility. At the same time, the ACC imposed further conditions—some of the most stringent anywhere in the nation—on the operation of the expanded facility. These conditions directly addressed concerns that opponents of the expansion had repeatedly and so effectively raised at the public hearings. SRP must

- ◆ stop burning diesel fuel at the plant;
- ◆ install the most effective emission control equipment available, regardless of cost;
- ◆ report to the ACC every five years on possible improvements to further reduce air emissions. The ACC will determine what improvements SRP must make;
- ◆ reduce carbon monoxide emissions at the plant site, not through offsets elsewhere.

The ACC defended its decision to approve the expansion as a way of forcing SRP to clean up the existing plant—an acknowledgment that opponents of the plant had made their case that SRP was a major polluter.

The opponents of the San Tan expansion continue to meet and

strategize for the long haul. The intervenors have just filed a motion with the ACC requesting that it reconsider its decision to grant the CEC based on its failure to fully address the issues in the town council’s resolution of opposition. They are pressing the town council to formally rescind the intergovernmental agreement between Gilbert and SRP. And they are working on plans to monitor the plant’s emissions in preparation for a nuisance lawsuit against SRP. This is a struggle that is far from finished. ◆

VICTORY IN NEW ENGLAND!

After three years of citizen-led campaigns to clean up old, dirty power plants in New England, both Connecticut and Massachusetts have what is being called the strongest clean air regulations in the country. Battling industry scare-tactics that a California crisis was heading New England’s way if these grandfathered coal and oil-burning plants were required to meet the same air pollution standards as newly built power plants, citizen activists living closest to the smokestacks succeeded in pressuring state decision-makers to protect public health over the profit of some of the countries largest power companies, NRG and PG&E. Going beyond most clean air campaign victories, citizens of Connecticut are poised to rid the state of environmentally unjust pollution credit trading—an industry-backed scheme that allows dirty plants to avoid meeting new standards by purchasing credits from a polluting facility elsewhere in the country. The bill was passed by large margins in the state legislature, and the Connecticut governor has announced he will sign it.

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power to do. They always followed up on the letters to ensure that the actions they had requested had been done. Residents also engaged in grassroots solidarity, reaching out to national, state, regional, and local groups to co-sign letters calling for relocation.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

An exciting outcome of the Hickory Woods effort is that HWCHA members are thinking beyond their own struggle and trying to organize a coalition of impacted groups who would have a visible presence and influence on all toxic issues in western New York. During their struggle, HWCHA reached out to existing groups, such as the Citizens Environmental Coalition and CHEJ, for help with media and government tactical issues. Now, leaders from HWCHA are attending other groups’ meetings and providing support for their issues while building the basis for a coalition.

Families at Hickory Woods will be moved and a new exciting grassroots coalition in western New York has been born. It wasn’t an easy fight. This grassroots effort has changed the lives of Hickory Woods families forever. Let’s hope it has also opened the eyes of Buffalo’s city hall so the next time there is a toxic waste problem it can recognize the red flags. ◆

Although the city of Buffalo has promised to evacuate them, Hickory Woods residents are making sure the verbal commitment stays in place. At the end of May, HWCHA held a spirited demonstration outside of a fundraising event for the mayor. The mayor came out in front of the local TV cameras and stated that he would relocate families within six months. Keep up the good work Hickory Woods families!

ACTION LINE



ALASKA

◆ **Concerned Parents of Gridwood School** continue to press for a thorough study of the Gridwood Elementary and Junior High School properties. The schools, part of the Anchorage School District, were built 1980-81 on top of an old landfill that contains fuels, paints, and possibly herbicides, solvents, and other toxic substances. The schools' drinking water well is about 165 feet deep and is down-gradient from the landfill; the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation has recently rated the well's vulnerability to contamination as "high to very high." Parts of the playground have been closed due to a brown, foul-smelling substance oozing up. The group has used the *Poisoned Schools* report to bolster the credibility of their fight. In the nearby Eagle River area, parents have just begun to organize against a proposal to build a new high school next to an old dumpsite where no one knows exactly what is buried. Parents in the area are determined to find out what their children are being exposed to at the Gridwood schools and want to ensure that the school district doesn't repeat the same mistake by building the new Eagle River high school near another dump.

◆ **Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Alaska Center for the Environment, and Cook Inlet Keeper** have filed a notice of intent to sue Entech Incineration, which burns medical, municipal, and industrial waste in South Anchorage. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation estimates that Entech discharges almost forty tons a year of hydrogen chloride and notified the company in 1997 that under the Clean Air Act it was required to get a permit. Entech has continued to operate without one and has not been reporting its hazardous discharges. The three groups are seeking an injunction to shut down the incinerator until Entech complies with federal standards.

ALABAMA

◆ Anniston residents won a belated victory against Monsanto spin-off Solutia Inc.

this April when the company agreed to pay \$40 million to settle a lawsuit charging it with contaminating the community with toxic chemicals and covering it up. Plaintiffs claimed that company documents showed that Monsanto, which manufactured PCBs in Anniston from 1935 to 1971, continued to dump PCB waste into local landfills and discharge it unfiltered into local streams even after Monsanto's own research in the 1960s revealed the material to be hazardous. For more than two decades after Monsanto stopped production of PCBs, it withheld information about PCB pollution that would have helped protect the local community. Solutia will pay an average of \$12,000 to 1,600 plaintiffs, \$2.5 million to relocate plaintiffs who live near the plant, and \$3.5 million to establish a foundation for victims of PCB contamination. Solutia had previously agreed to pay \$43.7 million to property owners living along waters polluted with PCB waste and is currently involved in at least twenty other lawsuits.

◆ Years of painstaking local and national organizing, research, and relationship-building with elected officials paid off in a big way for the **Chemical Weapons Working Group** (CWWG) on April 25 at a hearing of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee in Washington. Local activists from **Families Concerned About Nerve Gas Incineration** in Anniston, joined Craig Williams, a longtime CWWG leader from Kentucky, to testify to the subcommittee about the Army's flawed plans for destroying chemical weapons in the midst of civilian communities. Their testimony showed that a major rationale for using incineration—that it is necessary to meet U.S. treaty obligations—is contradicted by information in the Army's own confidential documents, which CWWG had obtained. The activists gave details from their communities of the Army's willingness to accept civilian exposure to lethal chemicals from chemical weapons incineration rather than use safer non-incineration methods. One of the activists demonstrated how to use the kit issued to residents by the federal government to protect families from the incin-

WE NEED YOU!

Has Action Line included your group recently? Please let us know about yourself—what you are organizing for or against, how you are organizing, and what actions or campaigns you would like to tell others about. We want to hear from you! Contact *EBY's* editor Ron Nicosia at 703-237-2249 or rn@chej.org.

erator. The kit consists of duct tape, plastic sheeting, and a pair of scissors. Anniston residents have been told they will have an eight-minute warning of any dangerous releases from the incinerator. The three U.S. senators present for the activists' testimony—Stevens of Alaska, Shelby of Alabama and McConnell of Kentucky, all conservative Republicans with pro-military voting records—strongly condemned the Army's approach. Senator McConnell once again expressed his longtime support for nonincineration technologies, while Senator Stevens said the thought of a chemical agent release had him "scared as hell." Senator Shelby scolded a federal official with the reminder that the only issue at stake was the "safety, safety, safety" of the people around chemical weapons sites.

◆ Community members of the state-recognized Mowa band of the Choctaw Tribe are organizing against the siting of a medical waste microwave treatment facility on their reservation. In February, residents of Mobile County, bordering the reservation, rejected the facility, which is to serve as a regional incinerator for medical waste from counties statewide. Concerned about the facility's health impact, Mowa community members have organized **Mowa Against Environmental Hazards** and are challenging the tribal council's decision allowing the facility to be placed within the reservation. The group is demanding more information on Environmental Medical Systems, an un-

Action Line

known company, and full public disclosure of the contract negotiated by the tribal council. An important concern is that no health assessment of the potential impact of the facility on nearby public housing has been done. The group is demanding that the community be part of the decision-making process and is calling for a new vote by the tribal council that addresses the community's health and environmental concerns.

CALIFORNIA

◆ Members of the former McClellan Air Force Base Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) are suing the base command for illegally dissolving the committee last May. The former RAB contends that the Air Force violated the RAB charter and federal Superfund regulations. According to the group, the Air Force acted to suppress complaints about the cleanup of the base, one of the most contaminated installations

wanted to shut us up, because they want to downplay the serious threat to public health and the environment posed by the radioactive waste and other toxins contaminating the base. But we're not going away!" The Air Force has spent thirteen years and nearly \$300 million trying to clean contaminated groundwater. The cleanup of toxic landfills and topsoil and the remaining fourteen billion gallons of contaminated groundwater will take at least another thirty-five years. The Air Force is closing the base in July and turning over parts of it to McClellan County.

◆ **Literacy for Environmental Justice** and **Linking San Francisco** sponsored a Youth on Fire! rally for environmental justice at the PG&E power plant in Hunters Point, San Francisco this May. At the rally, public school students and activists called for an immediate and total cleanup of the Hunters Point area and closure of the outdated PG&E plant, which threatens the health of the more than 10,000 children in the Bayview area. Hunters Point residents



approved for closure by the Base Realignment and Closures Commission. Del Callaway, the former community co-chair of the McClellan RAB and a fifteen-year civilian employee of the Air Force, stated that "the Air Force

suffer extremely high rates of such illnesses as asthma and breast cancer. The Youth on Fire! rally, which was organized by teachers and students at four public schools, included a march around the entire power plant, as well as such festivities as mural painting and theater.

◆ A Bay Area coalition of community, labor, and environmental groups, including **Greenaction**, continues to pressure Integrated Environmental Systems (IES) to adopt safer nonincineration technologies at its Oakland plant. On a rainy March 1, 150 people held a protest in front of the facility, placing a padlock on the gate. The next day coalition members conducted a sit-in at the Bay Area Quality Management District office to protest IES's announcement that it had reached an agreement with state regulators that would keep the plant operating. Air regulators then denied that a decision on the permit had been made. The Oakland facility is located in a low-income and minority neighborhood near a glass plant and asphalt facility, less than a mile from seven elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. The only commercial medical waste incinerator in the state, the plant has a long history of air quality violations and plant breakdowns.

◆ At the end of April, the **Ocean Beach Grassroots Organization** (OBGO) led a protest march at Anheuser-Busch owned SeaWorld in San Diego to call attention to the fact that the world's largest aquatic park has been built next to an old landfill polluted with hazardous waste. During the 1950s, the local aerospace industry dumped millions of gallons of waste contaminated with heavy metals and other toxic substances into the Mission Bay landfill. OBGO opposes the proposed expansion of the park due to the risk of disturbing the old toxic landfill, as well as the likely impact on air and water quality and wildlife.

◆ The **Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition** (SVTC), working with **Grass-Roots Recycling**, **Mercury Policy Project**, **Clean Water Action** and **U.S. PIRG** have launched the Electronics Take It Back! campaign. The Take It Back! platform endorses the principle of Extended Producer Responsibility, which requires that manufacturers and distributors of electronic equipment take financial and physical responsibility for their products throughout a product's entire lifecycle. The platform calls on the electronics industry to end the use of hazardous materials in the production of electronic products and

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to adopt health and safety measures to protect workers.

GEORGIA

◆ On April 3, **U.S. PIRG**, joined by more than eighty national, state, and local health and environmental organizations based in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, and Tennessee launched the Clean Up Southern Company campaign to pressure the electric utility to commit itself to cleaner power generation. At press conferences in eight southern cities and Washington, D.C., the groups released the report "Southern Company, a Giant Among Polluters" documenting that the levels of pollution emitted from Southern Company's antiquated plants are the highest in the nation and pose a major health threat throughout the southeast. On May 22, U.S. PIRG followed up with a second report—"Abuse of Power: Southern Company's Campaign to Undo, Weaken, Delay and Circumvent Life-Saving Pollution Rules." The report documents that Southern Company spent more than \$48 million in 1999 on public relations efforts and buying political influence in order to avoid having to modernize its old, dirty power plants. In April, 14,000 campaign supporters sent postcards or faxes to Southern Company asking it to clean up the company's plants and support stronger federal clean air regulations for power plants.

KENTUCKY

◆ The **Coalition for Health Concern** (CHC) recently completed an intensive community health screening project funded by a mini-grant on environmental justice by the U.S. EPA. This study gathered information on health symptoms from communities living near two contaminated sites in western Kentucky—the Paducah DOE nuclear enrichment site and the Calvert City petrochemical complex. Both communities are described by CHC as "national sacrifice areas" that are impacted by hundreds of toxic chemicals, toxic metals, and gases. The health screening results provided residents with a "snap shot" of the varied health problems in the community, including cancer and reproductive, neurological, and respiratory problems. At

community meetings, CHC distributed information on the toxicity of the chemicals released from the petrochemical plants and the DOE facility and realized that this was the first time that many people had ever received information on

mercury as a commodity rather than a hazardous waste to make it easier to sell and ship, but the DEP has refused. State and federal officials are currently negotiating with Mallinckrodt Inc., a past owner of the plant, to get it to pay



what was making them sick. While the health screening studies did not provide definitive answers, CHC is using the results to push the DOE to set up a clinic in the community to provide medical testing and treatment.

MAINE

◆ The **Penobscot Alliance for Mercury Elimination** (PAME) applauded the decision of the Bethlehem Apparatus Company in Pennsylvania not to accept used mercury from a now-closed HoltraChem facility in Maine. Mercury from Bethlehem Apparatus, the largest mercury recycling company in North America, has been found in two illegal mercury dumps in India. In announcing its decision, the company acknowledged that it was concerned about negative publicity. Earlier this year, D.F. Goldsmith Chemical and Metal Company, which had purchased the mercury from HoltraChem, was forced to recall a twenty-ton shipment of the mercury to India because of protests in India by environmentalists and workers. D.F. Goldsmith has wanted Maine's Department of Environmental Protection to classify the used

for cleaning up the mercury-contaminated site, one of the worst in the world.

◆ **Natural Resources Council of Maine** and a member of **Physicians for Social Responsibility**, along with mothers and children, held a press conference on May 10 to urge the Maine legislature to pass three bills that would reduce toxic pollution. Two bills focus on mercury; these would set standards for mercury in water and ban the sale of mercury thermometers. The third bill aims at reducing dioxin emissions by banning backyard trash burning and the burning of plastic, rubber, styrofoam and metals in construction debris; it also establishes a state goal of eliminating dioxin and requires the state to undertake a one-time outreach effort to educate the public about trash burning, the largest source of dioxin emissions in Maine.

MARYLAND

◆ More than nine months of organizing and agitating by office workers in a

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building where 1,000 employees of both the State of Maryland and Baltimore County work finally got results. In December, the state and the county agreed to relocate the employees from the Towson building after worker action led to substantial publicity about problems with asbestos, fungi, and mold, as well as what workers called "slip-shod" management and maintenance.

◆ **Parents for Safe Schools (PFSS)** in Ellicott City is planning on meeting with the Howard County Department of Public Works to discuss issues raised by the New Cut Landfill. After reading the technical reports prepared for the group by CHEJ and a local consultant, the county agency prepared a 100-page response. The landfill is adjacent to the Worthington Elementary School.

MASSACHUSETTS

◆ Officials in Quincy don't seem to have learned their lessons very well. Last year, **Quincy Citizens for Safe Schools** helped defeat a plan to build a new school on an old shipyard site

hydrocarbons, and other chemicals. Many residents oppose this site as well and are frustrated by the city's slow learning curve.

MICHIGAN

◆ A community fight in a primarily Latino section of south Detroit over the construction of a public school on a contaminated site continues to build momentum. Detroit Public Schools (DPS) and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality officials are attempting to move forward with a grossly mismanaged soil remediation plan for the newly built Beard school despite strong objections from two neighboring communities. DPS has miscalculated contamination levels and has failed to do sufficient testing of the site and DPS contractors have illegally dumped contaminated materials and hidden contaminated materials—undermining the community's trust in DPS. Parents of students at the old Beard school agree on the need for a new building but have organized **Parents for Healthy Schools (PHS)** to demand greater participation and transparency in the project. DPS has responded by offer-

While maintaining a dialog with DPS, PHS has intensified community outreach efforts. It recently joined forces with parents from the neighboring McMillan public school, which will also be closed when the new Beard school opens, to work on education and organizing of the community.

◆ On March 10, activists from across Michigan, including **Environmental Health Watch** and the **Ecology Center** staged a demonstration at Dow's shareholder meeting in Midland. Since its merger with Union Carbide, Dow is the second largest chemical company in the world. Outside the meeting, protesters wore papier-mache pregnant bellies to drive home the point that developing babies are most at risk for dioxin contamination. Inside, activists testified about the need for Dow to stop its dioxin-polluting practices and clean up its contaminated sites, such as the one in Midland. Activists also delivered a message from survivors of the 1984 Bhopal chemical disaster demanding redress for the thousands who are still suffering health effects from the massive gas release from Union Carbide's pesticide plant.

MONTANA

◆ Will the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ever stop amazing us? **Members of the Lockwood Community Coalition for Environmental Health (LCCEH)** outside of Billings recently received a letter from ATSDR, which is conducting a health assessment in the community to evaluate the impact of contaminated groundwater from the Lockwood Solvents Superfund site. Earlier, EPA connected the community to a public water system and had to vent the crawl space areas under some homes because of the off-gassing of high levels of chemicals out of the groundwater. In a "comfort letter" written by the EPA, the community has been told that their homes are now safe, but LCCEH isn't buying it. Further frustrating the community, the letter from ATSDR asks people to describe their "quality of life," a new addition to health assessment. One community leader responded, "What quality of life? We have no quality of life thanks to the Superfund site." What kind of life can



Parents for Healthy Schools in south Detroit getting their message out. Photo by Paul Engstrom.

contaminated with asbestos, PCBs, and other chemicals (our cover story in the last *EBY*). Now the city is proposing a Department of Public Works site contaminated with benzene, petroleum

ing to create a community oversight committee lacking decision-making authority—which the community, until now, has rejected while continuing to press for an independent committee with real clout.

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anyone have living next to one of the worst contaminated sites in the country? Community leaders are now worried that the agency might use their responses to minimize their concerns and to explain away illnesses in the community as due to stress and not chemical exposure.

NEW JERSEY

◆ **South Camden Citizens in Action** won an unprecedented legal victory on April 20 when a federal judge halted the opening of a St. Lawrence Cement plant for violating the civil rights of African-Americans and Hispanics in the South Waterfront neighborhood of Camden. The suit had been filed by Camden Legal Services with assistance from the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia and the **Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment** in San Francisco. Judge Orloffsky ruled that in issuing a permit to the plant the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection had failed to consider the cumulative impact of polluting facilities, the health of residents in the community, and the community's racial and ethnic makeup. The judge concluded that the plaintiffs had "established a prima facie case of disparate impact discrimination based on race and national origin in violation of the EPA's regulations," which are based on Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act. The South Waterfront neighborhood is ninety percent black and Hispanic and has a median household income of \$15,000, compared to the statewide median of \$67,000. The neighborhood already contains the region's largest trash incinerator, a power plant, a sewage treatment plant, a scrap metal yard, and two Superfund sites. The judge noted the "disproportionately high incidence of asthma and other respiratory ailments" among residents of the neighborhood.

The ruling was thrown into doubt less than a week later when the U.S. Supreme Court, in a different case, limited the ability of private citizens to file lawsuits under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to cases of intentional discrimination. On May 10, however, Judge Orloffsky ruled that the Camden suit to prevent the cement plant from

opening could proceed under U.S. Code, Section 1983, a nineteenth century civil rights statute that permits suits for state

Sam Pratt, director of Friends of Hudson, a 1,800-member community interest group. "The health effects of



Health Care Without Harm's Anti-Incinerator/Alternative Technology Workgroup held a skill share in April at Kernersville, North Carolina. Thirty activists came from as far away as South Africa to share strategies and celebrate the numerous successes HCWH has had in shutting down incinerators. Participants are standing in front of the Stericycle medical waste incinerator in Haw River. **Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, CACTUS** and others have been organizing locally to try and shut down this facility for the past year. Photo courtesy of Monica Rohde.

actions that violate rights guaranteed by the Constitution or by law.

NEW YORK

◆ These are rough days for St. Lawrence Cement, a Canadian subsidiary of Zurich-based Holderbank. **Columbia Action Now!** and **Friends of Hudson** sponsored a demonstration in front of the Swiss embassy in Manhattan on April 25 to protest the company's plans to build a coal-burning cement plant in Greenport, New York. The plant would generate an estimated 17.5 million pounds of pollution annually. "Holderbank and its subsidiaries have an irresponsible track record of air and water pollution all over North America," said

this coal-burning facility," he added, "would be felt far beyond the borders of Columbia County." In Switzerland, coal can no longer be used as fuel because of the pollution it causes.

◆ After the **Southside Elmira Environmental Action League** (SEEL) released the *Poisoned Schools* report, former one-time Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Director Clark Heath told a community gathering that there's no reason to continue to study the cluster of twenty-two cases of testicular cancer among the students at the Southside High School. Heath said he didn't believe the students had any significant exposures to the low levels of

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contaminants found on the school grounds. An investigation by CHEJ, however, found that the state's health study failed to do any sort of risk assessment. So how can the state judge what risks exist for the students, teachers, and workers at the school? SEEAL and other area residents are continuing to press for further study of the cancers.

NORTH CAROLINA

◆ When **Concerned Citizens of Northampton County** learned in January that International Paper (IP) intended to expand its industrial landfill, twenty members of the group met with the Northampton County Commissioners, demanding to know why no public notice had been given of the proposal. Angry that city officials had rubber-stamped IP's permit to open a new cell, Concerned Citizens voiced their concerns to the Roanoke Rapids *Daily Herald*—prompting IP officials to arrange a quick meeting. After reviewing the permit with **Clean Water Fund**, Concerned Citizens presented senior

for groundwater than older permits, Concerned Citizens has served notice to IP that it will be carefully monitoring the landfill—as well as requests for any future permits.

◆ At a press conference on April 3 in Mathews to announce the release of *Behind Closed Doors*, the **Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League** (BREDL) urged the Mecklenburg County Department of Environmental Protection to test the BMWNC incinerator for levels of dioxin and furan emissions, conduct a health survey of the community, and shut-down the facility until health issues can be resolved. BMWNC is the state's second largest commercial medical waste incinerator. BREDL has information on elevated levels of cancer and respiratory disease in the vicinity of the plant.

OHIO

◆ **Valleycrest Neighbors and Concerned Citizens** in North Dayton helped change the U.S. EPA's decision to stop the cleanup of the Valleycrest toxic waste dump. The dump was established back in

In 1994, the EPA declared the dump a Superfund site, and in 1998, some of the companies, including Waste Management and General Motors, agreed to begin cleaning it up. Last fall, however, the EPA granted the companies' request to halt removal of the drums. Valleycrest Neighbors and Concerned Citizens organized to put pressure on the EPA and the companies to finish the cleanup. The groups collected petitions, held regular protests outside the offices of Waste Management and General Motors, and lobbied their representatives. After the EPA's announcement on April 25, Congressman Tony Hall, who had met with Administrator Whitman on the issue, said, "It was a grassroots, bipartisan effort. The people spoke and EPA listened. The health and safety of Valleycrest neighbors and all Dayton area residents will benefit by this decision."

◆ **Committee Opposed to Ruining the Environment** (CORE) in Cuyahoga Falls is opposing a new City of Akron landfill to be located next to both a national park and an old landfill that is already contaminating the area. After the Ohio EPA agreed to an informational meeting in the community, CORE mobilized 800 local residents, got their message across to the community and to the Ohio EPA, and signed up 500 members at the meeting.

◆ Members of **The Awareness Group** (TAG) in Middlefield have been pressing local, state, and federal authorities for several years concerning industrial contamination of local groundwater. They've gotten a lot of resistance; one local company even wrote to a regulator naming one TAG leader as having singled them out for no good reason. Recently, TAG met one more time with officials, using a map with pins to indicate residents with health problems in the area. This time the group is getting support instead of a runaround. A local health official spoke out supporting TAG's claims and sharply criticizing the Ohio EPA. Other officials, including a congressional staffer, offered cooperation. The **Buckeye Environmental Network** has been working closely with TAG, providing technical assistance



Concerned Citizens of Northampton County in North Carolina. Photo courtesy of Clean Water Fund.

IP officials with pages of questions on the landfill's design and on protection of ground and surface water. While the permit does provide more protection

the 60s despite protests from neighboring residents and contains thousands of drums of toxic substances, as well as wastes from pollution control processes.

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and support for the group's development.

OREGON

◆ When four mothers in Dallas became concerned about Boise Cascade (BC) pesticides that were killing plants and wildlife around their homes and threatening their children's health, they had an uphill battle. After all, BC had \$7.6 billion in corporate revenues last year. Nevertheless, the women went to the local newspaper, the state legislature, and every audience they could, demanding advance notification and precise application methods. BC, which has been under some pressure already for its anti-environmental and anti-environmentalist actions, didn't need one more problem. So this year, BC took extra care when it sprayed herbicides near those homes in Dallas. Some plants and animals have come back, and neighbors have even seen earthworms for the first time in years. The kids can play outside more safely, and the pets can go out too. But the "four housewives" of Dallas plan to keep the pressure on the state government until laws are changed to better protect the citizens.

PENNSYLVANIA

◆ On April 17, **Group Against Gas** (GAG) in Hazelton held its own meeting at the same time as an EPA public relations event, drawing 200 residents to EPA's audience of 20. Local doctors joined the community in denouncing a recent EPA report that concluded that the Tranguch Gasoline Spill posed no health risk to the community. Petitions circulated calling for federal and state buyouts of residents' homes—and came back with signatures from nearly everyone in the room. Three days later, Governor Ridge announced that the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency's (PEMA) would not apply for federal disaster assistance for their neighborhood. GAG quickly chartered buses and took 100 people to picket a Republican Party event featuring Ridge. They were greeted by a helicopter and eleven state police cars.

On May 11, residents of Hazelton filed an eight-count class-action lawsuit in Luzerne County Court on behalf of

those affected by the gasoline spill. Defendants include BP Amoco, Exxon-Mobil, and Shell Oil. The suit also alleges that the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has repeatedly concealed information on the effects of the spill that could help protect residents.

◆ **Alliance for a Clean Environment** (ACE) in Stowe received a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) from the U.S. EPA to help them evaluate the impact of the Occidental Chemical Superfund site in their community. The company operates a PVC manufacturing plant that releases vinyl chloride, benzene, and other chemicals into the air and has contaminated ground-

also attacked a study of the coral reef around the island, which found unexploded ordnance leaking toxic TNT and more than 1,000 deteriorating barrels and cylinders of unknown chemicals. There have also been reports of higher rates of cancer, lupus, thyroid deficiencies, and asthma on Vieques.

When the Navy—undeterred by the law or the scientific studies—resumed bombing, the residents of Vieques and their supporters, led on the island by the **Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques**, turned to civil disobedience. Protesters arrested



Valleycrest Neighbors and Concerned Citizens picket in front of General Motors in Dayton, Ohio. Photo courtesy of Jeannie Manning.

water with TCE, xylene, styrene and other volatile organic chemicals. ACE has been fighting for years to prevent Occidental from building a pipeline through the town to transport gas from a nearby landfill as fuel for the plant.

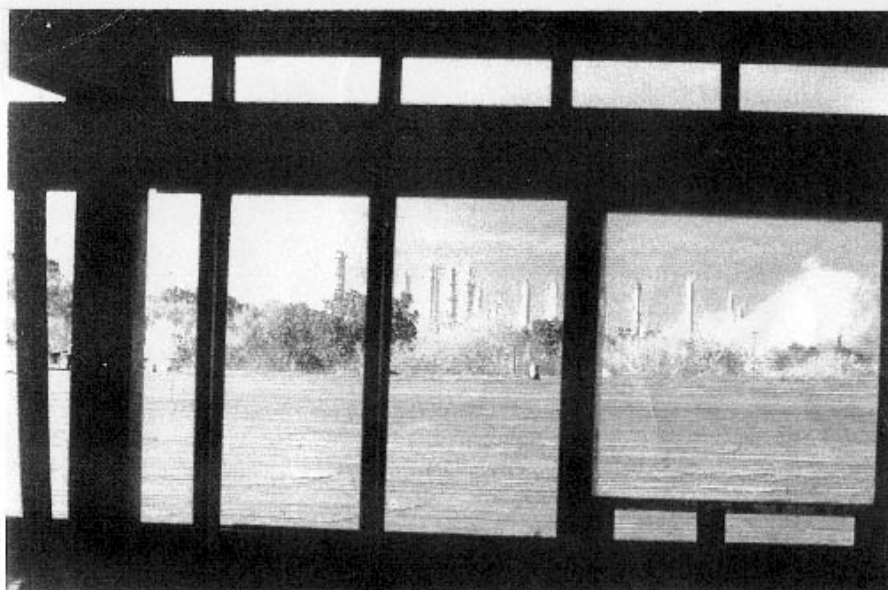
PUERTO RICO

◆ Days before the U.S. Navy was to resume bombing exercises on Vieques, Puerto Rico's new governor Sila Calderon signed into law a bill regulating noise levels at sea—in effect outlawing Navy bombing. Her decision was based in part on a study by the Ponce School of Medicine, which found heart problems among Vieques' residents that could be attributed to noise from the Navy bombing and artillery. The Navy criticized the science behind the study, and a judge backed the Navy and overruled the law. The Navy has

for entering the prohibited area included Vieques' mayor and many other residents, as well as representatives of Calderon's Popular Democratic Party, the pro-statehood New Progressive Party and the Puerto Rican Independence Party, parties which disagree on many issues, and also supporters from the mainland, including Reverend Al Sharpton, Mexican-American actor Edward James Olmos, Democratic U.S. Representative Luis Gutiérrez from Illinois, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and New York labor leader Dennis Rivera. The protests on the island were backed up by rallies in San Juan and in front of the White House, as well as by a full-page ad in major newspapers featuring supporters from the entertainment and sports worlds.

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View from classroom window at Cesar Chavez High School in Houston, Texas. School is within quarter mile of industries that release nearly 5 million pounds of toxics annually into the air. Photo by Juan Parras of Unidos Contra Environmental Racism. For more info, please contact Mr. Parras at 713-313-4270.

SOUTH CAROLINA

◆ Two-thirds of the way through a \$150 million project to deepen Charleston's harbor, local activists from **South Carolina—More Than a Port** found something that had escaped the notice of the EPA, Army Corps of Engineers, and the South Carolina State Ports Authority: tons of dredging materials intended for one spot in the ocean were being dumped somewhere else. The agencies are now dumping in the "right" place and investigating whether any harm was done to aquatic life. A similar mistake earlier in the project was only identified when a shrimper's nets were fouled. Looking at the bright side of things, an Army Corps spokesperson said, "We should finish ahead of time and well within the budget."

TEXAS

◆ After helping force Envirocare to drop its plans to dump nuclear waste in West Texas, **Friends of Ward County** joined with the **Lone Star Sierra Club** and other communities and environmentalists around the state in a bigger victory against an even bigger nuclear dumper. Waste Control Specialists

spent lavishly lobbying for a west Texas nuclear waste dump proposal that would have favored that corporation. The bill, however, was blocked by a committee of the Texas legislature. Environmentalist opponents of the longstanding plan to bring Maine and Vermont's nuclear waste to Texas had argued that any dump for that waste would also end up taking federal nuclear waste. When the proposal was amended to allow U.S. Department of Energy waste in the dump, it became clear that the environmentalists were right, and opposition to the dump solidified in the media and in the legislature.

VIRGINIA

◆ The **Coalition for the Safe Redevelopment of Avtex** marked Earth Day with a rally and a ceremony for the healing of the earth, gathering at the Avtex Superfund site in Front Royal. The group included high school and college students, pagan activists, a former Avtex employee who lives nearby, and a lot of kids, and featured drumming, dancing, and healthy snacks. Speakers and a skit protested the rush to "clean up" the site by capping toxic waste with sludge and fly ash and leaving it in the Shenandoah River flood plain. In addition, neighbors of the site questioned an EPA representative about the continuing odors and emissions. EPA continues to move forward with a rush-job cleanup that is being touted as a national model.

◆ Montvale residents won their fight to keep out an industrial park before they had even named their group. The small rural community of Montvale is already dominated by several large gasoline storage tanks. Last year, county officials decided to put in an



Earth Day dance in front of former Avtex building, now a Superfund site, in Front Royal, Virginia. Photo by Larry Yates.

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industrial park and to make it accessible from the highway via the same small road that leads to Montvale's homes and elementary school. Officials moved quickly with the plan but residents organized themselves and reached out to neighbors, finding not only large numbers of supporters but supporters who had specific expertise they needed—including a firefighter with hazmat experience and a businessman knowledgeable about economic development. Their research found that the county had not updated its comprehensive plan as required by state law. When 200 supporters showed up at a county meeting, with 60 of them signed up to speak, the officials decided to hear from the neighborhood's selected speakers, who covered the group's key points. The media were also there and much of the press attention focused on a sign held by two Montvale children—"Keep our children safe." The county Planning Commission voted down the industrial park plan, and the county supervisors supported their recommendation. The Montvale group has continued to be a force in local land use, contacting and giving advice to other resident groups facing spot zoning efforts by the county. They have been assured by county staff that, for the foreseeable future, the county plans to "leave Montvale alone."

WASHINGTON

◆ At the end of April, the Washington state legislature passed the Children's Pesticide Right-to-Know Act—a major victory for children's health. The act requires that school districts post indoor and outdoor notices warning students and staff when pesticides are used and provide advance notification to interested parents, and schools will be required to publish an annual report on their pesticide use. The **Washington Toxics Coalition** had been pushing for a parents right-to-know act for several years. Other groups that worked hard to get this bill passed include WashPIRG, the Lutheran Public Policy Office, Washington Conservation Voters, League of Women Voters, and Washington State PTA. After the vote, Democratic representative Mike Cooper, a cosponsor of the bill, said

that "Pesticides can cause cancer and other serious health problems. This is a really important step that will let parents know what their children are being exposed to at school."

◆ **People for Environmental Action and Children's Health (PEACH)** held a press conference on April 3 in front of the Spokane Municipal Waste to Energy Incinerator to announce the release of *Behind Closed Doors*. Next to a representation of a closed boardroom door, PEACH members spoke to a crowd of women and children about the need for the EPA to release the Dioxin Reassessment. Standing in a gentle snowfall, Brightspirit, the president of PEACH, said, "If you could see dioxin, this is what it would be like everyday."

◆ Over 500 Thurston County residents came to a school auditorium in late March to oppose a proposed sludge facility in the community. The site of the proposed facility was previously the site of an illegal sludge operation, which was shut down in the early 1990s. Opponents of the sludge facility continue to meet, to pressure the county government for answers, and to research the backers of the sludge plan.

WISCONSIN

◆ **Stop Unnecessary Road Expansion (SURE)**, the **Sierra Club of Wisconsin**, and **Citizens for a Better**

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REPORTERS WIN GOLDMAN AWARD

Jane Akre and Steve Wilson, who put their careers on the line to expose the health risk to humans posed by Monsanto's bovine growth hormone (BGH), are among this year's winners of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. Working for a Fox network station in Florida in 1997, Akre and Wilson prepared a report on the health problems of cows injected with BGH and on scientific evidence linking BGH to human cancers. Bowing to pressure from Monsanto, Fox postponed the broadcast. Fox forced Akre and Wilson to do eighty-three rewrites—none acceptable to the network—then fired the two reporters. In August 1998, a Florida jury awarded Akre \$425,000 for lost wages and damages, vindicating her claim that Fox had fired her for threatening to make public the network's pressure on her to falsify the report. (The script of the suppressed report and the full story behind the lawsuit are available at www.foxBGHsuit.com).

This year's other winners are labor activist **Oscar Olivera**, who led a coalition of organizations in protests and strikes against the privatization of Bolivia's public water system, forcing the government to cancel its contract with multinational corporations; **Yosepha Alomang**, an indigenous woman who has led the fight in West Papua, Indonesia against Freeport Inc.'s gold and copper mine, the largest in the world; conservationist **Eugene Rutagarama**, who risked his life during the 1990s to save Rwanda's last few hundred mountain gorillas; **Myrsini Malakou** and **Giorgos Catsadorakis**, biologists who have worked for a quarter-century to preserve the wetlands of Préspea in northwestern Greece; and **Bruno Van Peteghem**, who has led a campaign to protect the coral reef of New Caledonia from mining interests.

The Goldman Environmental Prize is given annually to environmental activists from six geographic regions: North America, South/Central America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and Island Nations. Lois Gibbs was awarded the first Goldman Prize for North America in 1990. (Details are available at www.goldmanprize.org)

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HEALTH CARE WITHOUT HARM

C A M P A I G N P A G E



MORE ON THE DANGERS OF MERCURY

A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control *Blood and Hair Mercury Levels in Young Children and Women of Childbearing Age—United States, 1999* tested the blood, urine, and hair of women and children for mercury. The study showed that one in ten women in this country have levels of mercury in their bodies high enough to cause neurological effects in their offspring. That puts the number of babies at risk in the U.S. at about 395,000 per year. (Report available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5008a2.htm)

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) has released *Brain Food: What Women Should Know About Mercury Contamination of Fish*. *Brain Food* warns that government recommendations are completely inadequate to prevent pregnant women from exposing their fetuses to dangerous amounts of mercury. EWG recommends that pregnant women not eat any quantity of thirteen types of fish and strictly limit consumption of ten others, including canned tuna. EWG points out that the government's recommendations for pregnant women are based on calculations appropriate for a 150-pound man and fail to take into account the amount of mercury already in our bodies. (Summary of the report available at www.ewg.org/pub/home/reports/brainfood/execsumm.html.)

RESOURCES FROM HCWH

HCWH and the American College of Nurse-Midwives have just published *Green Birthdays*. *Green Birthdays* developed out of concern that infants, the most vulnerable population, were being exposed to chemicals and products that could be safely and cost-effectively replaced. We examine products and practices, suggest more environmentally sound alternatives, and address other areas in which health care providers can improve their environmental performance. We explain how new parents can put together a green nursery in their home and offer suggestions on non-toxic furnishings and carpets. Copies of *Green Birthdays* are available through Health Care Without Harm's website www.noharm.org or by calling Jolie Patterson at 703-237-2249, ext. 26.

HCWH's Anti-Incinerator/Alternative Technology Workgroup has produced the *Toolkit for Community Activists: How to Shut Down a Medical Waste Incinerator*. If you

would like a free copy of the *Toolkit*, contact Cheryl Holzmeyer at the Washington Toxics Coalition at cholzmeier@watoxics.org or 216-632-1545, ext. 11.

POLLUTION PREVENTION

One of the key ways that HCWH works on a local level is through its Pollution Prevention (P2) workgroup. The P2 workgroup is a collaboration of organizers who work in cities throughout the country. These organizers target healthcare insiders and work with hospital systems to implement waste volume and toxicity reduction programs, mercury elimination programs, and environmentally preferable purchasing programs. They also organize conferences and trainings with the goal of educating healthcare providers and frontline healthcare workers about ways in which they can help their hospitals save money and become more environmentally responsible. The target locales for 2001 include Maine, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, Chicago, Minneapolis/Duluth, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Portland, OR. Target cities are chosen by two criteria: they must have a flame to fan (i.e., a dedicated organizer or a hospital system that has made overtures about pursuing HCWH's agenda) and have potential to 'move the market.' We chose Philadelphia, for example, for the prestige of its medical institutions; if those institutions could make significant progress, they could serve as role models for other medical facilities across the country and around the world.

This winter the P2 workgroup celebrated one of its most significant accomplishments. In March, the Maine Hospital Association, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and Health Care Without Harm signed an agreement modeled on the 1998 national Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. EPA and the American Hospital Association (AHA). The MOU committed AHA's member hospitals to a voluntary program to reduce infectious waste by 33 percent by 2005 and 50 percent by 2010 and to eliminate mercury within their member institutions by the year 2005. The Maine agreement expanded on this commitment by delineating more specific mercury reduction goals and including language about phasing out the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) medical products. The agreement sets a precedent for other state hospital associations—and opens the door to moving similar agreements through a number of 'target' cities and states. ♦

STOP DIOXIN EXPOSURE

C A M P A I G N P A G E



DIOXIN REASSESSMENT ON ITS WAY!

On June 1, the fate of the EPA's Dioxin Reassessment landed in the hands of Administrator Christie Whitman. This is a huge victory! This ends seven years of scientific peer review, a process that was held up largely due to industry pressure. The EPA is now poised to put the finishing touches on the Reassessment and release this important public health document to the American people before the end of the summer. In the letter sent to Administrator Whitman, the Science Advisory Board (SAB) recommends that the agency "proceed expeditiously" to complete and release the Dioxin Reassessment. The SAB also encourages the EPA to "limit emissions and human exposure...in view of the very long biological and environmental persistence of these chemicals."

The SAB Executive Committee also announced that it will launch an investigation into the Dioxin Reassessment Review Subcommittee and their review process. The process has come under scrutiny from congressional representatives, who sent a letter to SAB Executive Committee Chair Dr. William Glaze asking that the EPA be allowed to move forward and release the Dioxin Reassessment by the end of the summer. The subcommittee's report was filled with bias and inconsistencies. Research by the Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign revealed that one-third of the panel members had taken funds from ninety-one companies that would be adversely affected by strong regulations to reduce dioxin emissions.

BUSH SIGNS GLOBAL TREATY TO ELIMINATE DIOXIN

On May 23 in Stockholm, the U.S. joined 120 other nations in signing the Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (known as the POPs Treaty). The treaty bans or places tough restrictions on twelve of the most highly toxic and persistent chemicals known and calls for the reduction and eventual elimination of dioxin. The Bush administration had announced a month earlier that it intended to sign the treaty—a move intended to placate critics of its environmental record. To show its commitment to the treaty, the administration will need to 1) send it to the Senate promptly for ratification; 2) cooperate with European Union and Canada in providing financial and technical

assistance for developing countries to implement the treaty; and 3) support efforts to screen additional chemicals for inclusion in the treaty.

The signing of the treaty is a victory for community groups across the country who are fighting to end dioxin exposure. Thanks to all of you who have lobbied with your feet, your voice, and your computer to make this a strong treaty.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS!

On April 3, the Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign released *Behind Closed Doors*, which details the chemical industry's attempts to prevent the release of the Dioxin Reassessment and weaken the POPs treaty. The report is available online at <http://www.chej.org/BehindClosedDoors.html>. For a print copy, call CHEJ at 703-237-2249.

DIOXIN STILL IN OUR FOOD AT LEVELS THAT CAUSE HARM

According to a new study published in the *Journal of Toxicology and Environmental Health*, the amount of dioxin in U.S. food has remained at the same dangerous level it was more than a decade ago. The study, led by Dr. Arnold Schecter at the University of Texas, Houston School of Public Health, found that nursing infants are getting thirty-five to sixty-five times the level recommended by the World Health Organization. The study—"Intake of Dioxins and Related Compounds from Food in the US Population"—is the first nationwide study of dioxin in U.S. foods.

JOHN GRAHAM—A CRUMBY CHOICE FOR TOP REGULATOR

During the week of April 23, the Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign called on the Senate Government Affairs Committee to oppose the confirmation of John Graham to head the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). To call attention to Graham's pro-industry record, community groups from across the country flooded the members of the Sen-

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CHILD PROOFING OUR COMMUNITIES

C A M P A I G N P A G E



POISONED SCHOOLS REPORT RECEIVES MASSIVE MEDIA ATTENTION

Congratulations and a big **Thank You!** to everyone who assisted in the release of the *Poisoned Schools: Invisible Threats, Visible Actions* report. The stories about the need to protect children at school from environmental chemicals spread like wildfire across the country.

- ◆ There were sixty-seven organizations in thirty-one states that released the report. Some groups did a press briefing or release while others held protest actions in their communities or at the state capital.
- ◆ The news coverage was spectacular with coverage nationwide. There were over 100 interviews from large and small media outlets—too many to list here. But to give you a sense of the reach, here are some highlights:

“Parents in Leominster, Massachusetts (“The Plastics City”) won a major victory recently when the School Board voted 7-2 in opposition of re-opening a middle school in a converted office building just 300 feet from a closed municipal landfill, formerly a Superfund site. The school was shut down a year ago when methane levels were found in the surrounding soil above safe standards. The town mayor and building owner were pushing to re-open the school and an intense overcrowding problem within the city’s schools made the parent’s choices and challenges very difficult. Nevertheless, precaution won.

“I was able to attend the final School Board vote and presented all 9 School Board members with the Poisoned Schools report. The legitimacy of our national and the fledgling statewide campaign to prevent schools from being sited within 1000 feet of a landfill gave the ‘fence-sitters’ on the Board something to hold onto. It was perfect timing. The release of the report and the article in the Boston Globe were what initially caused the parents to give us a call and ask for help. Cheers to all involved.”

—Bernadette Del Chiaro,
Toxics Action Center, Boston, MA

National television—Good Morning America, Today, World News Tonight, NBC Nightly News and Court TV.

National Newspapers—*New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Newsday*, *Seattle Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *New York Daily News* and *Education Week*.

Regional and local media outlets covering the stories included the *Providence Journal*, RI.; *Peoria Times*, AZ.; *Herald*, WA.; *Los Angeles Daily News*, CA; *Capital Weekly*, ME; *Elmira Star Gazette*, NY; WB39, Houston, TX.

The campaign worked to connect journalists with local struggles to give groups a tool to put pressure on decision-makers. For that reason, the news reports focused not on comments by “experts” but on the local groups themselves.

NEXT STEPS IN CAMPAIGN WORK

The campaign consists of four committees, each with its own work plan. The *Poisoned Schools* report, for example, was the work of the Contaminated Schools and Pesticides Committee. The committees are open to others in the network that would like to participate.

◆ **Air Committee**—Addresses indoor and outdoor air contamination issues, including mold, carpets, ventilation, products such as cleaning agents, air quality in portable classrooms, and chemicals from other sources. Diesel-fueled buses parked near areas where children stand or near air intake vents are also of concern.

◆ **Pesticides Committee**—Addresses pesticide use and notification in school buildings and on grounds. Campaign members have adopted model policies, which groups are introducing at the local and state levels. The committee is working at the federal level to pass the School Environmental Protection Act.

◆ **Contaminated Schools Committee**—Addresses the location of new and existing schools near known contaminated sites, such as landfills, and sources of contamination from local industrial complexes.

◆ **Healthy Building Materials**—Addresses the purchasing of environmentally safe school materials for renovation/expansion, new buildings, and products.

Each committee holds one or two conference calls a month to move the committee work forward. Each lasts no more than one hour and does not cost participants anything. However, you must share in the work that needs to be done.

WHAT DO COMMITTEE MEMBERS DO?

- ◆ Comment, write, review, or brainstorm ideas for resources, activities, publications, and how to network with others to move the committee's goals forward.
- ◆ Help with school-based surveys on pesticide usage, the location of new schools in your area or state, and places where renovations or expansions will be taking place.
- ◆ Write letters to legislators to support policy initiatives and other campaign actions

Get involved in this important campaign and work with us to protect our children from chemicals in their school environments! ◆

STOP DIOXIN EXPOSURE

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ate Government Affairs Committee with boxes of Graham Crackers that contained the message "John GRAHAM is a CRUMBY choice for OIRA."

Research by the Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign found that during his tenure on the EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) Dioxin Review Committee, Graham received funding from sixty dioxin-polluting industries, including chemical manufacturers, incineration companies, pulp and paper companies, the petroleum industry, and coal- and oil-based utilities. As a member of that committee, Graham constantly argued that dioxin is not a known human carcinogen. This effort to keep from the public the link between dioxin and cancer has been at the forefront of the chemical industry's agenda for a number of years, even though numerous independent and international agencies have concluded that dioxin is a human carcinogen.

The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs plays a critical role in shaping environmental policies. If confirmed, Graham would have the discretion to block new standards or rules on industrial chemicals, fuel economy, and air and water pollution.

Unfortunately, in mid-May, the Senate Government Affairs Committee voted 9-3 in favor of Graham for the post. However, Senator Durban (D—Ill.) is calling for a vote in front of the full Senate, and with the shift in power in the Senate to the Democrats, there is still a chance that his nomination will not go through. ◆

ACTION LINE

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Environment were joined by two TV stations and six newspapers in the May 7 Tour de Sprawl. The tour, attacking pro-sprawl policies in Wisconsin, focused on the area where SURE has been fighting Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WDOT) plans to make Highway 164 a divided, four-lane superhighway. The tour gave the press a look at the massive development in formerly rural and small town areas spurred by the four-lane highway and included a stop at a fifth-generation family farm, which would be demolished if WDOT's plans move forward. The final stop of the tour was Ralph Williams' home in the historic community of Ackerville, where two nearby leaking landfills have contaminated the WDOT's proposed site for a bridge—and Mr. Williams' well. Analysis done for SURE by Dr. John Thresher, Ph.D., a professional soil and water scientist, has shown that the water contains arsenic, lead, trichlorethylene (TCE) and other toxic chemicals. Mr. Williams' wife died of cancer, and Mr. Williams no longer drinks from the well.

NOVA SCOTIA

◆ In a dramatic attempt to pressure Canada's government to relocate residents living near the Sydney Tar Ponds, Canada's worst toxic waste site, the executive director of the **Sierra Club of Canada** Elizabeth May started a hunger strike on May 2. She ended it seventeen days later when the Canadian health minister announced that the government would support testing of the area and of the population and relocate families at risk. The Sydney Steel Mill and its coal processing plant left over a million tons of toxic waste in the area, including 40,000 tons of PCBs. A recently released study undertaken by a consortium of four companies found extremely high levels of heavy metals and cancer-causing chemicals. The level of arsenic was seventy times the federal limit. Twenty thousand people live less than a kilometer from the coal site or the tar ponds, an area with one of the highest rates of cancer in Canada and abnormally high rates of birth defects and miscarriages.

MEXICO

◆ In May, a circuit court judge ruled that evidence that Guerrero activists Rodolfo Montiel Flores and Teodoro Cabrera García were tortured by the Mexican army must be considered by the original judge and sent their case back to him. In May 1999, the army illegally arrested and detained the men. Based on the statements they made under prolonged torture, Montiel and Cabrera were convicted last year on weapons and drug charges and received long prison sentences. Montiel was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize for North America in 2000 for his role in organizing campesinos against Boise Cascade's logging in the Petatlán area. ◆

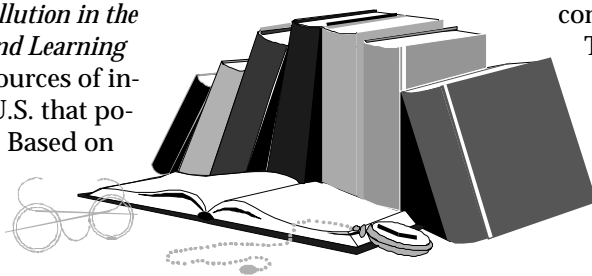
CHEJ was very sorry to learn of the death of Florida activist Carol Riley. Carol took on incinerator and mining issues and helped us host a leadership development conference in the 1980s. Carol would never accept "No" from her opponents and never say "No" to friends asking for help. We'll miss her.

RESOURCES

◆ *Polluting Our Future: Chemical Pollution in the U.S. that Affects Child Development and Learning* documents the scope, nature, and sources of industrial chemical emissions in the U.S. that potentially impact child development. Based on conservative data from the National Academy of Sciences, the authors conclude that at least one in every two hundred children currently suffers a developmental or neurological disorder produced by exposure to toxic chemicals. The authors analyze data from the federal Toxics Release Inventory to provide detailed statistical summaries on the chemicals that are being released, including state rankings by air emissions and water discharges, the 100 worst counties for toxic emissions, rankings by industry and facilities, and the percentage of African-Americans in the top 25 polluting counties. *Polluting Our Future* provides a thorough overview of the threat posed to our children by industrial chemicals. (National Environmental Trust, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2000, 31 pp.; tables, notes; available online at www.safekidsinfo.org)

◆ In *Why Poison Ourselves? A Precautionary Approach to Synthetic Chemicals*, Anne Platt McGinn provides a lucid introduction to the health and environmental risks posed by persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Arguing that chemical-by-chemical regulation is inadequate, McGinn draws effectively on recent research to build a strong case for production processes that are not dependent on synthetic chemicals. McGinn looks at the use of chlorine in paper production, the reliance on pesticides in agriculture, and the use of chlorine and phthalates in the production of PVC and argues that in all three cases alternative practices and materials are currently available that would eliminate or drastically reduce the use of toxic chemicals. (Worldwatch Institute, 2000, 92 pp.; figures, notes; order by phone at 800-555-2028 or online at www.worldwatch.org)

◆ *Reclaiming the Environmental Debate: The Politics of Health in a Toxic Culture* is an exceptionally stimulating collection of essays on the ideology and practices of contemporary environmentalism, with contributions from both academics and activists. Editor Richard Hofrichter has arranged the essays into three sections. The first addresses the assumptions and limitations of current public policy approaches to protecting human health and the environment and includes essays on safety regulations in the workplace, risk assessment, and urban redevelopment; the second addresses how corporations use public relations campaigns to shape public opinion and dominate policy debates; the third presents case studies of



community resistance to toxic pollution. The third section is the shortest section of the book and hardly does justice to the scope and creativity of current grassroots activism. The essays are rich in detail—both about the problems of toxic pollution that communities face and about the communities themselves.

The writing is probing and critical—not only of official approaches but those of environmental activists as well. Taken as a whole, the volume presents a powerful argument for an environmental health movement that more directly challenges the corporate system of production and aims at more comprehensive social change. (MIT Press, 2000, 356 pp.; notes, bibliography, index)

◆ Project Censored's annual review of important stories suppressed by the corporate media makes it possible for the work of the alternative press to reach a much wider audience. Among the biggest stories in *Censored 2001* are several on health and environmental issues—the dangers of genetically altered foods, the passage of extended producer responsibility laws in Europe, the EPA's toxic pollution, and the health risks posed by low-level exposures to chemicals (described in an *EBY* report, Summer 2000). This twenty-fifth anniversary edition includes summaries of the top ten stories featured each year since the publication began in 1976, essays documenting mainstream media bias and tracking media ownership, and a resource guide to alternative publications and media organizations. (Seven Stories Press, 2001, 381pp; index)

◆ No one does a better job of exposing corporate propaganda than Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, authors of *Toxic Sludge is Good for You!* In their new book *Trust Us, We're Experts!* they look at how the public relations industry uses the "third party technique" to promote corporate products and discredit public health and environmental advocates. By enlisting scientists and other credentialed "authorities" to produce research tailored to corporate needs and smear critics' work as "junk science," PR firms have successfully downplayed the hazards of tobacco, carcinogenic chemicals, even global warming. Rampton and Stauber show that through funding of university research and sponsorship of conferences, corporations have gained increasing control over both what scientists do and what research becomes public knowledge. An invaluable guide to the PR firms, corporate front groups, and conservative think tanks behind the "independent experts," *Trust Us, We're Experts!* raises disturbing questions about the role of public relations in a democracy and the influence of money and ideology on the practice of science. (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001, 360 pp.; notes, index)

WITH SPECIAL THANKS

The Center for Health, Environment and Justice remains an advocate, educator, organizer and leader in the movement for health and environmental justice through the generous support of our members, Partners, Guardians and key foundations and institutions. CHEJ would like to acknowledge the following individuals and institutions who made critically important donations to support our work between March 1, 2001 and May 31, 2001. Our members number in the hundreds, and are therefore too many to name. However, each gift, no matter what the size, is very much appreciated.

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RESOURCES

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◆ While reading Rampton and Stauber, take a look at the **Integrity in Science** web site just set up by the Center for Science in the Public Interest. The site contains a searchable database for tracking the corporate funding of scientists working in the fields of nutrition, medicine, and the environment. The Integrity in Science Project also provides information on the funding of professional and health associations. (At www.cspinet.org/integrity/)

◆ The **Scorecard** web site, a project of Environmental Defense, makes available to the public a wealth of environmental information by location. Users type in their zip code to get the local facts about air and water quality, superfund sites, toxic releases, and lead hazards. The site also provides information on the distribution of environmental burdens by race/ethnicity, income, poverty level,

education, home ownership, and occupation—making this a crucial resource for environmental justice research. (At www.Scorecard.org)

◆ Greenpeace has issued another important report on the toxic dangers of PVC. *This Vinyl House: Hazardous Additives in Vinyl Consumer Products and Home Furnishings* calls attention to the risks posed by the use of phthalates and metal stabilizers in common vinyl products around the home, including furniture, wallpaper, floors, and childcare items—all of which children come into contact with every day. The report documents the levels of these toxic additives in PVC products, the presence of these chemicals in humans, and potential adverse health effects. (Greenpeace, May 2001, 34 pp; appendixes, bibliography; available at www.greenpeaceusa.org/toxics/vinylhouse.htm) ◆

Poisoned Schools

Invisible Threats, Visible Actions



A REPORT OF THE
CHILD PROOFING OUR COMMUNITIES:
POISONED SCHOOL CAMPAIGN



Poisoned Schools: Invisible Threats, Visible Actions addresses the risks our children face at school from environmental toxins. The report

- ◆ examines children's special vulnerability to chemical exposure
- ◆ highlights examples of schools around the U.S. built on contaminated land and provides guidelines for ensuring that new schools are not constructed on abandoned landfills or near heavily polluting industries
- ◆ documents the threat posed by the use of pesticides in our schools and explains the principles of integrated pest management

79 pages, \$10.00

A *User's Guide* to the report is also available.

To order, call 703-237-2249

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