

January 2009

OHEJ Allies:

2008 was a productive year for our work together toward establishing environmental justice in Ohio.

The 2008 OHEJ Year-in-Review is attached to this email, and pasted in below.

Take a look at this month-by month re-cap of how far we came from the BEGINNING of the year - when we were still taking the ideas from the 2007 EJ forums and drafting them into a citizens' proposal - to the END of the year, when we had a sponsor for our legislation and had gained the attention of the legislature and the Ohio EPA regarding our recommendations for regulatory reform.

Yes, We Can!!!

AND...COMING IN 2009...

OUR Ohio EJ BILL TO BE INTRODUCED IN THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES -

This is YOUR bill, containing YOUR ideas - BE PART OF GETTING IT PASSED in 2009!!!

Come to a Town Hall Meeting if there's one in your community (plans are in the works in Columbus and Cleveland; Dayton and Northwest Ohio are the next prospects) .

Talk with your legislators! Write Letters! Stay on the train, and help keep this thing moving!!

See you out there!

OHEJ Strategy Committee,

**Ohioans for Health, Environment and Justice
Year-in-Review, 2008**

January

➤ Ohio EJ Bill Draft Work Begins

The volunteer Drafting Committee, empowered by those who attended the OHEJ Statewide Meeting at Deer Creek in late 2007, began its work. The committee's focus was all the ideas for Ohio Environmental Justice that were generated by citizens at the 2007 EJ forums, and that had begun to be shaped at the Statewide Meeting. Using California's EJ law as a template, the Drafting Committee started in-depth, line-by-line crafting of the citizen ideas into legislative form.

OHEJ recognizes and thanks the Drafting Committee Members:

NE Ohio:

Cindy Dougherty - Morrow County Landfill Fighters/Parents Protecting Children
Sudhir Raghupathy - Cleveland Bioneers

SE Ohio:

Lee Blackburn - Southern Ohio Neighbors Group (SONG)
Elisa Young - Meigs CAN

Columbus/Central Ohio:
Teresa Mills – Buckeye Environmental Network

Cincinnati:
Kathleen Clark – Communities United for Action (CUFA)
Allan Harris - Ohio NAACP
Nancy Lindemood - Property Owners Want Equal Rights (POWER)

NW Ohio:
John Bohland - Western Lake Erie Waterkeepers
Dr. Morris Jenkins - Toledo NAACP

➤ Strategy Committee Forms, Asks Question: “What is Best Path to Enactment of our Citizens’ EJ Law?”

Also empowered at the late-2007 Statewide Meeting at Deer Creek, and immediately showing a high level of commitment, the OHEJ Strategy Committee held the first of its bi-monthly conference calls, a demanding schedule that members have maintained all year. The committee’s first conversation covered ideas for bringing citizens and legislators together toward passage of the EJ bill that the Drafting Committee was working diligently on.

OHEJ recognizes and thanks the following who have served as Strategy Committee Members for some part or all of this year:

Cleveland

Jacque Gillon (Ad-hoc member) – Neighborhood Leadership Institute
Mark McClain - Neighborhood Leadership Institute
Sudhir Raghupathy - Cleveland Bioneers
Elvin Vauss - Lee-Seville-Miles Citizens’ Council

NE Ohio (south of Cleveland)

Jim Pirko - REACH
Alonzo Spencer- Save Our County, and NAACP East Liverpool

Central Ohio

Kristen Arnold - Ohio Student Environmental Coalition
Randy Burley - Ohio NAACP
Alvin Hadley - Columbus Metropolitan Area Church Council
Teresa Mills - Buckeye Environmental Network

SE Ohio

Kathleen Boutis - Southern Ohio Neighbors Group
Bill Carroll - Rural Action, and Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd
Eric O'Neal - Southern Ohio Neighbors Group

NW Ohio

Dr. Morris Jenkins - Toledo NAACP, U.of Toledo, and Building a Movement

February

➤ OHEJ meets Dayton EJ Leaders

OHEJ traveled to Dayton for a Groundwater Symposium. OHEJ organizer and other allies learned of the Chrysler/Behr VOC plume, an underground toxic spill that originated in the late 1980’s, which now threatens Dayton area water sources, and is poisoning the homes of low-income neighbors in the McCook Field neighborhood through “soil vapor intrusion”. The toxic liquid that was spilled contains TCE, a leukocyte (causes leukemia). It transforms to gas and rises through the soil, penetrating the concrete slabs under these neighbors’ homes, and rises up into their living space.

OHEJ met with several Dayton Environmental Justice leaders before and after the symposium - Citizens for Responsible Destruction of Chemical Weapons, a diverse group that successfully mounted a grass-roots campaign to turn back a US military plan to bury chemical waste in their community; and Valleycrest Neighbors and Concerned Citizens, who are fighting for their lives in the shadow of a toxic landfill Superfund site. Also at UD - professors and students expressed interest in working together to push for EJ in Ohio.

- Ohio Council of Churches Joins as OHEJ Ally
- Drafting Committee Continues its Work on EJ Bill

March

- Drafting Committee completes its work!
Resulting draft citizens' bill is sent out for review and comment to about 500 Ohioans -each of whom attended one of the 6 EJ forums in 2007.

April

- State Representative Tracy Maxwell Heard (district 26, Southside Columbus) approaches OHEJ with her interest in sponsoring an Ohio Environmental Justice bill.
- OHEJ has tables at Earth Day celebrations across the state. Info on our citizens' bill is made available, and huge banners are created, each with dozens of squares of colorful artwork that local people make with their own hands, to show support for Environmental Justice in Ohio. Allies volunteer to make it happen: Buckeye Environmental Network, Earth Day Coalition, Neighbors for Clean Air, Save Our County, SONG, REACH, University of Dayton students, Wood County Citizens Opposed to Factory Farms, and Xavier University students staff tables in Toledo, Cleveland, Marietta, East Liverpool, Athens, Dayton, Bowling Green, and Cincinnati.

May

- Meeting with senior aide to State Rep. Joyce Beatty (district 27, D) to ask advice for moving our EJ bill forward.

OHEJ, with CHEJ (Center for Health, Environment and Justice) and allies OEC (Ohio Environmental Council), Song, Buckeye Environmental Network and OH NAACP get commitment from aide Julie Eichorn to contact Rep. Heard and discuss best plan for bill sponsorship.

- OHEJ allies hold briefings with others in their communities in Toledo and in Warren to inform them on EJ bill, prepare to meet with state legislators.
- Citizens begin meeting with legislators to educate about EJ and push for passage of our bill. These meetings continue through summer and fall.

June

- Rep. Beatty supports Rep. Tracy Heard in taking the lead on sponsoring Ohio EJ bill,

because Rep. Heard represents Southside Columbus (an EJ community fighting air/water health and safety issues with Georgia Pacific); has worked with citizens on EJ issues since before being elected to the House; and is proactively seeking to introduce an EJ bill in the Ohio House of Representatives.

- Strategy Committee decides to divide citizen ideas (generated at forums and shaped by Drafting Committee) into two tracks – Legislative and Regulatory Reform
- Rep. Heard sends our bill to “LSC” – Legislative Services Committee, the group that drafts all legislation introduced in Ohio House or Senate.
- OHEJ allies hold more EJ bill briefings - this month and through the summer - in NW Ohio (factory farm/CAFO fighting groups), Cincinnati.
- Meeting w/ OEPA Director Korleski and staff to present OHEJ Regulatory Reform Recommendations – Promise of Follow-up meeting in two weeks

July

- Ohio NAACP works with local OHEJ ally CUFA (Communities United for Action) to put on two “Toxic Tours” as part of the 99th Annual NAACP National Convention in Cincinnati.
- Also at the Convention, Ohio NAACP members gather for a meet and greet to hear update on EJ bill. Ohio President Sybil Edwards-McNabb expresses continued commitment to working with other OHEJ allies for Environmental Justice in Ohio.
- Blue-Green Alliance joins OHEJ as ally.
- Ohio Sierra Club approves permission for Sierra Club chapter activists to meet with state legislators to encourage support of EJ bill.

By this time, our list of allies looks like this:

Growing List of OHEJ Allies

Following is a list of groups that have actively participated in the planning and implementation of OHEJ’s 6 environmental justice forums in 2007:

Center for Health, Environment and Justice (www.chej.org)
 NAACP, Ohio Conference (www.naacp.org), along with chapters in Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, SE Ohio, NE Ohio, and Toledo.
 Buckeye Environmental Network
 Communities United for Action (Cincinnati)
 Earth Day Coalition (Cleveland - www.earthdaycoalition.org)
 ECO - Environmental Community Organization (Cincinnati - www.env-comm.org)
 Marion Franklin Civic Association (Columbus)
 Appalachian Ohio Sierra Club (www.ohio.sierraclub.org/appalachian/)
 Ohio Environmental Council (www.theOEC.org)
 Appalachian Peace and Justice Network (SE Ohio – www.apjn.org)
 Williams County Alliance (NW Ohio - www.williamscountyalliance.com)
 Western Lake Erie Association (NW Ohio - www.westernlakeerie.org)
 Farm Laborer’s Organizing Committee (F.L.O.C., NW Ohio – www.floc.com)
 Our Lives Count (NE Ohio - www.ourlivescount.org)
 REACH (NE Ohio)

Below is the beginning of a growing list of groups that have signed on to a commitment letter to participate in pursuing OHEJ’s goal:

NAACP, Ohio Conference

LULAC Ohio (League of United Latin American Citizens, Ohio)
SONG (Southern Ohio Neighbors Group – Piketon)
Lee-Seville-Miles Citizens' Council (Cleveland)
Save Our County (East Liverpool)
Lower Price Hill Community Council (Cincinnati)
Camp Washington Community Council (Cincinnati)
Spring Grove Village Community Council (Cincinnati)
Northside Community Council (Cincinnati)
Winton Hills Community Health Center (Cincinnati)
Central High Black Men's Alumni Group (Cincinnati)
Wood County Citizens Opposed to Factory Farms (NW Ohio)

And here are groups working with us toward our goal of making environmental justice a priority in Ohio:

Blue-Green Alliance
Columbus Metropolitan Church Council
Ohio Council of Churches
Ohio Sierra Club
Sierra Student Coalition

August

- (After Two Months and No Word) OEPA Director Korleski: "I would like time to discuss your recommendations with the Governor's office... I will be in touch with you when I am ready to meet with you again."

OHEJ's response – good idea, talking to the Governor, we intend to also!

September

- Regulatory Reform Task Force forms, begins to hold regional hearings.

President of Ohio Senate calls for a Task Force to gather input from businesses: How do regulatory agencies in Ohio create obstacles to doing business, and thus stunt job creation and strong Ohio economy? 6 Republicans and 2 Democrats appointed. OHEJ attends first hearing at AK Steel in Cincinnati to listen, monitor.

- EJ bill draft by LSC complete. OHEJ Strategy and Drafting Committees review, submit edits to Rep. Heard who agrees and returns to LSC.
- In Cleveland, community leaders meet to review and discuss bill, commit to organizing a Town Hall Meeting when the time comes.

October

- Regulatory Reform Task Force hearings continue.

OHEJ allies testify at hearings this month into November in Mansfield, Brecksville, Warren, Lima, and Columbus, call on Task Force to consider OHEJ regulatory reform recommendations.

- Ohio NAACP Convention –

Alonzo Spencer (Save Our County, East Liverpool) receives lifetime achievement Environmental Justice award. This is first annual OH NAACP EJ Awards ceremony; future awards will be given in recognition of Mr. Spencer: the Alonzo Spencer Environmental Justice Award.

Also at Convention - first of a series of EJ trainings presented by OH NAACP and CHEJ, with aim of cultivating EJ knowledge and leadership in NAACP units across the state.

November

➤ Having started in May and continuing through this month, citizens meet with the following State legislators to talk about the environmental in-justices they are fighting, to inform lawmakers about our EJ bill, and to ask for support of the bill when it comes to the legislature in 2009 (listed in order of when met):

Rep. Joyce Beatty (aide Julie Eichorn, district 27, D)

Rep. Sandra Harwood (dist. 65, D)

Rep. Michael DeBose (aide Ross Davis, dist.12, D)

Rep. Linda Bolon (1, D)

Rep. Stephen Dyer (43, D)

Rep. Barbara Sears (46, R)

Rep. Edna Brown (48, D)

Sen. Capri Cafaro (32, D)

Rep. Ronald V. Gerberry (59, D)

Rep. Tom Letson (64, D)

Sen. Jason Wilson (30, D)

Sen. Robert Hagan (33, D)

Sen. Eric Kearney (9, D)

Rep. Sandra Williams (11, D)

Rep. Mike Foley (14, D)

Rep. Peter Ujvagi (47, D)

Rep. Steve Driehaus (31, D)

Rep. Tyrone Yates (33, D)

Rep. Dale Mallory (32, D)

Denise Driehaus (as candidate, 31, D)

➤ Regional Communication Network is Launched

Volunteer Coordinators in 6 regions begin regular email communications with most who attended EJ forums in 2007, and are adding new contacts and allies.

Information is shared on EJ in general, on specific meetings and actions,

AND every week a report is provided by Buckeye Environmental Network Teresa Mills with info re: regulatory hearings, facility permit apps, enforcement actions, and more.

➤ First meeting with Cincinnati NAACP - EJ Chair Tracy Gragston.

Mr. Gragston commits to set meeting with Unit President Christopher Smitherman first of 2009 to discuss Cincy NAACP engagement in push for EJ in Ohio.

➤ Allies in Cleveland and Columbus begin planning Town Hall Meetings for early 2009.

December

➤ Regulatory Reform Task Force issues report, invites comments, and votes to approve recommendations
OHEJ and allies submit comments. Task Force Chair Senator Keith Faber states that citizen and environmental group comments (and testimony at hearings) are not relevant to the focus of the Task Force, which is JOBS.

First order of business for OHEJ Strategy Committee in January: how to take a next step in moving OUR regulatory reform recommendations!

➤ Plans for Town Hall Meetings for early 2009 in Columbus and Cleveland begin; two other THM's in other parts of the state also pending

➤ Ohio Student Environmental Coalition considers proposal to take on Ohio EJ bill as a primary campaign in 2009.

Student leader Kristen Arnold makes strong case with her peers (decision Jan. '09).

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