

Dioxin '97, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

STOP DIOXIN EXPOSURE CAMPAIGN

1994 - 1997

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RESPONDING TO EPA'S DRAFT REASSESSMENT

CCHW'S *Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign* was launched in late 1994 when we sent educational mailings, published editorials and articles, and organized participation in public hearings in response to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) release of its draft reassessment report on dioxin.

In early 1995, CCHW printed and distributed 10,000 copies of "How to Start to Stop Dioxin Exposure in Your Community," a summary of the EPA's 1994 reassessment report on dioxin explaining how dioxin is harming our health, and a short guide to initiating community action. They were mailed to all of the grassroots groups in our network. Additional copies were distributed at conferences and at community and regional meetings, and in response to requests.

LAUNCHING A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

In April 1995, after six months of conversations with local, state and national groups who share our concerns about dioxin, CCHW sponsored a Dioxin Roundtable. The goals for the *Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign* were defined by the forty participants that included grassroots activists, scientists, policy makers, representatives of labor and national environmental groups. They developed collective strategies for a grassroots effort to stop dioxin exposure.

Roundtable participants were recruited from grassroots groups and organizations that are addressing critical environmental health issues such as incineration, chemical weapon disposal, occupational exposures from chemical plants, and paper and pulp mills. We also included organizations that have waged successful government procurement and recycling campaigns. Each Roundtable participant agreed to implement a portion of the effort.

The strategy defined by Roundtable participants includes coalition-building, public education, keeping participants connected, working with labor unions, and supporting state-level pollution prevention laws, procurement campaigns and efforts to end incineration.

In August 1995, we turned the strategies developed at our national roundtable into an organizer's handbook, *Dying from Dioxin, A Citizen's Guide to Reclaiming Our Health and Rebuilding Democracy*. A total of 63 individuals collaborated with us in writing *Dying from Dioxin*,

including all of the participants from our national roundtable on dioxin. The first nine chapters of *Dying From Dioxin* put into plain English the scientific and medical knowledge about dioxin and dioxin-like substances. The second half of this book is a toolbox for people who want to establish organizations or coalitions in their communities to stop dioxin exposure. The nine organizing chapters provide step-by-step information on how local groups can implement the components of a nationwide grassroots effort to stop dioxin exposure.

The book was published by South End Press, has had a second printing and is scheduled for a third. We have sold close to 10,000 copies to date. Many groups pass the book around their membership, so our actual readership is many times that number.

In late 1995, CCHW established a computer bulletin board devoted exclusively to dioxin. The system is set up so that anyone can become a subscriber and so that any subscriber can post items and respond to questions posted and raised by subscribers. It has been a very effective means of exchanging information and finding information not available in any one source.

CCHW has held monthly conference calls with roundtable participants and is planning to hold a second national dioxin roundtable in 1998. Regional dioxin strategies have been developed at roundtables we convened in the summer of 1996 in Illinois and New York and the winter of 1997 in New England and Florida. Grassroots leaders worked together at each of these events to shape innovative, collaborative strategies to eliminate the prevalent sources of dioxin in their state or region. For example, the New England strategy will include a focus on procurement campaigns in hospitals and schools, developing a coordinated response to EPA's dioxin reassessment when it is released, a media plan, and creating market demand for chlorine-free paper products.

SUPPORTING LOCAL CAMPAIGNS

CCHW is using *Dying from Dioxin* as a tool for public education, outreach, and coalition building and constituency expansion. CCHW launched a national book and organizing tour in September 1995 to promote *Dying from Dioxin* and nurture community efforts to stop dioxin exposure. CCHW's executive director and organizing director have made over 90 stops since then, including countless media interviews as well as visits to incinerators, a battery plant, hazardous waste storage facilities, an oil refinery, the site of a train derailment, press conferences, protests, rallies, university classes, book signings, community meetings and strategy sessions with grassroots leaders. We have generated hundreds of media reports on dioxin in the 24 states and two foreign countries we have visited.

In addition, scientists, organizers and researchers at CCHW have responded to hundreds of requests for assistance during the past two years from grassroots groups and individuals asking how dioxin emissions in their community are affecting them and how to stop those emissions.

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COLLABORATING AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

CCHW played a significant role on the 23-member organizing committee for the Third Citizen's Conference on Dioxin in Baton Rouge in March 1996. Nearly 600 activists attended the three-day event which resulted in nine intertwined campaigns (each with its own goals and organizing strategies) to: get chlorine out of paper, get organochlorines out of manufacturing and cleaning, stop all forms of incineration, phase out all uses of PVC, create a scientific/medical SWAT team to help communities, build a health movement to address dioxin, get dioxin out of food, develop tools to help poisoned communities, and communicate dioxin issues to the public and media.

CCHW has since initiated and coordinated the efforts of the nine ongoing working groups formed at the conference, and two additional ones formed since, to turn their strategies into a workbook that communities and regional coalitions can use to prioritize their own stop dioxin exposure campaigns. We edited the manuscripts, wrote pieces ourselves, and are working with designers and printers in order to get the workbook into the hands of activists nationwide in August.

We are supporting the national dioxin steering committee, on which each working group is represented, by coordinating monthly conference calls, electronic bulletin boards, printed updates, and the reminders needed to keep schedules on track and reach project goals. We also encourage the participation of local and regional coalitions in the efforts of the national working groups to better coordinate regional strategies with national ones. The steering committee's current priority is to organize strong public participation in the eleven public policy hearings EPA is planning to hold this fall around the release of the final Dioxin Reassessment Report.

In addition, CCHW has pursued additional strategies related to the Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign's overall goals. For example, CCHW is discussing and seeking sign-ons to our national stop dioxin exposure campaign among many national membership networks, including the Vietnam Veterans of America, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Endometriosis Association, breast cancer and women's health groups, and the Oil Chemical Atomic Workers Union.

CCHW has also taken on a leadership role in a new nationwide collaborative campaign focusing on one of the principle sources of dioxin emissions. In September, 1996, representatives from 35 organizations met to develop a nationwide collaborative campaign to eliminate pollution in health care practices without compromising safety or care. Efforts will focus on eliminating non-essential medical waste incineration and phasing out the use of PVC plastics and mercury in health care institutions through the advocacy of local and national constituencies and through legal and policy channels. CCHW was chosen to share the role of secretariat of the new Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) campaign with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

To date, HCWH participants (now numbering 40) have written, produced and distributed more than 600 educational packets. These packets were partly used to recruit 108 local and national organizations to participate in HCWH's inaugural public event, the joint release, in March 1997, of national and state-specific reports on medical waste incineration written by the Environmental

Working Group (EWG). We also used these packets to begin educating various national constituencies such as trade unions, health associations, environmental grantmakers, and World Bank lenders funding medical waste incinerators in developing countries.

In addition, HCWH participants have successfully encouraged the American Public Health Association to adopt a resolution on prevention of dioxin generation from PVC plastics used by health care facilities; brought together leaders from the nursing profession for a weekend summit on creating environmentally sustainable health care practices; and organized Grand Round lectures on endocrine disrupting chemicals in four New Mexico hospitals.

We are currently using the March release of the EWG report to advocate for strong air emission regulations, the Maximum Achievable Control Technology or MACT regulations, for medical waste incinerators. These rules are scheduled to be released by the U.S. EPA in late July. Our coalition is pressing for regulations that stress source reduction, not just requiring incinerators to use better pollution control technology.

At a training event in early June 1997, HCWH provided local campaign participants with the tools they need to "adopt a hospital," approaching hospital waste and procurement managers and ethics committees with a three-part strategy for alternative materials use, reuse and recycling. The 40 participants trained are now building local coalitions and planning to hold their own training events. CCHW will fund some of their local efforts through a mini-grants program funded by the Turner Foundation.

On other fronts, we're working with people from all around the country to try to get the most protective pulp and paper regulations possible, working to counter industry claims that such rules will spark immediate mill closings. CCHW co-sponsored the March 1997 conference on "Clean Paper Making Techniques for the 21st Century" in Green Bay, Wisconsin, organized by the Oneida Nation. Lois Gibbs gave the closing plenary and other CCHW facilitated a group discussion on collaborative strategies. We also continue to work closely with activists in Maine who are pushing for state legislation requiring mills to move toward chlorine free technology, and testified there at a public hearing on this issue, in April.

IMPACT

As a result of CCHW's Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign, we are seeing movements on a number of fronts. The paper and pulp industry is taking a serious look at moving to "elemental chlorine free" technology, using chlorine dioxide rather than elemental chlorine as a bleaching agent, which would significantly reduce, but not eliminate dioxin emissions. This concession does not go far enough, but it is at least a move in the right direction. The likelihood of this imminent shift is evidenced by statements made at the Green Bay, Wisconsin conference, industry ads seen recently in print media, and statements in a New York Times article in May.

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In September 1996 the EPA issued its policy paper on protecting children's health from environmental threats, and the President issued an executive order in April 1997 on protecting children from environmental health risks. This important recognition of children's special vulnerability to endocrine disrupting chemicals may never have come without the pressure brought to bear by dioxin and environmental health advocates.

At the local level, community organizing around dioxin has led to some significant victories including the relocation of all 358 households in Pensacola, Florida which served as EPA's test case to determine future relocation policy for dioxin-contaminated sites. Numerous dioxin-emitting facilities have been blocked or closed down through the efforts of local activists supported by CCHW's technical and organizing assistance. Every solid waste incinerator in Ohio has now been closed down, and an Ohio coalition beat back a permit for what would have been the country's largest pulp and paper mill. CCHW has helped local activists in many locations beat back or shut down incinerators, sewage sludge plants or paper and pulp mills including Cottonwood, AZ, Bradley Junction, FL, Kapolei, HI, Summit, IL, Fort Leonard, MO, Clancy, MT, Newark, NJ, Green Island, NY, Coolville, OH, Newell, SD, Marshall, TX, Arlington, VA, Huntington, WV, and West Lincoln, Ontario, Canada.

PLANNING FUTURE ACTIVITIES

CCHW plans to continue its Stop Dioxin Exposure Campaign over the next several years. We will organize regional roundtables in each of the ten EPA regions to reach agreement on the policies grassroots groups would like to recommend to EPA prior to the formal public hearings on the Reassessment Report. We will also organize public participation at each of the formal public hearings, and continue educating and mobilizing our grassroots constituency to close down the biggest sources of dioxin emissions. We will also plan on updating *Dying from Dioxin* to include findings from the rapidly growing scientific literature published in the past 2 years.

REFERENCES/RESOURCES

Dying from Dioxin, A Citizens Guide to Reclaiming Our Health and Rebuilding Democracy, Lois Gibbs and the staff at CCHW, South End Press, 1995.

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