



## The New Jersey Work Environment Council 25 Years of United Action

*New Jersey's statewide blue-green alliance, the Work Environment Council, has accomplished perhaps more than any of the other partnerships between blues and greens. - Professor Brian Mayer, in his book, **Blue-Green Coalitions: Fighting for Safe Workplaces and Healthy Communities (2009)***

For 25 years, volunteers, supporters, and staff have made WEC the nation's longest standing state labor/environmental coalition dedicated to winning safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment.

Leaders of the NJ Industrial Union Council (AFL-CIO) and the NJ Right to Know Coalition, which won the nation's strongest state chemical right to know law in 1983, formed WEC in 1986. In 1999, WEC became a membership coalition that now includes 70 member organizations. WEC is also the New Jersey affiliate of the BlueGreen Alliance, a partnership of 11 national unions and four environmental groups.

### **Working with our partners, WEC has:**

- **Won the strongest policies in the nation** to ensure indoor air quality in our schools and public workplaces and for safety and security at facilities using highly hazard chemicals. Now we are successfully fighting back against politicians and their Wall Street and corporate financiers who are attacking our basic workplace and community safeguards.
- **Trained thousands of workers and neighbors** on their right to know about chemical dangers, getting an effective OSHA or PEOSH inspection, preventing health care hazards (such as violence and lifting injuries) and disastrous chemical plant explosions, and ensuring indoor air quality. We sponsored the nation's first joint labor-environmental workshops to address climate change and "green chemistry".
- **Provided campaign and technical consulting assistance** to hundreds of unions and/or community organizations facing serious workplace and environmental hazards, from asbestos demolition to Zimek Corporation's toxic misting process.
- **Alerted the public through the media to critical safety and health concerns**, such as childhood exposure to toxic substances and the consequences of chemical accidents. WEC alerted the *Trenton Times* to asbestos dangers from an abandoned WR Grace plant, prompting dozens of articles. Last fall, the Newark *Star Ledger* and Bergen *Record* featured four WEC opinion columns on why we must strengthen, not weaken, safeguards.
- **Issued essential publications on workplace and environmental issues.** WEC factsheets address an array of hazards and strategies to prevent them, from artificial turf to chemical exposures. Our bimonthly newsletter, *WEC@WORK*, reaches 2,000+ labor and public interest leaders statewide. Sixty WEC written columns in the NJ Education Association *Reporter* reach 200,000 teachers and school staff every month.
- **Started or helped support other much-needed organizations**, such as the NJ Environmental Justice Alliance and New Labor, an immigrant workers' center.

## Some Public Policy Accomplishments by WEC and Partners

- **Won**, with NJPIRG, *NJ's Pollution Prevention Act* (1991). NJ is one of two states in the nation to track the use of toxic chemicals, as well as emissions.
- **Won** occupational health training provisions in the *NJ Workforce Development Act* (1992) and mandatory worker training on chemical hazard identification and security (2006).
- **Won** *NJ Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act* amendments (1984, 1995) and millions of dollars of federal matching funds for the State PEOSH program.
- **Won** Republican support in order to fund the US Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board established in 1990 (1997).
- **Won** *NJ Conscientious Employees Protection Act* amendments, which encourage workers to act to prevent hazards and pollution, without fear of retaliation (1986, 2004).
- **Won** NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP) regulations to prevent "runaway" reactive chemical hazards (2003).
- **Won** Executive Order on Environmental Justice establishing the Environmental Justice Advisory Council to NJ DEP (2004).
- **Won**, with NJ Environmental Justice Alliance, a state law to reduce diesel emissions from school buses, garbage trucks, and other public vehicles (2005).
- **Won**, with Communications Workers of America and other public employee unions, improvements to PEOSH Indoor Air Quality standard, including that management must repair water intrusion within 48 hours (2007).
- **Won** NJ DEP regulations for using safer chemicals and processing methods. NJ is the only state with such policies (2005, 2008).
- **Won** NJ DEP Administrative Orders enabling worker and union participation during inspections of high hazard chemical facilities under the *Toxic Catastrophe Prevention Act* and *Spill Prevention Act* (2005, 2007).
- **Won**, a policy of the US Environmental Protection Agency to fulfill worker and union inspection participation provisions of the *Clean Air Act*, Section 112(R), covering agency inspections at 13,000 high hazard facilities across the US (2011).
- **Won**, with Health Professionals and Allied Employees and other health care unions, NJ Department of Health rules implementing laws to prevent violence and promote safe patient lifting in hospitals and nursing homes (2011).

### In addition, we have...

- **Defeated** multiple attacks on New Jersey's 1983 *Worker & Community (chemical) Right to Know Act*, the leading precedent for the national *Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act* and OSHA *Hazard Communication Standard*.
- **Defeated** attacks on the *NJ Open Public Records Act* designed to encourage corporations to hide dangers (2005) and blocked legislation to turn workers, residents, and reporters into criminals if they monitored toxic releases (2006).
- **Blocked** bipartisan legislation (S2486/S1986) that would stop NJ safeguards from exceeding weak federal standards, unless legislators first approved every detail (2011).