



WEC@WORK

News from the NJ Work Environment Council

May/June 2011

Safe, Secure Jobs
and a Healthy,
Sustainable
Environment

Save the Date!

WEC's Annual
Awards
Celebration

Friday
November 18,
2011

Rutgers
University Labor
Education Center

Why Unions Matter to Everyone!

Do attacks on union members by Wall Street, CEOs, Governor Christie, and some Democratic politicians matter to anyone who doesn't belong to a union?

Actually, yes. Certainly if you care about clean air and water, healthy communities, and climate change.

Governor Christie Joins the Attacks

Christie has joined the governors of Wisconsin and Ohio in trying to take away workers' right to negotiate over working conditions.

His first step: asking the legislature to take away the state employees' right to negotiate over health care costs. If he gets that foot in the door, then he can move to abolish the workers' right to negotiate over any issue, including job safety, health, and environmental conditions that affect the public.

State workers opened this year's negotiations to replace their contract – which expires June 30 – with a proposal to cut health care costs by 20%, but to do it fairly by protecting care for lower wage workers, using more generic drugs, and so on. Christie wants the legislature to simply impose changes instead, with no voice for affected workers.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress have proposed a to cut staff time by 44% at the National Labor Relations Board, the agency that is supposed to protect rights to form a union.

Union Members Protect Us All

Union members can challenge polluters.

Backed by their union and rights, members can speak up when companies endanger the public and the environ-

ment. Union members negotiate safety and health protections for themselves *and* the public, preventing toxic releases in chemical plants, ensuring proper handling of blood in hospitals and during Red Cross blood drives, and eliminating unsafe cleaning chemicals in our schools.

Union members vote for pro-environment candidates.

To take an example from the 2010 elections, only 31 percent of *non-union* white voters without a college degree voted for the more pro-environment candidate for Congress, yet 55 percent of white *union* members without a college degree voted for the pro-environment candidate. Union members vote differently than their counterparts because they receive the facts about candidates from their unions and are less easily divided by ad campaigns on “wedge” issues.

Union members are key allies for pro-environment policies.



WEC Staff, Rallying for workers' rights on June 16th in Trenton.

“Union members' support was essential in creating EPA, OSHA, and New Jersey's Right to Know law,” said Jeff Tittel, Director of the NJ Sierra Club. Nationally, 10 major unions joined with four national environmental organizations to form the BlueGreen Alliance to fight for green jobs and climate change legislation. **Union members do vital environmental work.**

Unionized workers attacked by Christie include staff at the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection, whose budget has been cut by one-third in three years.

“Union members are leaders in fighting for environmental protections for workers and communities. We need strong unions to ensure a healthy environment,” said Reverend Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of GreenFaith.

That's why stopping big corporations and the politicians that do their bidding from wiping out unions is important to all of us.

DuPont Settles PFOA Lawsuit

A preliminary \$8.3 million settlement has been reached in a class action lawsuit brought by Salem County residents against the DuPont Chambers Works plant after the company tainted local drinking water with perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). PFOA, labeled a "likely carcinogen" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was used for years by DuPont to make compounds for non-stick surfaces such as Teflon. Approval of the settlement will release DuPont from liability without an admission of wrongdoing.

There is no federal or New Jersey regulatory limit for PFOA in drinking water, the EPA has a provisional health advisory of 0.4 parts per billion (ppb) and New Jersey has established a preliminary guidance value of 0.04 ppb. New Jersey established its stricter value after a campaign by WEC, United Steelworkers (USW) Local 4-943, representing workers at DuPont, local residents, the NJ Environmental Federation, and Delaware Riverkeeper to ban the use of PFOA. DuPont has claimed to stop using PFOA at the Chambers Works facility, but according to the union, they have simply reformulated the chemical.

"We still don't know the effects of the new formula on workers, the community and the environment," said Steve Smeregla, acting president of USW 4-943. "DuPont is requiring monthly blood tests on our members, and we plan to continue to monitor the results."

The funds from the settlement will be used to provide water filters for each household with a private well within a two-mile radius of the plant where PFOA has been found or to any household that was a customer of the Penns Grove Water Supply Co. at the time the lawsuit was filed. WEC recently learned the filters being provided to the residents are made by a company recently purchased by DuPont.

And the Hypocrisy Award Goes To ...

Reversing almost 20 years of good policy, Governor Christie's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recently gutted their Alternative Workweek Program (AWP) which encouraged its employees to compress workweeks, limit commuting, and extend daily office hours. AWP did not curtail weekly work hours, but flexed them to reduce commuting, vehicle use, energy consumption, and air emissions. The program had been successful, with 1,500 employees practicing what DEP preaches, lowering its staff carbon footprint. According to CWA Local 1036 President and WEC Board member Adam Liebttag, whose union represents most DEP staff, "We reasoned with management, filed grievances, held protests, appealed at the Civil Service Commission, got 1,200 petition signatures, brought in experts, and filed a lawsuit. That's the short list. We're fighting this every step of the way."

New Poster on Public Employees OSHA

Based on recommendations by WEC's Consulting Industrial Hygienist Eileen Senn, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development has overhauled and redesigned its poster on employee rights and employer obligations under the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act. This poster must, by law, be prominently posted at all public sector work sites. Previously, the poster left out

important worker rights and its design did not encourage anyone to read it. To see the new poster, go to http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/forms_pdfs/lsse/wps35.pdf

BlueGreen and Apollo Alliances Merge

With 24 million Americans still out of work or unable to find full-time work, the BlueGreen Alliance and Apollo Alliance have announced a merger to strengthen and unify the movement to build a good jobs economy fueled by a clean energy future. The merged organization will focus anew on creating good jobs, securing America's energy future and preserving the environment for future generations. Beginning July 1, the two organizations will combine in the BlueGreen Alliance (BGA), which will be home to the Apollo Alliance project. Together, they will engage labor, environmental, business and community leaders across the country to create good jobs and rebuild our economy. WEC is BGA's New Jersey state affiliate.

BGA is a national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations working to expand the number and quality of jobs in the green economy. Launched in 2006 by the United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club, BGA now unites 10 U.S. labor unions and four of America's most influential environmental organizations - and their 14 million members and supporters - in pursuit of good jobs, a clean environment and a 21st century economy.

As the attacks on middle class continue, WEC continues to unite unions and communities to protect important worker and environmental safeguards that provide good jobs and a clean and healthy environment.

Support WEC with a tax-deductible contribution today to help us continue the fight. Please consider giving a special donation through our website at www.njwec.org. Thank you!

• • •

Back issues of *WEC@WORK* are available at www.njwec.org. Rick Engler & Denise Patel, Editors. WEC is an alliance of 70 labor, environmental and community organizations working together for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. WEC Staff: Rick Engler, Director; Debra Coyle McFadden, Assistant Director; Cecelia Leto, Project Coordinator; Denise Patel, Campaign Organizer. Staff are members of USW or CWA.

CWA Local 38010/USW 4-149