



WEC@WORK

News from the NJ Work Environment Council

Nov/Dec 2011

Celebrating 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 organizations.

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 hazardous chemicals.
- **Trained thousands of workers and neighbors** on their right to know about chemical dangers, getting an effective OSHA or PEOSH inspection, and preventing health care hazards and disastrous chemical plant explosions. 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 community organizations facing serious workplace and environmental hazards.
- **Through the media, alerted the public to critical safety and health concerns**, such as asbestos dangers from an abandoned WR Grace plant, prompting dozens of articles in

the *Trenton Times*. This fall, the *Newark Star Ledger* and *Bergen Record* featured four WEC opinion columns on why we must strengthen, not weaken, safeguards.

- **Issued publications on workplace and environmental issues.** WEC factsheets address an array of hazards and strategies from artificial turf to chemical exposures. Our newsletter, *WEC@WORK*, reaches 2,000+ labor and public interest leaders statewide. WEC authored columns in the NJ Education Association *Reporter* reach 200,000 teachers and school staff every month.

Some Public Policy Accomplishments by WEC & Our 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 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 NJ Conscientious Employees Protection Act** amendments, which encourage workers to act to prevent hazards and pollution, without fear of retaliation (1986, 2004).
- **Won Executive Order on Environmental Justice** establishing the Environmental Justice Advisory Council to NJ DEP (2004), and with the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance, a state law to reduce diesel emissions from school buses and other public vehicles (2005).
- **Won NJ DEP regulations for**

using safer chemicals and processing methods at high hazard chemical facilities. 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), and a similar policy by the US Environmental Protection Agency under 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).
- **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 stopped legislation to turn workers, residents, and reporters into criminals if they monitored toxic releases (2006).
- **Blocked** (to date) bipartisan legislation (S2486/S1986) that would stop NJ safeguards from exceeding weak federal standards, unless legislators first approved every detail (2011).

Safe, Secure Jobs
and a Healthy,
Sustainable
Environment

Thank you to
all of WEC's
members &
supporters
for 25 great
years!

Please
consider
giving a year
end tax-
deductible
donation to
WEC so we
can continue
to work to
move NJ
Forward,
Not Back!

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WEC Awards Reception a Success!

On November 18, WEC held our 10th Annual Awards Reception with nearly 200 people attending. We honored six wonderful recipients, and marked a quarter century of uniting labor unions and environmental and community organizations for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. At the event, WEC honored EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, Congressman Frank Pallone, Bonnie Anderson a mesothelioma awareness advocate, Pete Guzzo of TTP Communications, Deborah Ehling of PEMSA-NJ, and Ed Rodgers, formerly of NJN News.

Special thanks to NJEA, SEIU 1199, Levy, Phillips & Konigsberg, LLP, USW District 4, LIUNA! Eastern Region, HPAE, AFT NJ, IBT 877, and Rutgers LEARN for sponsoring the event.

WEC's Annual Meeting Focuses on Schools

WEC members and supporters gathered at NJEA for our annual meeting to discuss how to create jobs and healthy learning environments for children in New Jersey's public schools. Les Leopold of the Labor Institute kicked off the meeting with a presentation, "What's Next for Occupy?" highlighting the economic imbalance in our country. Representatives from WEC, LIUNA, Statewide Education Organizing Committee, Education Law Center and BlueGreen Alliance high-lighted the reasons why New Jersey's schools are crumbling, how it impacts students, teachers and school staff, and what is being done to address the problem. The lively dialogue at the meeting among key organizations working on school facility issues led to commitments to plan next steps together. WEC will convene a meeting to discuss an action plan early next year.

COSH Conference

Over 200 representatives of unions, workers' centers, COSH groups, international unions, national advocacy organizations, public health professionals, and family members of victims gathered together for the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH) Worker Health and Safety Training Conference and Summit, Oct 28-29, outside Baltimore. WEC staff led two health and safety workshops at the conference, participated in a plenary, and helped

honor WEC President John Pajak for his work to help establish a national policy to involve workers in environmental inspections at high hazard facilities.

The conference featured 29 workshops, several panel presentations, and talks by some of the leading figures in the Occupational Safety and Health movement, including United Mine-workers President Cecil Roberts; outgoing President of the American Public Health Association Linda Rae Murray; Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor Jordan Barab; and the OSH Directors of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, Peg Seminario and Eric Frumin.

OSHA Announces Chemical Sector NEP

On November 30, 2011, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) announced a new National Emphasis Program (NEP) for chemical facilities covered by OSHA's process safety management (PSM) standard which protects workers from catastrophic releases of highly hazardous chemicals. The inspection process includes detailed questions designed to gather facts related to PSM requirements and verification that employers' written and implemented PSM programs are consistent. Inspections will take place at randomly selected facilities likely to be covered by the standard.

WEC can provide *free* training to help prepare you and your union for a PSM inspection. WEC's training curriculum covers key aspects of the PSM standard to help workers learn the health and safety hazards of working at PSM covered sites. All material is OSHA-approved under a Susan Harwood training grant.

For more information contact Denise Patel at (609) 695-7100, ext. 305 or by email at dpatel@njwec.org.

Panel Finds Health Risk of PFOA

Workers at the DuPont Chambers Works facility in Salem County, represented by USW Local 4-943, with WEC and local community groups, fought DuPont to eliminate the use of per-fluorooctanoate acid (PFOA) after the chemical was found in drinking water sources near the plant.

Now, a team of scientists has found a "probable link" between PFOA and high blood pressure among pregnant women in West Virginia. No link between exposure to the chemical and other reproductive effects, including low birth weight, miscarriage and birth defects has been found.

Members of the science panel issued the findings, the first major conclusions of a six-year study. In West Virginia, DuPont has used PFOA since the 1950s as a processing agent to make Teflon and other nonstick products, oil-resistant paper packaging and stain-resistant textiles. The science panel was created by court order as the result of a settlement to a community lawsuit filed against DuPont.

If they conclude there is a link, DuPont may have to pay up to \$235 million for future medical monitoring for area residents. DuPont has already agreed to provide water filters to homeowners closest to the New Jersey plant.

WEC in the News!

In the past few months, several New Jersey newspapers have featured editorials by WEC leaders to set the record straight on so-called "job-killing regulations", Wall Street's gambling with our economy, and how we can fix our crumbling schools. Go to www.njwec.org to see the featured editorials.

Thanks to all of our members and supporters for making our 25th year a success! With your help, WEC will continue to bring together labor and environmentalists to fight for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment for the next 25 years.

Please consider giving a special year-end donation to show your support for WEC. All contributions to WEC are tax-deductible in accordance with the law! Donate now through our secure website at www.njwec.org.

Information filed with the Attorney General concerning this charitable solicitation may be obtained from the Attorney General of the State of New Jersey by calling (973) 504-6215. Registration with the Attorney General does not imply endorsement.

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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, Project Coordinator. Staff are members of USW or CWA.