



WEC@WORK

News from the NJ Work Environment Council

January 2010

Safe, Secure Jobs
and a Healthy,
Sustainable
Environment

2009 YEAR IN REVIEW

Despite the worst economy since the Great Depression, a huge state budget deficit, and adamant corporate and bureaucratic opposition, WEC advanced worker and environmental protection during 2009. This review highlights some of our 2009 accomplishments for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment, all made possible with your support. To learn more about our programs, leadership, annual honorees, financial supporters, and how you can become involved and support our work, please visit our website at www.njwec.org.

Advancing National Policies

Victories in WEC's *Safety and Security First!* campaign in New Jersey laid the groundwork to advance national chemical security policy, giving workers a greater voice to address health, safety and security issues. WEC helped win passage by the U.S. House of Representatives of *The Chemical and Water Security Act of 2009*. Its provisions on inherently safer technology and worker participation were modeled on New Jersey's precedent-setting policies. At WEC's request, working with the Steelworkers, Auto Workers, and others, Congressman Frank Pallone (D-6) successfully amended the legislation to enable workers and their union representatives to accompany Department of Homeland Security and Environmental Protection Agency inspectors to help point out toxic risks. Action is now pending by the U.S. Senate.

In addition, WEC coordinated 106 labor, environmental, and health organizations to sign on to a letter to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson urging



her to adopt EPA inspection policies to engage workers and their unions during inspections. Among signing organizations were the national AFL-CIO, Change to Win, 21 national labor organizations, and 14 national environmental organizations. We are very pleased with this broad level of support, coordinated with the Blue Green Alliance. View the letter, at www.njwec.org.

WEC also lobbied Congress for the *Employee Free Choice Act*, a top priority for the labor movement. Senators Lautenberg and Menendez and 10 of the 13 House members now sponsor the legislation. WEC member environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club and NJ Environmental Federation, were part of this effort. Having more workers who are union members is essential for winning campaigns to protect our jobs, environment, and safety. We also laid groundwork in our state for efforts to help reform the *Toxic Substances Control Act* and the *Occupational Safety and Health Act*.

Despite tough economic challenges, WEC had some great victories for jobs and the environment in 2009.

To help ensure that we can continue to work for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment in 2010, we ask you to make a special contribution to help kick off the new year.

Moreover, we are planning action to help tackle the big challenges, like reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act. Stay tuned.

So, please take a moment to make a secure online donation at www.njwec.org.

Preventing Toxic Disasters

WEC advocacy helped win improved NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulations for industrial facilities to implement the NJ *Toxic Catastrophe Prevention Act*, enacted 25 years ago after the Bhopal, India disaster that killed many thousands. Advances include: better regulation of reactive chemical hazards; improved hazard reviews by oil refineries; incidents must, for the first time, be reported to DEP that could *potentially* cause a catastrophe; management must justify not promptly correcting maintenance problems; increased fines for firms that fail to register with DEP; and plant management must assess the adequacy of their notice to the public during a toxic emergency. Employers must comply by March 2010.



Environmental Justice

WEC advocacy won continuation of New Jersey's Environmental Justice Executive Order by Governor Jon S. Corzine. Without this action, the Executive Order would have expired and the state's Environmental Justice Advisory Council would no longer exist. In addition, WEC catalyzed issuance of the Council's March 2009 report, *Strategies for Addressing Cumulative Impacts in Environmental Justice Communities*, focusing on actual health impacts, instead of misleading risk calculations. The report provides arguments for stronger environmental justice policies.

Healthy Schools

WEC strengthened our long-standing partnership with the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), the state's largest labor union. WEC provides technical assistance, training, and organizational consultation to NJEA. To learn about the healthy school issues that NJEA addresses, go to the issues section of www.njea.org. Monthly health and safety columns in the *NJEA Reporter*, written by WEC, reach more than 200,000 teachers and school staff.

In a notable victory for teachers, staff, and students, the Howell Township Education Association, working with WEC, prevented the Howell Township Public Schools from fogging classrooms and school buses with disinfectant pesticides to kill H1N1 ("swine flu") virus. Fogging could have put 7,000 K-8 students and staff in twelve elementary and middle schools at risk of chemical triggered irritation, sensitization, and asthma attacks. The district was the nation's first to buy three Zimek Micro Mist Room/Vehicle Decontamination Systems, at a cost of \$132,000. However, this use of the chemical would violate the *Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act*. Staff and students would have been exposed to disinfectant residues because particles adhere to surfaces such as books and upholstery, as well as intended surfaces - doorknobs and desks. This victory was accomplished through membership education and mobilization, media attention, along with WEC's assistance. In addition, WEC filed a complaint with DEP, leading to the salesman for Safe Air, Zimek's distributor, receiving a Notice of Violation for making false claims of safety. Moreover, as a result, in part, of pressure from WEC concerning the machines, U.S. EPA issued an email alert to 42,000 recipients warning of vendors who market ineffective and unregistered

ed products or services that claim to disinfect surfaces or entire rooms against the H1N1 influenza virus.

Training for Safer Jobs

As New Jersey's affiliate of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH), WEC helped lead efforts for safe and healthy workplaces through training. In 2009, we reached more than 1,000 workers through training on OSHA's Process Safety Management rule; health care hazards through our *Safe Work, Safe Care* curriculum; and basic OSHA rights. WEC also shared our training methods and curriculum with COSH groups nationwide.

Six New Jersey nursing homes took specific steps to prevent workplace violence after union and management representatives participated in WEC's *Safe Work, Safe Care* training. For example, in several nursing homes, employees did not lock all of the doors each night because the doors were used after hours. After hearing employee concerns about this problem expressed through an employee safety and security survey, management solved the problem by installing keyless entry devices. Facilities also revised workplace violence policies and procedures.

Green Jobs

WEC coordinated four "Green Jobs Forums" engaging 40 groups of diverse constituencies including management, labor, environmentalists and public officials to discuss key issues and potential common ground as we transition to a green economy. We are now planning follow-up steps.

WEC became the first independent state affiliate of the Blue Green Alliance. Launched in 2006 by the United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club, this national labor-environmental collaboration has grown to include the Communications Workers of America (CWA), Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA), Amalgamated Transit Workers (ATU), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The Blue Green Alliance unites eight million people in pursuit of good jobs, a clean environment, and a green economy.



Corzine's Legacy of Missed Opportunities

WEC also faced our share of 2009 disappointments, particularly concerning state policy. Governor Corzine, despite enacting precedent setting chemical safety and security reforms earlier in his term, failed to implement WEC recommendations to support growth of green manufacturing jobs, restore public access to the state's chemical "right to know" website, promote community oversight of the most toxic industrial facilities, further regulate diesel emissions or block privatization of DEP's failed hazardous site remediation program. Corzine's Health Department missed deadlines to issue required regulations on safe lifting and workplace violence to protect health care workers. After his election loss, he conditionally vetoed the *Jobs, Trade, and Democracy Act*, effectively gutting it. The bill would have given the legislature and the public capacity to monitor and influence trade agreements that affect both New Jersey's jobs and environment.

Looking Ahead

While US Attorney, our new Governor, Chris Christie imprisoned corporate criminals for violating worker and environmental protection laws. Yet, during his campaign, he pledged to freeze new regulations and take similar steps that potentially could endanger worker and public health. While we plan to reach out to Governor Christie to see what cooperation is possible, we are likely to face some big challenges in the next four years.

• • •

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 Gilligan Leto, Project Coordinator; Denise Patel, Campaign Organizer. Staff are members of USW or CWA.

CWA Local 38010/USW 4-149