



WEC@WORK

News from the NJ Work Environment Council

October 2009

Safe, Secure Jobs
and a Healthy,
Sustainable
Environment

WEC's Annual
Awards Reception

Friday
November 20, 2009
7 pm

Rutgers Labor
Education Center,
New Brunswick

We are proud to
announce our
2009 Honorees:

Joyce Powell,
Past President,
New Jersey
Education Association

David Foster,
Executive Director,
Blue Green Alliance

Jeff Tittel,
Director,
Sierra Club,
New Jersey Chapter

Michelle DePass,
Assistant
Administrator,
Environmental
Protection Agency

To purchase tickets,
go to www.njwec.org

Education Association Stops Pesticide Fogging

In a victory for teachers, staff, and students, the Howell Township Education Association (HTEA) prevented the Howell Township Public Schools in Monmouth County from fogging classrooms and school buses with quaternary ammonium (quat) disinfectant pesticides to kill the H1N1 ("swine flu") virus. The proposed fogging could have put 7,000 K-8 students and staff in twelve elementary and middle schools at risk of quat triggered irritation, sensitization, and asthma attacks.

To accomplish this, HTEA worked with the NJ Education Association (NJEA), their parent organization, WEC and NJ Environmental Federation (for their expertise on pesticides).

In August, the district was the first in the nation to purchase three Zimek Micro Mist Room and Vehicle Decontamination Systems. The systems consist of an aerosol generator that creates dry, negatively charged particles of less than one micron in diameter of an anti-microbial pesticide and a HEPA filtering unit to remove airborne residue from the application area. The cost - \$132,000. However, their use would have violated the *Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA)*.

If fogging had occurred, staff and students would have been exposed to disinfectant residues because the micro particles adhere to surfaces such as books, papers, upholstery, carpeting, stuffed animals, cardboard, as well as intended surfaces such as doorknobs and desks.

HTEA members attended school board meetings where the equipment purchase was debated and sounded a warning when the decision was made. HTEA President Bill O'Brien then called a meeting of staff



members representing different jobs in the school where WEC Industrial Hygienist Adrienne Markowitz explained the hazards of fogging quats and strategies to stop it. Markowitz and Eileen Levine, a representative of the local association, who is also a concerned parent, subsequently attended the meeting Zimek had with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region II. At that meeting, EPA told Zimek to stop using the quats since it was an illegal use. EPA also referred the case for enforcement to EPA Region IV that covers Zimek Technologies' home office in Tampa, FL.

WEC industrial hygienists concluded that the proposed fogging was not only dangerous but also unnecessary, since the government recommends hand-washing, routine cleaning, early treatment, and keeping sick and high-risk staff and students' home. Schools are also urged to clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact. Additional disinfection is *not* recommended.

Unfortunately, selling these machines is lucrative and Zimek may determine another

way to sell their product. WEC has written EPA expressing our concern and will inform union and healthy school advocates. In addition, WEC filed a complaint with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection concerning safety claims by Safe Air, Zimek's NJ distributor.

Fortunately, thanks to HTEA and allies such as WEC, the school district has returned the devices and gotten their money back – and students, teachers, and students are safer.

If you know of a school district or other employer considering purchasing a Zimek or similar system, please contact Eileen Senn, WEC Industrial Hygiene Consultant, at eileensenn@gmail.com.

Resources on pandemic flu
AFL-CIO: www.aflcio.org/issues/safety/pandemic_influenza.cfm; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) at www.flu.gov or www.cdc.gov; or NJ Dept. of Health & Senior Services (DHSS) www.state.nj.us/health/flu/h1n1.shtml or by phone: NJ H1N1 Hotline, 1-866-321-9571, 7 days, 9am to 5pm.

Fed. Chemical Security Law Moves Ahead

The U.S. House of Representatives will soon vote on national chemical safety and security legislation that would set standards at thousands of industrial and water treatment plants. The *Chemical and Water Security Act of 2009 (H.R. 2868)* builds on an existing but temporary chemical security law set to expire at the end of October. President Obama is expected to sign a one-year extension for this 2007 law to allow Congress time to pass the permanent chemical security legislation.

WEC and Congressman Frank Pallone have been important players for federal chemical security reform. The new bill would require adoption of Inherently Safer Technology (IST) reviews at the 200 most dangerous facilities (where feasible and with other exceptions) and IST reviews for many other facilities. And, thanks to amendments offered by Congressman Pallone at the request of WEC and unions, the law would involve workers in Department of Homeland Security inspections. Both provisions were influenced by New Jersey's chemical security policies which were adopted as a result of WEC's Safety and Security First campaign.

Efforts to set strong national chemical security standards have been led by a coalition of labor and environmental groups, including Greenpeace, United Steelworkers, United Autoworkers, and US PIRG.

Why We Still Need RTK

The Bergen Record recently reported that more than 1,600 drums of toxic and potentially explosive and flammable chemicals abandoned in a Clifton warehouse and in onsite shipping containers had been removed a year after they were discovered. The \$1.7 million, seven-month EPA clean up at bankrupt Abrachem Chemical was conducted with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection.

Many of the containers had no labels or were mislabeled. EPA set up an onsite chemistry lab to determine the identity of chemicals in containers. In February, the building was evacuated when a drum of unknown chemicals was opened for sampling. Fumes escaped from the drums, causing the oxygen level in the building to drop and set off alarms. In another case, the Passaic County bomb squad had to use a robot to take samples.

This case reminds us why proper

labeling and the right to know about hazardous chemicals are essential.

News and Notes

OSHA PSM Grant Renewal

WEC has received a two-year Susan Harwood training grant renewal from OSHA to continue the *Preventing Chemical Accidents* training project. The training project targets workers in facilities covered by OSHA's Process Safety Management standard and links it to New Jersey's *Toxic Catastrophe Prevention Act*. Trainings are provided free of charge and can take place at your facility or in your union hall. To set up training, contact Denise Patel, WEC's PSM Training Coordinator at (609) 695-7100, ext 305. For more information on the training project and topics, go to www.njwec.org/PSM.cfm

Congratulations!

Valorie Caffee, WEC's Director of Organizing, and WEC Board Members, Rev. Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of GreenFaith and Kelly Francis, President of the Camden County NAACP, have been appointed to the NJ Environmental Justice Advisory Council for a second term. The council advises the DEP on environmental issues concerning low-income, minority, and often urban communities. The council includes representatives from faith-based, academic, health, environmental, civil rights, grassroots and business organizations. Unfortunately, no labor representatives were appointed

to the Council.

Valorie Caffee and Nicky Sheats will be honored at the annual GreenFaith Awards for their leadership of the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance. The Awards Ceremony will be held at the Reformed Church of Highland Park on Saturday, November 7th from 6 -9 pm. Join us in honoring Valorie and Nicky for all of their hard work! Go to: www.greenfaith.org for tickets and more information.

Beyond Toxics Conference Postponed

WEC's Beyond Toxics Conference scheduled for Saturday, November 14, 2009 has been postponed. However, we believe that too many people continue to be exposed to toxic chemicals on the job, at home and in the environment. Congress will soon weigh options for comprehensive chemicals policy through reform of the federal *Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)*. This national reform will have long-lasting effects on how we manufacture, use and are exposed to chemicals.

Please join us for WEC's Annual Membership Meeting where we will discuss the impacts TSCA reform will have on manufacturing jobs, reduce everyday chemical exposure and contribute to a more sustainable planet. The meeting will be held at NJEA in Trenton on Thursday, December 10th at 6:30 pm. You do not have to be a WEC member to participate in this meeting. Please join us! Donations are requested for dinner.

Calendar

Saturday, November 7 - 11th Annual CBTU Mini-Conference on Toxics, Thomas Edison State College, 101 West State Street, Trenton, 10 am - 2 pm, free admission. Contact Mujahid Majeed at (917) 579-0525 for more details.

Saturday, November 7 - GreenFaith's 4th Annual Awards Celebration, Reformed Church of Highland Park, 6 pm - 9 pm.

Saturday, November 7 - Worker Safety & Health National Summit sponsored by National COSH Network, AFSCME DC - 33 Bldg., 3001 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, 9 am - 5 pm. For more information, call Tom O'Connor at (919) 933-6322.

Friday, November 20 - WEC's Annual Awards Reception, Rutgers Labor Education Center, New Brunswick, 7 pm. For ticket information go to, www.njwec.org

Thursday, December 10 - WEC's Annual Membership Meeting, NJEA, 180 W. State St, Trenton, 6:30 pm.

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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; Valorie Caffee, Director of Organizing; Djenaba Figueroa, Office Manager; Cecelia Leto, Project Coordinator; Denise Patel, Campaign Organizer. Staff are members of USW or CWA.

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