



**Center for Health,
Environment & Justice**

*A Project of People's
Action Institute*

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

Mentoring a Movement,
Empowering People,
Preventing Harm

Photo by Gene J. Puskar

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This year's Annual Report is dedicated to Teresa Mills. Teresa was so much more than just an employee. She was the heart and soul of CHEJ's organizing work with grassroots community groups. No one was more dedicated or committed to helping grassroots leaders be successful than Teresa. She will be deeply missed.

A few words from some of the people Teresa worked with:

"I found out today about Ms. Mills passing. She was the most important person guiding us in our EJ challenges. Without her guidance, we would have never got our story on the local news or had any traction in requesting a Health Assessment from ATSDR, just to name a few. She is deeply missed and we can't even begin to thank her enough. She has set a good standard for all." – Grassroots leader from GA.

"Citizens for a Clean Wausau dedicates its work this year to Teresa Mills of CHEJ, in order to honor our very close friend and ally. Without the inspiration and tutelage of Teresa, Citizens for a Clean Wausau would simply never have existed."

"We salute her. She was and will remain a true working-class hero. And we in Gary will be forever indebted to her for her kindness and her immense knowledge of the struggle for environmental justice." – Grassroots leader from IN.

"We in Ohio who have been fighting our state and federal governments' permitting of poison and pollution for decades always looked to Teresa for leadership, data, strategy, fortitude, and humor. She will be SO missed. No one can fill her shoes." – Grassroots leader from OH.

"Teresa's commitment to empowering and mobilizing citizen activism through grassroots organizing is an inspiration. We were so thankful for her gracious spirit and enthusiastic support for our outreach and engagement efforts, which we were able to expand over the past year with the help of CHEJ's Small Grants Program. Her expertise and passion helped us grow our work to protect Minnesota's waters and human health from the threat of sulfide-ore mining. We are surely one of many organizations strengthened by her dedication." – Grassroots leader from MN.

INTRODUCTION

CHEJ is delighted to report that 2023 was another successful year for the organization and for many of the grassroots community-based groups that we serve. Our staff, volunteers, and most importantly, our leaders on the frontlines have continued to win local campaigns to stop polluters and protect their families.

Our work is all possible because of our donors and supporters. Without your support, we could not provide training to build leadership skills, facilitate strategic action plans, produce scientific analyses, or provide the much-needed resources to frontline grassroots communities through our small grants program and community organizing efforts.

This past year has been highly challenging for communities fighting for environmental justice. These challenges have especially been true for the residents of East Palestine, Ohio, the site of a horrific train derailment and the subsequent decision by Norfolk Southern to intentionally burn five tanker cars carrying vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals. CHEJ's Stephen Lester was invited there to participate in a Town Hall meeting shortly after the accident. CHEJ has been involved since, providing science and organizing support to the residents. The main focus of CHEJ's science work has been to help the residents understand the risks of exposure to dioxins released from the fire that resulted from burning the toxic chemicals on the tanker cars. The organizing work has focused on helping the residents form a local community-based group and develop a plan to achieve their goals.

A major focus this past year was to develop our Unequal Response Unequal Protection campaign further. We believe more must be done to protect communities exposed to toxic contamination. This past year, we targeted the difficult questions of interpreting toxic effects resulting from chemical exposures. Instead of trying to determine if health problems in a community were caused by specific exposures to toxic chemicals, we focused on an approach used by the federal government when considering adverse health effects suffered by veterans, active military, first responders, 9/11 victims, and others exposed to toxic chemicals.



Photo by Hunter Marion

In these situations, the US government recognized that critical scientific information linking exposures and health outcomes was impossible to evaluate, missing or incomplete, making it necessary to make “presumptions” about exposures leading to the health problems suffered by these groups. This recognition led to the government providing health care, treatment, compensation, and other assistance needed due to exposure to toxic substances suffered while serving our country. In communities where people have been exposed to toxic chemicals through no fault of their own, the government should extend a similar application of the presumptive approach. Our work on the No More Sacrifice Zones campaign is closely related to this effort, which also continued this past year.

In this report, you will read about the heart of our work with communities fighting to stop and clean up pollution. We include our many accomplishments and inspiring stories about the passion and commitment of several of the communities we work with. You will also read about the technical assistance we have provided to local community groups. Providing scientific and Technical Assistance to grassroots community-based organizations seeking to address environmental justice issues remains a priority for CHEJ.

This past year, we prioritized our Communications Outreach to ensure that we reach our constituents as effectively as possible. You will read about social media outreach, our backyard monthly initiative, our exciting User Experience survey project, and the launch of a new podcast. You will also read about the various Zoom training calls we provided (which saw attendance again increase over the previous year), about Toxic Tuesday (which provides information on the toxicity of individual chemicals and features on the challenges of interpreting toxic effects), and much more. Additionally, you will read about the work of the 38 organizations that we proudly supported with \$390,054 through the assistance of our donors and supporters as part of our Small Grants Program as we continue to build the base of the Environmental Health Movement.

Lastly, we close this report with a section dedicated to our roots at Love Canal. We always want to remember our beginnings and reflect on our yesterdays to build a bigger and stronger tomorrow.

COMMUNITY STORIES

SOBE Concerned Citizens, Youngstown, OH

It was early 2022 when people in Youngstown, OH, learned of plans by SOBE Energy Solutions to build a "chemical recycling" gasification plant in their community. CHEJ was there early and helped the residents form SOBE Concerned Citizens to oppose this facility. The company wanted to burn plastics, tires, auto fluff, and other waste under the guidance of chemical recycling. We helped the group prepare a list of questions to ask about the process and how it would impact the community. Our organizing staff worked closely with the group and helped them develop a plan to fight the company's proposal. The group's main concerns centered around the plant's emissions, including dioxins and heavy metals such as lead and mercury. SOBE Concerned Citizens had a significant win this past September when the Youngstown City Council unanimously passed a resolution opposing the Ohio EPA issuing a permit to SOBE. The group remains steadfast in its opposition to this plant.

Chapel Hill Organization, DeKalb County, GA

Six years ago, a handful of "everyday people" came together when they realized that what they were hearing from their elected officials didn't make any sense. These folks discovered that it wasn't just foul odors that they were smelling but also toxic chemicals in the air. They formed the Chapel Hill Organization to create a community of informed activists whose mission was "to inspire the community to revive our quality of life." A significant fight they took on was to address the foul odors at the Narvie J Harris Elementary School, where 22 teachers have died of cancer. The more research they did, the more they learned about the contamination impacting the school and how the government turned its back on the community. CHEJ has been working with the Chapel Hill Organization to help them understand the science and develop a plan of action to address the contamination in their community.

Ditch the Dump, Harrison, OH

CHEJ began working with this primarily woman-run grassroots group from Harrison, Ohio when they sought our help in developing a long-term strategy to fight an expansion of a local landfill. Over time, we learned that this landfill was only one of the many environmental

hazards that oversaturated a widely ignored township on the Indiana-Ohio border. The landfill is a former unlined Monsanto landfill filled with unknown waste, at one time considered for Superfund status, that was then sold to Rumpke, who is seeking an expansion permit. What is known about the waste is that it contains PCBs and that runoff is likely contaminating the nearby Whitewater River Wetlands and municipal groundwater.

CHEJ is currently helping Ditch the Dump formulate a strategy to target key stakeholders to address the PCB contamination. This strategy has included providing resources and expert opinions on how to secure documentation via EPCRA and FOIA, seeking EPA attention due to the polluting of a federally protected waterway (the Whitewater connects to the Ohio River), and wrestling the narrative away from Monsanto and Rumpke to propel their mission.



Photos by Hunter Marion



Texas Health and Environmental Alliance (THEA), TX

CHEJ has been supporting THEA to speed up the remediation efforts for several Superfund sites in Harris County, TX. THEA operates out of Houston, TX, which contains half of Texas's Superfund sites, many located on important city waterways. THEA has been increasingly advocating for the locals surrounding these sites, particularly the San Jacinto Waste Pits and the Jones Road Groundwater Plume sites, to the EPA, the Houston Port Authority, and the local government. CHEJ has been helping in this process by providing THEA with insight on coordinating amongst different population groups, environmental testing, and public comments.

In December, THEA hosted a weekend-long community meeting among its three primary affiliated communities. They invited CHEJ's Science Director, Stephen Lester, to be a keynote speaker for this series of meetings. During the meetings, Stephen presented critical learnings on properly using scientific data to fight for your community's health, as learned through over 40 years of working at CHEJ.

EAST PALESTINE TRAIN DERAILMENT

Unity Council of East Palestine, OH



Photo by Matthew Hatcher

East Palestine, Ohio, was the site of a horrific train derailment and the subsequent decision by Norfolk Southern to intentionally burn five tanker cars carrying vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals. CHEJ's Science Director and toxicologist, Stephen Lester, was invited to East Palestine to participate in a Town Hall meeting shortly after the accident. CHEJ has been involved since, providing science and organizing support to the residents. The main focus of CHEJ's science work has been to help the residents understand the risks of exposure to dioxins released from the fire that resulted from burning the toxic chemicals on the tanker cars. The organizing work has focused on helping the residents form a local community-based group and develop a plan to achieve their goals.

Residents in East Palestine continued to push EPA until the agency finally conceded to test for dioxins in soil. CHEJ reviewed hundreds of collected soil samples and prepared a Letter Report for the Unity Council for the East Palestine Train Derailment in October.

Based on the data provided by EPA, CHEJ found that it was not possible to tell 1) where dioxin contamination was or wasn't or 2) what the concentrations of dioxins were at a given location. This was because the EPA failed to disclose the actual location of any collected samples. This information is needed to independently determine the public health risks posed by the dioxin contamination found in East Palestine.

Some of the key findings from this report included:

- Norfolk Southern's sampling plan was never intended to identify the public health risks posed by the contamination in the community caused by the derailment and subsequent intentional burning of vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals.
- The approach used to determine where to collect samples was highly unusual and subjective and did not follow standard procedures for investigating contaminated sites. This approach involved simply walking the area and "inspecting" the surface soil for evidence of ash or other debris from the derailment and subsequent intentional burn.
- No samples were collected from the areas directly and immediately impacted by the derailment and subsequent intentional burn.
- The testing was not done for almost two months after the derailment so weather conditions and human activity would likely have altered the surface soil conditions and influenced what was found.
- Despite these and other limitations in EPA's testing approach, some samples did detect significant levels of dioxins that exceeded EPA and other benchmarks and guidelines for evaluating public health risks and warrant additional action. Yet, EPA has refused to conduct additional testing or take any action to address these findings.
- The many outstanding questions and limitations of EPA's dioxin testing made it difficult to trust, believe, and accept the results as providing an accurate understanding of the concentration of dioxins in the surface soil in the areas that were impacted by the train derailment and subsequent intentional burn of vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals. Instead, the results of the EPA testing for dioxins may reflect the unusual and unconventional methods and procedures used by Norfolk Southern to define where and how to collect samples.

Based on this analysis of the EPA's testing approach and results, additional testing is needed. This further testing should address the public health risks posed by the contamination caused by the derailment and subsequent burning of vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals.

The situation in East Palestine remains very frustrating for many local residents who try to make sense of the contrast between what the EPA tells them and the many adverse health symptoms they are experiencing firsthand.



Many residents continue to suffer from nose bleeds, headaches, skin rashes, thyroid problems, and more caused by the horrific derailment of a train with more than 50 cars carrying toxic chemicals and the subsequent intentional burning of vinyl chloride, a highly toxic chemical known to cause cancer, liver damage, central nervous system, and other adverse health effects. EPA continues to tell people that everything is fine, and Norfolk Southern, the train operator, is tired of paying for temporary housing, which some people have used to move out.

The people in East Palestine deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, and that includes expecting their government to act to protect their health in the face of the many uncertainties that exist in understanding the adverse health effects that result from exposure to mixtures of toxic chemicals. CHEJ will continue its work in 2024 to support East Palestine's residents.

TRAINING PROGRAM

CHEJ conducted twelve virtual training sessions in 2023. Nearly 600 leaders participated from 46 different states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. CHEJ training also aids environmental activists in strengthening the skills, capacity, and infrastructure required for effective grassroots leadership.

January:

Mini-Grant Training – Round 1

Attendees: 75

This was the first of two training workshops for CHEJ's Small Grants Program. In this session, we discussed the guidelines for applying for these grants and the application process.

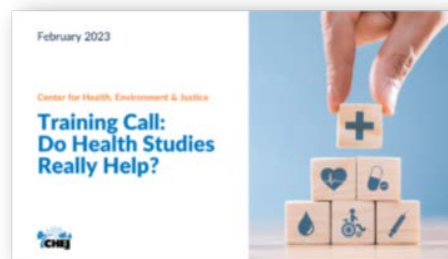
February:

Do Health Studies Really Work?

Attendees: 76

This training focused on dispelling the “smoking gun” perception of health studies and expanded on the various methods available for assessing health impacts in communities while also noting their limitations. During this call, our Senior Science Associate, Jose Aguayo, dispelled this perception and expanded on why health studies often fail to connect outcomes with chemical exposures.

He then offered an alternative method CHEJ has developed in collaboration with community leaders and public health scientists that we hope can bridge the gap and give affected communities both answers and relief.





March:

Understanding Your Right-to-Know Attendees: 70

This training focused on the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) of 1986. This act guarantees citizens the right to know what chemicals are in their area and what is being planned to be brought in or travel through their neighborhoods. Having a citizen's presence on their Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is vital to protecting their air, water, and community.

When used together, EPCRA and LEPCs, as well as awareness, can be a powerful tool to help keep people safe. This call was hosted by Silverio Caggiano, retired Battalion Chief, Fire Instructor, and HazMat/WMD Specialist for the Youngstown, Ohio Fire Department.

April:

How to Define and Deal with a Sacrifice Zone Attendees: 55

A few years back, CHEJ defined a "sacrifice zone" as any 4-mile area with levels of air pollution exceeding the 70th percentile according to EPA's air monitoring data.



In this call, we trained people on how to use the EPA's EJScreen to define if a community can be considered a sacrifice zone. We also discussed strategies on how to use this information as leverage for community-wide action, policy change, and grassroots activism.



May:

Voices from East Palestine - Lessons Learned Attendees: 50

In February, a 150-car freight train with 20 or so tanker cars carrying toxic chemicals derailed in East Palestine, OH. The rail company quickly made the decision to spill the contents and then burn five tanker cars holding vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals into a ditch alongside the railroad tracks.

Local resident Jami Wallace, who experienced the accident and the intentional burn, and Amanda Kiger, from River Valley Organizing, shared their experiences after this disaster.

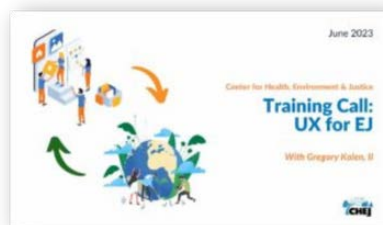
June:

UX for EJ

Attendees: 37

User experience (called “UX”) is a term often used by the tech industry to describe making a product more user-friendly or obtaining valuable insight into a customer base. It is a concept that our IT & Media team at CHEJ finds invaluable in virtually communicating and satisfying our key constituents.

This Training Call aimed to introduce grassroots organizers to the tools and language used amongst UX professionals to improve their online presence and recruitment and connect with their base.



July:

The Impact of PFAS

Attendees: 52

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are an emerging public health threat. Nicknamed the “forever” chemicals, they have contaminated drinking water across the U.S. PFAS are toxic at extremely low levels, are highly persistent in the environment, and bioaccumulate in people.

Environmental pediatrician Dr. Beth Nealy, in association with the Wisconsin Environmental Health Network, presented the history of PFAS manufacturing, their exposure routes, their impacts on human health, ways to decrease your exposure, and legislation across the U.S. recently developed to fight it.

Mini-Grant Training - Round 2

Attendees: 27

This was the second training session for CHEJ’s Small Grants Program. In this session we went over the guidelines for applying for these grants and application process.



August:

Are Schools Safe?

Attendees: 45

For the back-to-school season, we wanted to bring awareness to all the potential environmental hazards our children could be returning to this school year. Our colleagues at the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN) hosted this call.

During this call, we discussed children's unique vulnerability to environmental hazards, identified common school hazards, and shared educational and advocacy resources for improving school environmental health. A particularly helpful resource presented was CEHN's Eco-Healthy Childcare® program.

September:

How to Hold Corporate Polluters Accountable

Attendees: 36

The East Palestine train derailment highlighted the dangers of transporting vinyl chloride used to make plastics. Following this disaster, extensive reporting revealed that vinyl chloride pollution is widespread across the country.

In this Training Call, our former community organizer and current director of the Toxic-Free Future's Mind the Store program, Mike Schade, further illuminated vinyl chloride pollution and how to hold corporations accountable.



October:

Creating Your Individual Donor Fundraising Plan

Attendees: 20

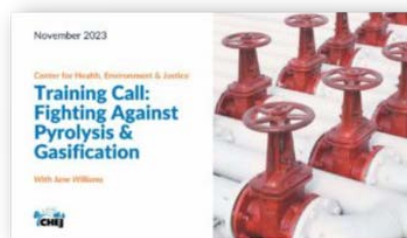
Did you know that 30% of donations to non-profits come from people who make \$75,000 or less a year? In this call, the founder of CHEJ, Lois Gibbs, temporarily came out of retirement to lend her extensive wisdom on creating an individual donor fundraising plan.

Lois instructed attendees on establishing fundraising goals, determining an audience, finding relevant strategies, figuring out the necessary amount of donors/donations, and constructing a realistic timeline. As she says, "Without a timeline, non-profits are unlikely to succeed."

November:**Fighting Against Pyrolysis & Gasification****Attendees: 40**

Gasification and pyrolysis are thermal processes that convert organic substances into fuels. These processes are highly controversial due to their impact on air quality. They are also a significant concern for the communities surrounding these facilities.

The EPA has recently withdrawn its proposal to exempt pyrolysis and gasification units from the Clean Air Act. What does this action mean for the communities facing increased proposals to build these facilities in their areas? Jane Williams, Executive Director of California Communities Against Toxics, provided critical insight into this issue.



TOXIC TUESDAY

Since 2020, CHEJ's science team has produced a bi-weekly newsletter called Toxic Tuesday. Posted on our website and emailed to our supporters, each Toxic Tuesday highlights a specific chemical and the adverse health effects people can experience if exposed to it in the environment. This newsletter aims to explain health and environmental information in plain language to educate community leaders about the dangers of toxic chemicals.

In 2023, we produced 24 Toxic Tuesdays. Typical posts focus on a single chemical, explaining how and why it is produced, how it gets into the environment, potential routes of exposure, and health effects caused by exposure. We present commonly known chemicals like petroleum hydrocarbons and less well-known substances like benzo(a)pyrene. Posts sometimes highlight a community dealing with exposure to that chemical and how they are fighting to protect their health, such as East Palestine, OH, where people were exposed to isobutylene after the Norfolk Southern train derailment.

Toxic Tuesday also includes posts focusing on the methods and techniques the science community uses to interpret and evaluate the toxicity of chemicals. These special posts have delved into topics like the deficiencies of classic toxicology and the difficulties in accurately assessing health risks from chemical exposures. They explain some of the limitations of the science, which is crucial to understanding whether scientists can answer the questions that community leaders are asking about toxic chemicals found in communities.

This year, we also started a Toxic Tuesday series that explains newly published scientific research on a toxic chemical and its effects on human health. This included a post on research that exposure to cadmium or lead from private water wells during pregnancy is associated with preterm births. We hope these posts help communities understand cutting-edge research and stay current on the known health effects of exposure to toxic chemicals.

CHEJ looks forward to continuing Toxic Tuesday into 2024.



List of chemicals/topics covered in 2023

1. Dioxin (1/10)
2. Asbestos (1/24)
3. From Risk Assessment to Presumption (2/7)
4. PCBs (2/21)
5. Vinyl Chloride (3/7)
6. Hydrofracking (3/21)
7. Epigenetic Toxicity (4/4)
8. Acrolein (4/18)
9. Isobutylene (5/2)
10. PBDEs (5/16)
11. Transgenerational Toxicity (5/31)
12. Glyphosate (6/13)
13. Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons (TPHs) (7/4)
14. Exposures to Chemical Mixtures Matter (7/18)
15. Benzo(a)pyrene (BaP) (8/1)
16. Ethylbenzene (8/15)
17. Selenium (8/29)
18. Particulate Matter (9/12)
19. How Individual Variability Affects the Toxicity of Chemicals (10/3)
20. Asphalt VOCs (10/17)
21. Metals & Preterm Births (10/31)
22. Acrylonitrile (11/14)
23. How Individual Sensitivity Affects Toxicity (11/14)
24. Endometrial Cancer (12/12)

UNEQUAL RESPONSE UNEQUAL PROTECTION



CHEJ started the Unequal Response, Unequal Protection campaign to address the federal government's ongoing failure to protect communities exposed to toxic chemicals. This failure stems from the lack of a structured federal response and the inadequate scientific methods available for investigating health outcomes related to exposure to toxic chemicals. Health investigations typically take years to complete and often result in an uncoordinated investigation that rarely generates meaningful action to protect communities. The primary reason for this is having to prove a cause-and-effect link between exposure and adverse health outcomes. Instead, by adopting the presumptive scientific approach, it would no longer be necessary to prove cause and effect and government could take action to protect the health of communities exposed to toxic chemicals.

To change this flawed response, CHEJ brought together community leaders, scientists, and health professionals to develop a community-driven approach for investigating health Impacts resulting from areawide environmental contamination. The overall goal of this effort was to:

- Develop an updated federal response model that facilitates action to protect the health of communities affected by harmful chemicals in their environment.

In developing this approach, a response was crafted that:

- Identifies potential chemical health hazards in communities using a scientific approach called Presumptive Association without requiring proof of cause and effect.
- Empowers communities to take control of their health by giving them the authority, through a decision-making body called the Community Leadership Team, to decide what actions to take to protect their health based on the Presumptive Association approach.

This approach mirrors the process used by the U.S. government when considering adverse health effects suffered by veterans, active military, first responders, 9/11 victims, and others exposed to toxic chemicals while serving their country or their government. Instead of requiring proof of causation in these cases, the government recognized that critical scientific information was missing or incomplete, making it necessary to make “presumptions” about exposures leading to health problems suffered by these groups. This recognition led to the government providing health care, treatment, compensation, and other assistance needed due to exposure to toxic substances. In communities where people have been exposed to toxic chemicals, the government would extend a similar application of the presumptive approach.

Throughout the year, CHEJ continued to move this campaign by writing blogs, articles, and papers about the campaign, holding a training call, and speaking publicly about this new and exciting approach to investigating and evaluating health problems in communities exposed to toxic chemicals.

NO MORE SACRIFICE ZONES



The No More Sacrifice Zones Campaign centers on community leaders drafting policies/regulations that are protective of public health and not corporate profits. Air pollution from factories, chemical plants, incinerators, coal-fired power plants, and more harms people's health and property values. In areas of industrial clusters, families have higher rates of asthma, respiratory disease, reproductive problems, and cancer. Furthermore, families are trapped because no one wants to buy their homes due to air pollution. Today's regulations are inadequate to protect public health because they are based upon regulating chemical-by-chemical and pipe-by-pipe releases. This year, CHEJ continued to help communities find ways to reduce pollution in sacrifice zone communities.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

CHEJ's technical assistance work is designed to help local grassroots organizations fight to prevent harm to their communities and families. CHEJ's scientists help local leaders understand the complex science surrounding environmental health issues and explain technical testing data, health studies, cleanup plans, site proposals, and other technical documents to level the playing field. This work is critical to understanding the health risks and informing local organizing efforts. It also helps people make informed decisions and gives them the confidence to influence environmental policies and decisions affecting their health and well-being.

Our technical assistance work does not take place in a vacuum. It is intrinsically tied to our organizing work, where both work hand in hand to provide communities the knowledge and skills to demand that their health be protected. Because of this connection between science and organizing, our technical assistance work focuses on educating our constituency about the role and power of science in winning local community battles. We teach communities that science on its own will not solve local problems. But when used as part of a strategic plan, scientific information can help local groups succeed in achieving their goals.

Our technical assistance work takes many forms. The simplest is answering calls and email requests for help. These often are routed to our organizers to build a solid organizing structure in the community as our science team reviews various reports and information. Once the organizing base is set, our science department can provide Letter Reports or other technical support for a strategic plan. In 2023, we completed eight detailed technical reviews. We conducted this by analyzing lengthy technical documents or environmental sampling data and providing written comments. CHEJ also has written over 90 guidebooks and fact packs that are routinely updated and designed to support the efforts of community groups facing environmental health threats.



Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

Here are two examples of the technical assistance CHEJ provided in 2023.

Brave Heart Society, Yankton Sioux Reservation, Yankton, SD

This past year, CHEJ continued its ongoing work with the Brave Heart Society, which is a member of the Yankton Sioux Tribe located in Lake Andes, SD. Our work involved evaluating water quality and fish samples collected from the Missouri River near Greenwood, South Dakota. The primary focus of this effort was to determine if mercury was present in fish collected from the Missouri River near the Yankton Sioux Reservation. Our review of data collected from surface waters of the Missouri River, found mercury at one location on three different dates. On each sampling date, various fish species were collected separately. Trace levels of mercury were found in the samples evaluated, as were PCBs. According to the FDA, all contaminant levels were below the threshold recommendations for safe consumption of fish. The levels of PCBs were also below FDA guidance for the consumption of PCBs in fish. Our report called for additional testing to determine current levels of mercury and PCBs in fish. EPA has declared the portion of the Missouri River where these samples were taken to be “impaired” due to the mercury found in fish. However, they have not been able to identify the source of the mercury contamination. This work is part of the Sacred Water Bundle Project envisioned by Faith Spotted Eagle, director of the Brave Heart Society. The overarching goal of the Sacred Water Bundle Project is to prepare a co-management plan for the Missouri River Bioregion watershed that includes the Yankton Sioux Reservation that will restore traditional Native practices of water and land management.

HOPE for Bristol, Bristol VA and TN

CHEJ continued its work with Hope for Bristol to close a landfill on the border between Bristol, VA, and Bristol, TN. Because the landfill is located on the state line, the state regulating agencies have been reluctant to properly control the noxious odors from the landfill which pressure from the group helped close in 2022. This past year, CHEJ reviewed a consultant report and various environmental samples collected from the landfill site and the surrounding neighborhood. CHEJ found that the community needed a safety plan that includes a temporary evacuation option that would be implemented during the proposed remedial construction project being considered to address the emissions coming from the landfill. A safety plan would protect the community from air emissions released during the remedial construction activities for the following reasons:

1. There are huge uncertainties about what is known about the conditions in the landfill.
2. There are many toxic substances present in the emissions coming from the landfill.
3. The cumulative effects of living with the emissions from the landfill are already taking a significant toll on the people living around the landfill.
4. There is no plan to monitor air emissions during the remedial construction.
5. The remedial construction is likely to take much longer than expected to complete.

The points above were addressed in a Letter Report provided to the community.



Photo by WHJL

2023 CHEJ SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM

CHEJ's Small Grants Program aids in getting resources into the hands of grassroots groups that are fighting for a clean, healthy community. In 2023, we received 237 grant applications. 38 applications qualified for support. The 38 groups awarded grants are listed below. CHEJ was able to give a total of \$392,154 to grassroots grantees in 2023. We are excited to be able to continue to provide this service to groups fighting for a healthy community and environment.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
350 New Hampshire (350 NH) <i>Dover, NH</i>	350 NH's purpose is to shut down the last coal plant in New England with grassroots organizing.	To: (1) Build enough grassroots people power to force the shutdown of the last coal fired power plant in New England, in Bow, New Hampshire; (2) Educate thousands of people; (3) Build local public opposition; and (4) Take action to give our communities a voice in the decision-making process.
350 Wisconsin (350 WI) <i>Madison, WI</i>	350 WI's purpose is to organize local, statewide, Midwest, and national opposition to Enbridge's proposed expansion of the Line 5 crude oil pipeline through Northern Wisconsin. This will be done through coalition-building, regulatory approaches, training, education, and bold, creative tactics and actions.	To: (1) Decommission Enbridge Line 5 to reduce fossil fuel impacts on the climate, protect the Bad River Watershed and the Great Lakes, and support Indigenous rights; (2) Strengthen the climate movement to fight fossil fuel projects; and (3) Promote climate justice.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) <i>Anchorage, AK</i>	ACAT's purpose is to: (1) Restore Alaskan tribal lands contaminated by military toxics, (2) Re-establish the Yupik community and traditional hunting-fishing-gathering activities, (3) Redress for contaminated community members.	To: Reopen the Defense Department's decision to prematurely end cleanup activities; (2) Convince ATSDR to conduct a legally sufficient and scientifically adequate health assessment; and (3) Secure a Congressional investigation into the military's failure to comply with its land use agreement with the tribes to leave land in its original condition.
Beyond Toxics (BT) <i>Eugene, OR</i>	BT's purpose is to support and build capacity for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and working-class communities facing extreme risks from manufacturers, incinerators and landfills emitting dioxins, Volatile Organic Compounds VOC's, hydrogen sulfide, penta-chlorophenol and heavy metals.	To: (1) Expand skills among frontline populations to understand health risks of air pollution; (2) Take action to reduce risks; (3) Bring community expertise into decision-making; (4) Design solutions rooted in environmental justice; and (5) Take steps that will lead to coordination between communities to adopt policies to improve health and the community's well-being.
Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL) <i>Glendale Springs, NC</i>	BREDL's purpose is to serve and promote public health, environmental democracy and social justice in the southeastern United States through advocacy and community organizing.	To Educate residents on the public health risks of nuclear power generation and the planned expansion of the Vogtle Nuclear Power Plant in Georgia.
Brookhaven Landfill Action and Remediation Group (BLARG) <i>Bellport, NY</i>	BLARG's purpose is to ensure closure and remediation of the landfill and accountability for the harm it has created. BLARG also seeks to raise awareness that this is a matter of environmental justice and actively support the advancement of environmental justice everywhere.	To increase our capacity both with peoplepower and accessibility needs. With a growing community in North Bellport who speak Spanish, the goal for BLARG is to ensure that our organizing efforts also centers on language accessibility.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Buckeye Environmental Network (BEN) Athens, OH	BEN was established in 1996 with a purpose and commitment to empowering grassroots organizations, individuals, and local communities to advocate for environmental justice.	To: (1) Conduct a strategic planning session with a facilitator to aid in the drafting of a framework and elements of an associated action plan, and (2) Conduct a needs assessment and applicable board developmental training.
Camden for Clean Air (CCA) Camden, NJ	CCA's purpose is to: (1) Derail the plan to monetize the old Covanta Camden trash incinerator by importing and burning liquid industrial waste; (2) Get Camden County to stop burning its trash; and (3) Continue advocating for cleaner air in the environmental justice community of Camden, New Jersey.	To: (1) Get Camden County to hire certified consultants to guide a transition away from incineration to zero waste solutions; (2) Get the county or its municipalities to change their waste contracts to end incineration; (3) Stop the state from permitting the incinerator to burn liquid industrial wastes; and (4) Continue testifying on behalf of the public at NJ Department of Environment Protection (DEP) hearings as new air permits are applied for by local polluting industries.
CCLP Bay Area Toxic Cleanup Campaign (CCLP) San Francisco, CA	CCLP's purpose is to: (1) Demand the responsible parties to clean up the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, the second worst Superfund site in the nation. (2) Demand that it be cleaned up under independent community oversight, and that those responsible must provide full compensation and covered health services to those impacted by the Shipyard's contamination.	To: Recruit volunteers for community canvassing, poster and petition campaigns, and speaking engagements. This project's focus was to get the entire Bay Area to join in cleaning up this toxic, radioactive site, which is poisoning children, families, and communities.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Citizens for a Healthy Community (CHC) <i>Paonia, CO</i>	CHC's purpose is to: (1) Protect the air, water, and foodsheds within the Delta County region of Southwest Colorado from the impacts of oil and gas development, and to accelerate the path forward to a clean, resilient, and renewable energy future; and (2) Ensure a resilient and livable community for both present and future generations.	To: Increase individual donations by targeting, educating, and recruiting newcomers to the CHC community.
Clean Air Action Network of Glen Falls (CAAN) <i>Glen Falls, NY</i>	CAAN's purpose is to reduce air pollution and protect public health and the environment in the Tri-County region around New York's Upper Hudson Valley.	To: (1) Host large gatherings and trainings to increase engagement in the Stop Saratoga Biochar campaign; (2) Train impacted residents to advocate for themselves and organize against local industrial pollution; (3) Upgrade CAAN's website by posting all pertinent background documents; (4) Develop a Sterigenics Watchdogs steering committee and action plan; and (5) Hold a training on working with the media.
Cleveland Lead Advocates for Safe Housing (CLASH) <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	CLASH's purpose is: Awareness, Activism, Advocacy, Leadership and Governance. Awareness involves activities which inform the community about lead hazards. Activism activities focus on getting at risk families to take steps to protect their homes and families. Advocacy activities focus on briefing public officials about lead safe policies.	To: (1) Sponsor a day-long workshop to brainstorm 2023 goals; (2) Sponsor six training sessions to equip CLASH volunteers with new skills and knowledge; and (3) Expand our individual donor base. To meet these goals, CLASH intends to rent out an office/meeting space and rent three billboards to support our Winter Funding campaign.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW) <i>Naoma, WV</i>	CRMW's purpose is to: (1) Train, empower, and assist residents resisting the public health threats imposed by the coal industry; (2) Monitor coal operations on/near Coal River Mountain; (3) Compel regulatory agencies to do their jobs; and (4) Hold coal companies accountable for their hazards imposed on communities.	To: (1) Have mountaintop removal mining and other polluting coal industry operations shut down, denied, delayed, and abated; (2) Encourage and support more citizen complaints, while also providing the tools to do so; (3) Educate residents about the coal industry's environmental health and justice threats; and (4) Raise sufficient funds to support the program through 2023.
Cultural Fire Events (CFE) <i>Provo, UT</i>	CFE's purpose is to create awareness around the mining issues on the reservations within the state of Utah via the 2023 Red Canyon Powwow in Moab, UT.	To: (1) Create awareness around mining on Utah Native American reservations; (2) Host a focus group and two talking circles; (3) Collect survey responses; and (4) Create a database to share with Native American organizations in Utah to help them with informed decision-making.
Del Amo Action Committee (DAAC) <i>Rosamond, CA</i>	DAAC's purpose is to define and implement solutions to environmental health hazards in their community and beyond that hold the needs of their community and other underserved communities in the forefront.	To: (1) Develop ten (10) additional new leaders in underrepresented areas of the community we recently began working with; (2) Encourage the next generation of leaders to carry on our mission of direct engagement through increased door-to-door outreach; and (3) Engage new leadership in planning, reviewing, and updating the current strategic plan.
Delco Environmental Justice (DEJ) <i>Springfield, PA</i>	DEJ's purpose is to rapidly end Delaware County's use of the trash incinerator in the City of Chester Pennsylvania by building community pressure. DEJ seeks to ensure full implementation of the new Delaware County Zero Waste Plan by the county and its 49 municipalities.	To: (1) Organize municipal teams to pressure their local governments; and (2) Leverage the power of residents and their municipal governments to quickly move the county government to find a path away from incineration as soon as possible.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Ditch the Dump (DTD) <i>Harrison, OH</i>	DTD's purpose is to stand up to corporate powers, to inspire residents to fight for their community and know their environment's health is necessary to protect the future of their children.	To: (1) Educate community members about the impact of landfills on the health of people, wildlife, and the environment, and to (2) Stop a landfill in an already overburdened area suffering severe consequences to their environment.
EJ for Hancock County (EJHC) <i>Sparta, GA</i>	EJHC's purpose is to protect the residents of Shoals Road, in Hancock County, GA, a historic, low-income, predominantly African-American, environmental justice community from having their land and property taken through eminent domain to develop railroad tracks.	To stop the degradation of a historic African-American community facing environmental racism aimed toward destroying the community's existing land values and quality of life. EKHC plans to accomplish this goal by better establishing our group, raising awareness, and educating our group and the public.
Faith Communities Together for a Sustainable Future (FaCT) <i>Mentor, OH</i>	FaCT's purpose is to educate individuals and communities about the toxic elements of brine waste, which is used as a deicer on freeways, highways, and county roads. This deicer contains Radium-226 and Radium-228, which are bone-seeking forms of radiation. They affect bone development, cause bone cancers, affect fetal development, and lead to lung cancer.	To: (1) Mobilize people of faith and others in communities throughout Ohio (primarily in Appalachian counties most effected by radioactive brine waste spreading) (2) Take Action to prevent the spreading of radioactive brine waste.
Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition (FCAC) <i>Fairbanks, AK</i>	FCAC purpose is to: (1) Mobilize Fairbanks and Interior Alaska communities toward action to mitigate and adapt to climate change; and (2) Elevate climate solutions and foster a fair, equitable, and just transition to sustainable communities – locally, regionally and globally.	To: Strengthen our governing body - a key priority in our strategic plan - by supporting a smooth leadership transition between our founding council members and new leaders from impacted communities.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Grand Valley Citizens Alliance (GVCA) <i>Rifle, CO</i>	GVCA's purpose is to protect citizen's health and the environment from the adverse effects of local energy development by influencing local/state/federal regulations, policies, and actions that govern industry activities that contribute to Climate Change.	GVCA has four proposed projects aimed at accommodating parents, working to remove language barriers as our organization expands, and advancing technologically to retain new members.
Great Lakes Protector Network (GLPN) <i>Detroit, MI</i>	GLPN's purpose is to build the capacity of community members in the Great Lakes Region to effectively organize, educate, and mobilize around environmental justice issues. These issues include stopping oil pipelines, preventing unsustainable development, and resisting other threats to our ecosystems, local watersheds, and communities.	<p>To: Create spaces for activists and community members to come together, strategize, and build capacity.</p> <p>This goal will be achieved by hosting training events where individuals learn how to lead frontline environmental justice campaigns and build a strong foundation for future work.</p>
Group Against Smog & Pollution (GASP) <i>Pittsburgh, PA</i>	GASP's purpose is to work to improve air quality to protect human, environmental, and economic health in Southwestern Pennsylvania.	To: (1) Hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) consultant; (2) Design and implement a community-wide survey; (3) Develop and facilitate basic DEI survey skills training for Board and Staff; (4) Aggregate results from; and (5) Develop and facilitate listening sessions to communicate survey results to Board and Staff.

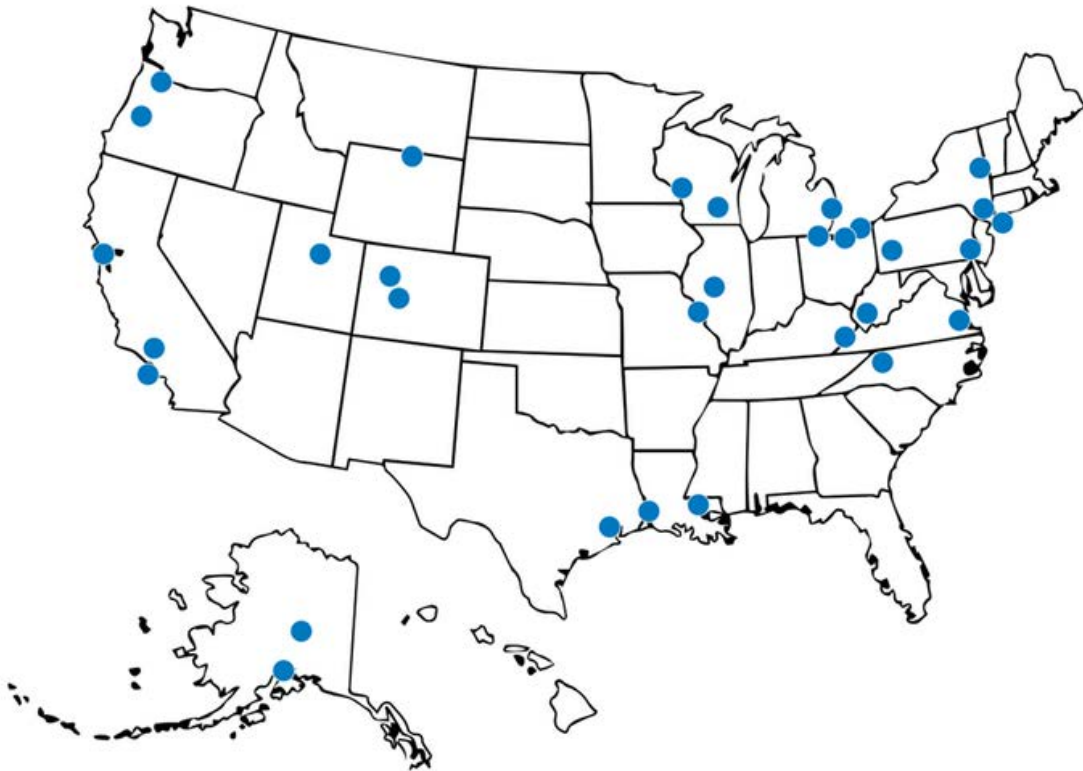
Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Hope for Bristol (HFB) <i>Bristol, TN</i>	Since its inception in 2021, HFB's purpose has been to work diligently to address the horribly mismanaged City of Bristol, Virginia owned and operated landfill. This landfill is an elevated temperature landfill that spews toxic emissions into the surrounding neighborhoods. HFB intends to continue to monitor this landfill, by remaining fully committed to raising its voice to make sure this disaster never impacts our residents, again.	To: (1) Create a fundraising platform to provide consistent revenue for our organization and to fund relief efforts (air purifiers/filters) for suffering residents; (2) Streamline accounting practices; (3) Expand website to communicate landfill updates with residents; and (4) Continue community engagement and organizational growth through community meetings.
Just Moms STL (JM-STL) <i>Maryland Heights, MO</i>	<p>JM-STL's purpose is to: (1) Advocate for the health of our community by ensuring the start of EPA's removal remedy; and (2) Educate residents and neighboring communities about the dangers the site currently poses and the ground water investigation.</p> <p>JM-STL efforts include significant community involvement, coordination and by writing a safety plan to be used during remediation.</p>	To: (1) Implement the safe and timely removal of all radioactive waste within 20 feet of the site's surface; (2) Expedite testing of the groundwater both on- and off-site; (3) Conduct a health study of current and historical risks; and (4) Set-up 24-hour air monitors during the removal of all hazardous wastes.
Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) <i>Baton Rouge, LA</i>	LEAN's purpose is to foster cooperation and communication between individual citizens, corporations, and government organizations to assess and mend environmental problems in the state of Louisiana.	To: (1) Create an engaging hub of environmental justice related information, discussions, and opportunities; and (2) Build greater diversity, understanding, and meaningful action in Louisiana's collective efforts to engage with and address the state's environmental issues.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Micah Six Eight Mission (MSEM) <i>Sulphur, LA</i>	MSEM's purpose is to work with our partners. MSEM intends to strengthen our connection to the communities we serve by (1) Developing key goals and objectives (2) Facilitating public health and wellness in the face of the dual burdens of industrial pollution and the devastation caused by hurricanes which have worsened due to climate change.	To: (1) Host community events, listening sessions, and workshops in conjunction with other environmental organizations, (Better Bayou and The Vessel Project); and (2) Hold community events that bring resources to the communities in Southwest Louisiana (SWLA), while inviting participation in the listening sessions and planning workshops.
Neighbors for Clean Air (NCA) <i>Portland, OR</i>	NCA's purpose is to create a healthier Oregon through the reduction of air pollution. NCA upholds state and federal air regulations and advances broad-based, grassroots change through active community engagement with partner environmental justice organizations, regulators, local municipalities, and the state legislature to reduce sources of air toxics, both from industry and the diffuse sources that adversely affect health and negatively impact quality of life in our urban centers.	To: (1) Continue expanding and embedding air quality expertise among a broad constellation of community-based groups, thus building a stronger, long-term environmental justice movement; and (2) Activate this network to push for specific reductions in diesel toxics on both the local and statewide levels.
Northbridge MABRA Endowment Trust (Northbridge MABRA) <i>Hampton, GA</i>	Northbridge MABRA's purpose is to recruit and train teams to share safety measures needed along the Flint River. Northbridge MABRA is responding to a sewage spill that has rocked communities along the Panhandle Corridor of the county with hazardous materials on the ground and odorous fumes in homes.	To: Build a communication network of young adults and seniors who will participate in environmental safety training sessions. The goal is that they will in turn share that information with others who live along the Flint River/Clayton County Water Authority sewage easement paths. Northbridge-MABRA is determined to prevent further accidents.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Parents Against Santa Susana Field Lab (PASSFL) Los Angeles, CA	PASSFL's mission is to advocate for the complete remediation of the Santa Susana Field Lab (SSFL), the site of one of America's worst nuclear accidents. PASSFL parents aims to protect nearby children and families from exposure to the site's toxic and carcinogenic contamination. PASSFL was founded by mothers of children diagnosed with rare cancers and seeks to reduce, to the greatest extent possible, the number of local families who must hear the words, " <i>your child has cancer</i> ".	To: (1) Ensure the full cleanup of SSFL by: (1) Helping the community to understand scientific data; (2) Navigating the regulatory process; and (3) Taking actions like petitioning elected officials, participating in public hearings, and submitting public comments of cleanup documents.
Powder River Basin Resource Council (PRBRC) Sheridan, WY	PRBRC's purpose is to increase public and private renewable energy investments in Laramie, Wyoming and throughout the state.	To: (1) Build both our grassroots base and leadership capacity in Laramie, WY, and subsequently throughout the state (2) Educate the community and thus broaden support for renewable energy investments among the public (city, county, schools, University of Wyoming, etc.) and the private sector.
Savannah Riverkeeper (SR) Augusta, GA	The SR's purpose is to (1) Serve as the primary guardian of the Savannah River striving to respect, protect, and improve the entire river basin through education, advocacy, and action; and (2) share our commitment to creating a clean and healthy river that sustains life and is cherished by its people.	To: (1) Build the power, influence, and education for those communities that are directly affected and located around the planned facilities; and (2) Help empower residents to begin redefining their communities not as sacrifice zones but as healthy communities.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
Southeast Queens Residents EJ Coalition (SEQREJC) <i>St. Albans, NY</i>	SEQREJC's purpose is to solicit funding and technical assistance to resolve the issue of groundwater flooding in the SEQR community. SEQREJC also seeks to address environmental justice issues and to inform our community on green initiative programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.	To: Put in place specific communication systems (website, Zoom, etc.) that allow SQREJC to have an information portal for: (1) Environmental injustice issues in our community (i.e. flooding); (2) Climate Change; (3) Global Warming; and (4) Existing Green Initiatives.
Sunrise Philly (SP) <i>Philadelphia, PA</i>	SP's purpose is to build its base, to increase its clout, and combine its culture with working class people in the city of Philadelphia that is most affected by climate change and environmental racism.	To: (1) Recruit, train, and on-board approximately 100 community members into Sunrise Philly's membership; (2) Combine our existing culture with their priorities, preferences, and needs; and (3) Create a launch pad for Philadelphia's Green New Deal.
Texas Health and Environment Alliance (THEA) (2023-Round 1) <i>Houston, TX</i>	THEA's purpose as a regional nonprofit is to protect public health and the environment by engaging, educating, and empowering impacted communities to advocate effectively for the cleanup of historical contamination.	THEA's primary programmatic goals are to continue its efforts to build the San Jacinto River Coalition, engage with the public, and continue to elevate their voices.
Texas Health and Environment Alliance (THEA) (2023-Round 2) <i>Houston, TX</i>	THEA's purpose as a regional nonprofit is to protect public health and the environment by engaging, educating, and empowering impacted communities to advocate effectively for the cleanup of historical contamination.	To: (1) Ensure that the community is informed, involved and heard in the EPA's remediation efforts; (2) Provide technical expertise and experience with the regulatory process to help residents navigate its complexities; (3) Engage with the EPA regularly; (4) Maintain a watchdog oversight of the RPs and cleanup activities; (5) Educate the general public; and (6) Never Forget that THEA is giving a voice to people who may be spending sleepless nights wondering if a loved one's cancer was caused by a 60-year-old toxic waste site.

Organization	Organization's Purpose	Project Goals
The Clinch Coalition (TCC) Wise, VA	TCC's purpose is to protect and preserve the forest, wildlife, and watersheds in our National Forest and surrounding communities for present and future generations.	To: (1) Increase fundraising efforts through outreach to donors; (2) Increase membership; (3) Provide professional development for grant writing; and (4) Provide Board and Staff development.
The Ohio Nuclear Free Network (ONFN) Toledo, OH	ONFN's purpose is To: (1) Continue the confirmation of off-site radioactivity around the Portsmouth Nuclear Site; (2) Expose the increasing cancer and overall mortality rates in the area; and (3) Get the community, legislators, and media to move the government into addressing the situation.	To: (1) Force the Department of Energy to do a better job of cleanup at the Portsmouth Nuclear Site (PORTS); (2) Secure evaluation of contamination of surrounding homes and businesses; and (3) Get government to pay for the illnesses and deaths of the residents.



Map showing the locations of the recipients of CHEJ's 2023 Small Grants Program across the United States

COMMUNICATIONS OUTREACH

Backyard Monthly

Creating a monthly digest newsletter offers a myriad of benefits for our audience. First and foremost, it serves as a centralized hub for staying informed about the latest developments, initiatives, and success stories within the environmental justice movement. By consolidating this information, our audience can effortlessly stay abreast of crucial issues and emerging solutions. Additionally, the newsletter provides a platform to amplify diverse voices, ensuring that the experiences and challenges faced by marginalized communities are recognized and understood. It solves the problem of information overload by distilling complex topics into digestible, engaging content, making it easier for readers to comprehend and share key insights.

CHEJ's Backyard Monthly newsletter, introduced in March of 2023, fosters a sense of community, uniting individuals passionate about environmental justice and empowering them to take informed actions. Our monthly digest addresses the information gap and cultivates a more connected and informed network dedicated to driving positive change in environmental justice.

In its first year of online distribution, the Backyard Monthly newsletter had an average open rate of 26.3%. The content included in the digest is the staff blogs for the month, Toxic Tuesday highlights, the recording of the training call of the month, The EJ Minute Podcast episodes, community highlights, and a call to action or contribution ask.



User Experience Survey

CHEJ is committed to enhancing user experience through a robust research process. In a recent initiative led by CHEJ intern Leila Waid, a comprehensive user experience survey was distributed to the online community, seeking valuable insights into user interaction with the organization's resources, website, and communication channels. The gathered information was meticulously examined to identify patterns, preferences, and areas for improvement.

This data-driven approach has paved the way for the next phase of the research process, wherein CHEJ is preparing a series of user experience interviews. These interviews aim to delve deeper into individual experiences and perceptions, providing qualitative insights that complement the quantitative data from the survey. By actively involving the community in shaping the user experience, CHEJ prioritizes user needs and ensures that its resources are tailored to best serve the communities in their mission for health, environment, and justice.

The EJ Minute Podcast

Launching a short environmental justice podcast on platforms like Spotify offers an array of benefits for our audience. In a world inundated with information, the podcast is a convenient and accessible medium to quickly grasp essential news and updates on environmental justice. Delivering succinct summaries saves our audience time and provides an efficient way to stay informed on pressing issues. The auditory format adds a personal touch, fostering a stronger connection with listeners and creating a sense of community.

Additionally, the portability of podcasts allows users to stay engaged while on the go, transforming mundane moments into opportunities for learning and advocacy. This podcast aims to streamline information and inspire and empower our audience to participate in the ongoing environmental justice conversation - ultimately contributing to a more informed and engaged community.

Initially led by CHEJ intern Juliet Porter, The EJ Minute Podcast has received a great reception and has continued to grow. We look forward to continuing to grow this communication avenue according to the needs of our listeners.

Blogs

CHEJ's ongoing blog, Backyard Talk, crafted by interns, associates, and staff members, has emerged as an instrumental resource in advocating environmental justice. These blog posts delve into crucial aspects of environmental issues, offering insightful analyses and informed perspectives on the intersection of health, the environment, and justice. The success of these entries lies in their ability to communicate complex topics in an accessible manner, making vital information widely available to a diverse audience.



By leveraging the expertise of the staff members, these blog entries not only educate the public on the urgent need for environmental equity but also include communication strategies and seasonal messages, provide search engine optimization value to increase the exposure of information, and continue to serve as a dynamic platform for mentoring a movement, empowering people, and preventing harm.

OUR STORY

It all started in 1978 in Niagara Falls, New York. Lois Gibbs struggled to raise a family, which included two children suffering from a variety of rare illnesses. However, she soon realized they weren't the only ones. Nearly every family in the Love Canal neighborhood was facing its own medical nightmare.

Lois discovered that her home, and those of her neighbors, sat beside 20,000 tons of toxic chemicals. In response to this shocking news, Lois stepped up to lead her neighbors in the battle to protect their families from the hazardous waste in their own backyards.

Through this experience, Lois realized that no local, state, or national organization existed to provide communities with the strategic advice, guidance, and technical assistance necessary to win such a battle.

Lois and her neighbors developed strategies to educate and organize their community, assess the impact of toxic waste on their health, and challenge corporate and government disposal policies.

After a three-year fight, Lois' leadership led to the relocation of 833 Love Canal households.

To ensure that no other community would have to face a toxic health threat alone, Lois founded the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste in 1981. We soon became known as the Center for Health, Environment & Justice. In 2017, we merged with People's Action Institute and have since operated as a special project through their organization.

The core of CHEJ's mission is, and always has been, to prevent harm to human health. This mission is achieved by providing technical and organizing support to individuals and communities facing toxic hazards.



Photo by Hunter Marion

Today, CHEJ continues to harness the power of grassroots organizing to help communities protect their health, as Lois did many years ago. On average, CHEJ receives hundreds of requests for assistance each year. Over the past 42 years, CHEJ's work has touched over 15,000 individuals and groups.

At CHEJ, we believe that everyone has a right to a clean and healthy environment. Together, we can create one powerful voice to protect our health and the environment and to promote environmental and economic justice.