

# Highlights of 2001

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## I. Good neighbor campaigns

### Morton International/Rohm & Haas

Morton International/Rohm and Haas produces specialty chemicals for the PVC plastics industry in Reading, a suburb of Cincinnati. Neighbors have complained for over ten years about odors coming from the plant, and the plant has routinely polluted the air with tens of thousands of pounds of chemicals that can cause cancer and other health problems.

- Ohio Citizen Action members wrote a total of 9,984 letters to plant manager Bruce Beiser during the course of the campaign, from February 2000 to April 2001. We organized the neighbors to meet with plant management, and traveled to Philadelphia to bring corporate headquarters into the negotiations.
- We won the good neighbor campaign in April 2001, when the company agreed to make changes in four areas: toxics, odors, truck parking and emergency response. The plant expects a 90% or more reduction in the release of chloromethane, a dangerous chemical which they had been releasing at the rate of 88,000 pounds a year. Rohm and Haas will be spending over \$2 million to install a cryogenic chiller and take other steps to remedy these longstanding problems.
- The company and neighbors now have an ongoing commitment to work together to see that all of the changes are implemented. The steps being taken by the plant go far beyond any legal requirements, and are a testament to the strength of the "good neighbor" campaign approach. The turning point in the campaign came when leaders at the corporate headquarters in Philadelphia got involved.

### **AK Steel**

AK Steel's coke plant in Middletown, Ohio literally rains soot and heavy metals on workers and neighbors daily. The plant has also contaminated a nearby creek with PCBs and has been cited repeatedly for dangerous working conditions.

- We began a good neighbor campaign at the AK Steel plant in Middletown in May, 2001. Through December 31, Ohio Citizen Action members had sent 7,048 personal letters to AK CEO Richard Wardrop.
- We helped form a citizens group in Middletown to work on campaign -- United Neighbors Against Dirty Air (UNADA) -- and began citizen collecting and testing of the particulate matter, which covers neighbors' homes and cars. We also began research on a 'Citizens Audit of AK Steel' to be released in the spring of 2002.

### **Brush Wellman**

Brush Wellman's plant in Elmore, Ohio is the largest processor of beryllium in the world. Exposure to beryllium dust can cause chronic beryllium disease, an incurable lung disease, as well as lung cancer.

- In the fall of 2000 and again in the summer of 2001, Ohio Citizen Action collected dust samples from around the community near the Brush Wellman Elmore plant. We found beryllium in workers' homes and cars, in the home of a plant neighbor, in the vacuum cleaner of a restaurant, and on the hood of a car owned by a resident living across the street from the plant. These sample results helped spark an exposure investigation by the nation's leading public health agency, the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, which will take place this spring.

- In January 2001, Ohio Citizen Action released a study outlining how dental health professionals, who work with beryllium-containing alloys, are in danger of developing beryllium disease. The report attracted great media coverage and spurred the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to rewrite the health and safety standards for dental laboratories.

- Citizen Action and some workers suffering from beryllium disease contacted the Boy Scouts of America and the media when we found that the Boy Scouts were selling Eagle Scout rings containing beryllium. The Boy Scouts immediately responded by removing the ring from their catalogue and notified the jewelry manufacturer that they would no longer sell items made with beryllium.

- In December, Ohio Citizen Action and the Environmental Working Group released 6,500 pages of internal Brush Wellman and federal government documents on the internet. These documents detail the scandalous history of the beryllium industry.

## **River Valley Schools**

The River Valley High School and Middle School near Marion, Ohio are built on top of an old military waste dump, and alarmingly high rates of leukemia have been found among the high school graduates.

- In the November 2000 elections, Marion voters approved a \$19.6 million bond issue to relocate the River Valley Middle and High school students away from the contaminated site. After forcing the city of Marion to change its restrictions on canvassing (See 'Protecting the First Amendment,' below) , we canvassed Marion and surrounding areas this spring and summer. The canvassing opened the debate in the community, and families learned they would not be alone in their decision to transfer their children to different schools for safety's sake in the fall. The new schools are scheduled to be ready by the fall of 2003.

- In February 2001, Ohio EPA whistleblower Paul Jayko was reinstated as chief investigator at the River Valley schools. He had been punished by former Ohio EPA Director Donald Schregardus in 1998 for criticizing the agency for its lax approach towards the investigation. For years, Ohio Citizen Action, the Concerned River Valley Families and other groups campaigned for Jayko's reinstatement, peppering Gov. Bob Taft with thousands of letters. Jayko got more than his job back: in March, Ohio Citizen

Action was asked to introduce Mr. Jayko at the Franklin County Trial Lawyers reception where he was presented with the 'Citizen of the Year Award'.

## **II. Environmental enforcement**

Ohio Citizen Action, the Ohio Chapter of the Sierra Club, Rivers Unlimited, and Ohio Public Interest Research Group prompted an unprecedented federal investigation of the Ohio EPA by asking the U.S. EPA to take away Ohio's authority to enforce major environmental laws. This campaign produced several important results this year:

- On September 17, former Ohio EPA chief Donald Schregardus withdrew his nomination for the top enforcement post at U.S. EPA. When he was nominated in June, Schregardus appeared to be headed for an easy confirmation, despite his terrible track record as head of the Ohio agency for eight years. But grassroots Ohio organizations and national environmental allies pressured senators and generated media coverage and newspaper editorials from around the country opposing the nomination. The intervention of several U.S. Senators forced U.S. EPA to release its preliminary report on its 18-month investigation of Ohio EPA -- a withering indictment of the state's failures, many under Schregardus' watch. When committee chairman Senator James Jeffords announced an "extensive investigation" of the nomination, Schregardus withdrew.

- In its September draft report, U.S. EPA warned Ohio EPA that unless the state agency improves its clean air enforcement programs, the federal government could take back policing authority. The report also found problems in the state's water and solid and hazardous waste enforcement programs. In November, hundreds of citizens from around the state packed the U.S. EPA public hearing and testified about Ohio EPA's failure to enforce environmental laws. Ohio Citizen Action delivered thousands of letters from members to U.S. EPA Administrator Christie Todd Whitman at the hearing. We filed comments on the report calling the review "fragmented and inconsistent," and urging U.S. EPA to withdraw authority for all three programs, saying that "Ohio EPA has become an agency with the "mind and soul" of a polluter trapped in the body of a regulator." U.S. EPA is expected to issue its final report later this year.

- Ohio Citizen Action worked with citizens across the state to protect groundwater and drinking water supplies. In the Dayton area, we organized residents living near the Valleycrest landfill to push U.S. EPA to reverse a decision to stop clean up of the site. The residents picketed the offices of major corporations who had buried drums in the site, pressured politicians, and generated press coverage. They won their campaign when the U.S. EPA announced a commitment to continue the drum removal clean up at the site.

- Ohio Citizen Action was invited to participate in a global coalition of public interest groups that seek to promote public access to information, participation, and justice in environmental decision-making. We teamed up with World Resources Institute, Environmental Law Institute, and Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition to measure indicators of the public's right to know in the U.S. and eight other countries (Hungary, Chile, Mexico, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Thailand, and Uganda).

### **III. Pesticides, farming, and food systems**

- We sponsored a successful statewide conference, Reconnecting Consumers and Farmers, in March, bringing together 200 consumers, farmers, environmentalists, farm organizations, and agencies. We helped form a strong coalition of non-profit groups who meet regularly to work on issues affecting our environment and local food systems, and met with food processors around the state to find ways for them to reduce their pesticide use.
- We participated in programs and farm tours highlighting our publication, Farming Without Chemicals, to educate over 2,500 farmers and the public about sustainable agriculture practices.
- We initiated "Blue Ribbon" awards to recognize individuals, organizations and farmers who are reducing pesticide use in Ohio. The first set of awards will be presented on February 21, 2002, in Columbus.
- We organized a network of Ohioans interested in agricultural policy issues, and lobbied for changes in the Federal Farm Bill to help family farmers and conserve farmland.

### **IV. Community choice for electric and gas**

Ohio's new competitive electric market produced positive results during its first year, thanks largely to the widespread creation of local government buying pools. Ohio Citizen Action campaigned successfully to put the local government option in the state electric deregulation law in 1999.

- Six hundred thousand Ohioans chose new electric suppliers in 2001. Nearly all of the switches were in northern Ohio (about 1/3 of FirstEnergy's residential customers switched), where Ohio Citizen Action and others have fought for 25 years against FirstEnergy's high rates.
- When natural gas utilities, the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and the Office of Consumers' Counsel slipped through last-minute amendments in the Ohio House to gut legislation to allow community buying pools, Ohio Citizen Action mobilized local elected officials to mount a quick, intense campaign to undue the damage during Senate deliberations, successfully restoring language modeled on the electric community choice measure.
- In November, more communities won voter approval to shop for electricity. Several communities, including Cleveland, Canton, and Toledo, got the voter OK to shop for natural gas, and many more communities are poised to put the gas issue on 2002 ballots.

### **V. Campaign reform**

- The City of Cincinnati passed a campaign finance ballot reform initiative in November, with a 547 vote margin. Ohio Citizen Action was a founding member of the Fair Elections Coalition, which worked for passage of the initiative. Preceding the election, we released a study analyzing the contribution patterns of major donors from 1997-1999 and their economic interests in city policy. The reforms won in the initiative

include contribution limits; partial public financing tied to spending limits; electronic disclosure and the creation of a Citizens Oversight Committee to investigate violations of the law and levy fines if necessary.

- Ohio Citizen Action released disclosure report cards for Ohio political parties, and for statewide and Ohio General Assembly candidates, and worked with reporters on dozens of media stories "following the money" at the State House.

- We held community forums in Columbus, Cincinnati and Akron to explore the need for reform and helped educate the public about the issues with newsletters and materials distributed by Ohio Citizen Action's door-to-door canvass.

## **VI. Environmental education**

Ohio Citizen Action's research and education affiliate, Citizens Policy Center, worked with Lippman Community Day School and the Jewish Community Center of Akron to set up public education programs at 'Tikkun Village' (Tikkun means 'to heal' or 'to repair.')

The Village won recognition by the Summit Education Initiative as part of its star partnership program, and was visited by eleven different Akron Public Schools and the Coming Together Project this fall.

## **VII. Membership communications, media, and the First Amendment**

- Ohio Citizen Action published its last newsletter in the winter of 2001, making way for more timely and active communications with members through the internet. By combining e-mail and the worldwide web, we will be able to send bulletins to participating members immediately, at little cost to the organization or the members. Brief e-mails will tip members off that there is news available, with links to the information on the website. By now, 115 million Americans regularly use the worldwide web, with a growth rate of 15% a year. For those who don't use the internet, we'll still be in touch through door-to-door canvassing, phone canvassing, mailings, meetings, and news reports. We'll also begin publishing an annual report for members at the end of every year.

- Ohio Citizen Action received recognition this year in a variety of national media outlets. We were named as one of the 100 Best Non-Profits to Work For in a book by Leslie Hamilton and Robert Tragert, and our work on right-to-know laws was featured in Bill Moyers' nationally-acclaimed documentary, Trade Secrets. In addition to coverage by many Ohio media outlets on our campaigns and campaign finance work, we were quoted in the New York Times, Washington Post, Newsweek, and other national publications on the Schregardus nomination.

- We continued to protect our rights to canvass under the First Amendment by settling lawsuits with the communities of Cortland and Marion. Cortland adopted a model ordinance as we recommended, and Marion changed a twenty-year old ordinance which restricted canvassing. We also filed suits against the communities of Archbold and Baltimore, which are still pending.

## **VIII. Financial support and administration**

- Our field canvasses operated throughout the year, pursuing the good neighbor campaigns and recruiting tens of thousands of members.

- The phone canvass made many significant operational improvements, including better training for the staff, and greatly increased involvement in the local campaigns.
- Citizens Policy Center received the generous support of the following foundations in 2001: the Joyce Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, the Beldon Fund, W. Alton Jones Foundation, Kutz Foundation, Institute for Global Ethics, Women's Community Foundation, Patagonia, Environmental Support Center, Murray and Agnes Seasongood Good Government Foundation, Center for Rural Affairs, Environmental Defense, and Public Citizen Foundation.
- Citizens Policy Center also joined Greater Cleveland Community Shares and Cincinnati Community Shares. These programs advance social justice by providing member agencies with a steady source of operating income through workplace payroll deduction campaigns.
- The Ohio Citizen Action board added several new members this year, and elected a new president, Brian Henties of Cincinnati. We are grateful to outgoing board president Pari Sabety, who served the organization with dedication and insightful leadership for the past six years.
- The board and staff commend the excellent work done by the financial department, which serves Ohio Citizen Action and Citizens Policy Center, throughout the year.

## **IX. In memoriam**

Ohio Citizen Action lost two close organizational friends and supporters from the Boston area this year with the deaths of Ed Kelly and John O'Connor. Ed was one of the founders and first research director of Ohio Citizen Action; John was the founder of the National Toxics Campaign and the 'father' of good neighbor campaigns. Both of these wonderful men had continued their involvement and support with us over the years.