

Highlights of 2002 -- Ohio Citizen Action

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I. Good neighbor campaigns

BRUSH WELLMAN

Brush Wellman is the world's largest manufacturer of beryllium. The company's international headquarters is in Cleveland, and their processing plant is in Elmore, near Toledo. Exposure to beryllium dust can cause chronic beryllium disease, an incurable lung disease, as well as lung cancer.

For fifty years, government agencies failed to get Brush Wellman to take major steps to prevent dangerous beryllium exposure to its workers and communities beyond the weak federal standards. But when 20,000 northern Ohioans wrote letters to the CEO and board members of the company, and we did our own community testing and found that beryllium was being tracked out the plant, things began to happen.

Brush Wellman made major changes within the plant to protect workers and to keep beryllium from leaving the facility through the stacks and on employees' clothing and shoes. The company also decided that health and safety considerations would prevent it from reopening the most dangerous part of the plant, which processed pure beryllium. In April, top company executives traveled with Ohio Citizen Action leaders to Washington, D.C. to meet with key Congressional leaders about how to increase funding for NIOSH's work on preventing beryllium exposure. By convincing Brush Wellman to clean up its beryllium operations, we have affected the entire beryllium industry, because they are the unquestioned industry leader.

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 with AK Steel in May 2001. The campaign had a number of notable organizing successes in 2002. We organized a gutter cleaning day in Middletown, where 100 volunteers collected hundreds of pounds of particulates from homes surrounding AK Steel. We had the particulates tested for heavy metals, and delivered 150 pounds of them to the AK Steel board of directors meeting in Delaware; but the bags couldn't get past the metal detectors at the hotel where they were meeting. Working with the Sierra Club Water Sentinels project, we have also just completed water testing of Dick's Creek for PCBs, and will be releasing the dramatic results soon. We have developed some excellent local leaders, who are long-time residents of Middletown and finally see the chance to make some progress to clean up their community. Because

Middletown is a “company town,” a major focus of our organizing has been to help embolden residents of this company town to speak out. We are preparing a documentary featuring the neighbors which will be released in March 2003.

One of the biggest strengths of this campaign has been its strong coalition, involving neighbors of the facility, Sierra Club, Environmental Community Organization (ECO), and the United Steelworkers of America. Sixteen thousand people have sent personal letters to company executives urging them to clean up their act, and we are now sending the enclosed “Middletown, Ohio” postcards to board members. (The postcards feature graphic scenes of everyday pollution at the facility, and say “wish you were here.”)

COLUMBUS STEEL DRUM

Columbus Steel Drum is a hazardous waste drum refurbishing facility, located in Gahanna, just northwest of Columbus. The facility, which processes an average of 5,000 drums a day, has been a menace to its neighbors, violating its permits for air pollution, water pollution, and hazardous waste. Noxious odors from the facility have caused evacuations of a nearby elementary school, residences, and businesses.

We launched our Columbus Steel Drum campaign in February 2002, and during the course of the year have organized a strong group of neighbors of the facility to take on the good neighbor campaigns. We are working closely with local fire departments, a local watershed protection group, and employees of the neighboring businesses to get the facility cleaned up. Ohio Citizen Action members have written over 13,000 personal letters to the CEO, and under public pressure the Attorney General has filed a lawsuit against the facility.

As a result of the campaign, Columbus Steel Drum installed scrubbers on three emission units, began proper maintenance of the furnace, cleaned up drain ditches, fixed leaks on the property, and disposed of illegal heavy drums. Although the CEO and plant manager have agreed to new compliance schedules, they have violated them and the terrible odor problems have continued. We have received a great deal of recent media coverage of the campaign, and are planning to conduct our own water and air testing around the facility in early 2003.

AMERICAN LANDFILL

American Landfill is the largest landfill in Ohio, a mountain rising over farmlands in Northeast Ohio. The landfill, which has applied to Ohio EPA for a major expansion, is unlined and has probably contaminated nearby groundwater. Residents are forced to live with the traffic of 500 trucks per day along rural roads.

Usually, a campaign to stop the expansion of a landfill would be directed toward getting the regulatory agency to deny the permit. However, because the Ohio EPA is so weak and unlikely to stop the expansion, we are conducting a good neighbor campaign aimed at influencing the landfill’s owner, Waste Management. We are working closely with Citizens Against American Landfill Expansion, a group of farmers whose homes surround the landfill, and Ohio Citizen Action members have written 3,300 letters to the

company opposing the expansion. We helped uncover illegal dumping of hazardous waste at the landfill this year, and worked with a truck driver who became ill from her load.

This fall, we also worked with neighbors of a waste transfer station in Akron, which is the first stop for some of the garbage heading to American Landfill. Raccoons and other rodents from the transfer station, along with terrible smells and health hazards from the garbage, were plaguing the neighbors and the nearby University of Akron. By organizing pressure on the president of the nearby University of Akron, we were able to get the city leaders of Akron to agree in December 2002 to move the transfer station out of the residential area.

SUNOCO

Sunoco's refinery in East Toledo, Ohio, has long been the subject of numerous air pollution complaints from residents. The plant is in a primarily low-income neighborhood, and borders the suburb of Oregon on Lake Erie.

We began laying the foundation for a new good neighbor campaign in the Toledo area after the completion of the Brush Wellman campaign. We found that the plant has had over 100 chemical spills since 1996, and we contacted some of the neighbors who have been complaining about the plant for years. In October, we hosted a good neighbor campaigns workshop in East Toledo and launched our full-scale good neighbor campaign in January 2003.

DAVIS-BESSE

The Davis Besse nuclear power plant is on Lake Erie, between Toledo and Cleveland. In March 2002, workers going through the plant during a refueling outage discovered a football-sized hole in the head of the nuclear reactor, caused by leaking boric acid. The only thing which prevented a rupture of the reactor head was a 3/8" lining of stainless steel, which was not designed to contain the high pressure within the reactor and was already cracking and bulging. The extent of damage was unprecedented in a nuclear plant in the United States. The plant's owner, FirstEnergy, has spent over \$400 million on repairs and replacement power to date.

Ohio Citizen Action launched a campaign in May 2002 to prevent the reopening of the nuclear reactor at Davis-Besse. Our members have sent 9,000 personal letters to CEO Peter Burg asking him to keep the facility shut down. Members are also sending letters to several First Energy board members in the Cleveland and Akron area. We have found tremendous public support throughout northern Ohio for closing the facility.

We opened the debate about whether the facility could be converted to another form of energy generation and four members of Congress from the area endorsed this call for investigation). While FirstEnergy scoffed at the idea at first, they now have made several public comments that they would consider alternatives if they can't afford to fix the nuclear reactor. We revealed flaws in the Ottawa County evacuation plan, and surveyed residents near the plant to see what they would do in the event of an accident.

We have worked with local citizens and whistleblowers to raise questions at the monthly public meetings held in the community by the NRC. We have helped to generate media coverage of the issue, especially with the *Plain Dealer*, *Toledo Blade*, and *New York Times*. The highlight of our media coverage was a 20-minute segment on the national PBS news magazine, *NOW with Bill Moyers*, which aired on January 24, 2003 and generated tremendous reaction on the campaign. We have posted daily developments on the campaign on our website, and have also made sure that financial analysts following the case receive copies of all the press coverage.

II. Campaign Reform

- We were a trusted and sought-after source by media in Ohio who wanted to “follow the money” in the 2002 elections. For the first time, we were able to produce “real time” reports documenting the flow of money to candidates for Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court. The Center also analyzed contribution information voluntarily provided by the Citizens for a Strong Ohio, an affiliate of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. These reports helped highlight the need for judicial reform and problems with the current system.
- We released *The Run for the Money: An Analysis of Campaign Contributions to Ohio Statewide and Legislative Candidates 1999-2000*. The Center also produced *The Enron Hot Potato*, a survey of Ohio statewide and legislative candidates who received contributions from Enron PACs and employees, *Power Player: FirstEnergy*, an analysis of contributions from FirstEnergy PACs and employees to Ohio statewide and legislative candidates and *Lending Industry Invests in the Legislature*, contributions to statewide and legislative candidates from the lending industry and proponents of HB 386. *Gambling on the Ohio Legislature* is an analysis of contributions (1999-available 2002 reports) from the gambling industry and proponents and opponents of a video slot machine bill (SB 313).
- We pushed for improved disclosure of information about financial contributors with three new studies: *Disclosure Proficiency: Time to Move to the Next Grade*, an analysis of campaign finance disclosure by Ohio statewide and legislative candidates in 2001, *Ohio GOP Earns “A” and Democrats “F”*, an analysis of party disclosure, and *Disclosure and the County Political Parties*, a survey of county level parties commitment to disclosure.
- Ohio Citizen Action distributed 86,000 candidate contribution-voting record flyers to Ohio families door-to-door and by mail. Working with the Secretary of State, we also beat back an attempt in the lame-duck legislative session to repeal Ohio’s law requiring electronic filing of campaign contributions.
- We released *The Cincinnati Dash for Cash 2001*, an analysis of contributions to candidates for Cincinnati City Council and Mayor in response to an initiative placed on this November’s ballot to repeal the public financing components of the 2001 Fair Elections Initiative. This study was summarized and mailed to 5,000 voters. Unfortunately, the repeal passed by 55%-45%. The Center has been working with the

city of Cincinnati as they determine the best way to make contribution reports available on-line.

III. Environmental enforcement and groundwater clean-up

- We continued to work with the Ohio Chapter of the Sierra Club, Rivers Unlimited, and Ohio Public Interest Research Group to push for improved enforcement of environmental laws in Ohio. The U.S. EPA did not meet their own year-end deadline of issuing a report on their response to our petition to revoke Ohio EPA's authority to enforce major environmental laws. In the meanwhile, we exposed many instances of enforcement failures and corruption in Ohio through our good neighbor campaigns.
- We assisted local groups in Southwest Ohio with campaigns to protect their valuable groundwater from toxic contamination. This included helping the Old North Dayton Neighborhood Association obtain a Technical Assistance Grant to oversee the investigation and clean up of the Valleycrest Landfill in Dayton, helping citizens in Urbana prepare a lawsuit against Honeywell and Siemens for groundwater contamination, providing technical assistance to citizens in Yellow Springs and Urbana, working with the City of Dayton on their wellfield protection program, and researching the potential of catastrophic accidents at water treatment facilities. We also conducted a summer-long ozone monitoring program for air pollution in the Miami Valley.
- Citizens Policy Center developed environmental education programs in the Akron area, conducted tours for school groups at the Tikken Village "eco-village" site, and compiled internet resources on safe lawn care.
- We worked with the international Access Initiative project to promote the right to know and greater public involvement in environmental decision-making in Ohio and throughout the world. We promoted the model of our good neighbor campaigns at a variety of environmental conferences, including the UN Summit in Johannesburg.

IV. Pesticides, farming, and food systems

- We helped form a statewide network of non-profit groups who support sustainable agriculture in Ohio. The network advocated to secure funding for family farms and conservation programs in the federal Farm Bill enacted in 2002. We presented 18 "Blue Ribbon" awards to recognize individuals, organizations and farmers who have reduced pesticide use in Ohio in February 2002, and participated in programs and farm tours highlighting our publication, *Farming Without Chemicals*.

- We are coordinating the Greater Columbus Foodshed Project., which will establish 24 community gardens at Head Start facilities over the next 2 ½ years, develop nutrition materials and cooking classes and outfit a local Food Wagon to provide educational programs about locally grown food for inner city neighborhoods. The project will transport food grown in the gardens to neighborhoods and will educate local youth about urban and rural farming opportunities. The project has already secured an agreement from Ohio State University to purchase food from local farmers for its Columbus campus.

V. Membership communications and protecting the First Amendment

- Ohio Citizen Action's website, www.ohiocitizen.org, attracted an average of over 217 visitors a day, up 71% from the year before. The site is updated daily, and is full of resources on Ohio Citizen Action's campaigns. Throughout the year, we collected email addresses from our members, and in January 2003 developed the capacity to send broadcast emails around the state. These emails, which can be sent on a regional or statewide basis, will keep our members informed of the latest developments and offer new opportunities for participation in the organization. People will also be able to make financial contributions on the website.
- The Ohio Citizen Action board voted to present the 2002 annual Howard M. Metzenbaum Award to Art Minson, in recognition of a lifetime of leadership for civil rights, labor, environmental, and community volunteer work in the Akron area. The award was presented at a gala event on January 16, 2003.
- We continued to protect our rights to canvass under the First Amendment by settling lawsuits with the cities of Archbold, Baltimore, and Middleburg Heights. The settlements included the cities' making changes to their ordinances to remove restrictions to canvassing, as well as payments to us to cover attorneys fees and damages. We have a lawsuit pending against Mentor-on-the-Lake. The U.S. Supreme Court made a major decision in June 2002 protecting canvassing rights, in the case filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses against the village of Stratton, Ohio.
- We worked with victims of medical malpractice from throughout Ohio to oppose legislation which put caps on damages and restricted victims rights.