



OVEC

Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition

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PROGRESS REPORT

January 1995

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

OVEC's three staff would not be able to have a major impact on any issue without the involvement and support of numerous volunteers. On all issues described below, a major staff emphasis has been to increase active citizen involvement. This includes:

- One-on-one meetings between OVEC staff and current or potential volunteers
- Phone conversations and mailings to keep interested citizens informed and involved
- Frequent issue strategy meetings open to all interested citizens
- Working with volunteers on door-to-door contacts in affected or potentially affected neighborhoods
- Helping our most active volunteers plan and coordinate their activities
- Providing volunteers with the technical information they need to be credible
- Coordinating phone and/or letter campaigns to specific regulators or industries
- Extensive networking with other regional and national organizations



THE LARGEST PULP MILL IN NORTH AMERICA

After five years of closed door meetings with WV officials, Parsons and Whittemore, a multi-national giant, plans to build what would be the largest pulp and paper mill in North America in Apple Grove, WV, in our region. If built as now planned, the mill would use a chlorine-based bleaching process and would produce organochlorines such as deadly dioxins which would be discharged into the Ohio River and into the air. Sixty-six mills around the world, mostly in Europe and Canada, currently use non-dioxin producing bleaching methods.

In the past two years, much scientific evidence has accumulated on the effects of dioxin on human, wildlife and eco-system health. In spite of this evidence, the US pulp and paper industry continues to resist the change to sane technology. Construction of this mill, as proposed, would be a major set-back in the effort to move American industry towards safer, sustainable methods.

OVEC has taken the lead on organizing grassroots citizens and other environmental groups to work together to demand a dioxin-free mill, and a sustainable timber harvesting policy. In addition to numerous strategy meetings in four communities, OVEC coordinated a large public meeting on the pulp mill proposal, and two candlelight vigils in front of the WV Governor's mansion, to protest his support of the current pulp mill proposal.

In 1994 OVEC and others have shared some significant victories. In July, a special West Virginia water quality task force (including an OVEC staff person) voted 7-1 to maintain current stricter standards for measuring the discharge of carcinogens into the state's rivers, although the changes had been requested by the pulp mill company.

After the issuance of a state water pollution permit for the mill in August, OVEC and others legally appealed the permit. We expressed outrage to US EPA, Region III, because the permit issued would have allowed 10 times more dioxin than the draft permit reviewed by the public (and the US EPA). The EPA Regional Administrator, Mr. Peter Kostmayer, then required the West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection (WV-DEP) to reopen the public comment period for all interested citizens.

In an October meeting arranged by OVEC, Mr. Kostmayer met with representatives of citizen groups (after receiving many letters) to listen to our concerns regarding the mill. As a result of organized citizen pressure by OVEC, the US EPA continues to be directly involved in the issue.

Of great concern was the fact that WV-DEP set dioxin discharge limits for the water permit based on the false assumption of zero dioxin currently in the Ohio River. OVEC pointed out that a 1993 study, conducted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, reported that fish at Apple Grove had high levels of dioxin already--in excess of the state standard for fish tissue.

In early November, in response to our legal appeal of the permit, the West Virginia Environmental Quality Board suspended the water permit until further dioxin testing could be conducted. OVEC and others asked the US EPA to require WV-DEP to conduct background testing for existing dioxin in the Ohio River.

When WV-DEP refused to conduct the necessary tests and rejected US EPA's right of oversight, the US EPA conducted their own tests in December and January (1995). Results are expected in March. WV Governor Caperton has recently met with the administrator of the US EPA, apparently to ask that Region III EPA not interfere with his plans.

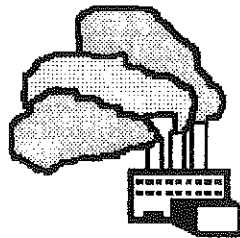
On another front, OVEC worked with West Virginia's Affiliated Construction Trades Union on their production of a video documenting the threats from this mill. The 30 minute

program aired statewide in January, 1995. OVEC has contracted to produce another video emphasizing the threats this mill poses to our region's forests.

OVEC will continue to work to increase citizen involvement in this issue. We will emphasize the public health implications of a mammoth dioxin-spewing mill: the mill's 56 million gallons per day of waste water discharges would be about 23 miles upstream of Huntington, WV's public drinking water intake pipes (Huntington is WV's second largest city); incineration of dioxin-containing pulp sludge would unnecessarily emit dioxins and other toxic organochlorines into the air in our inversion-prone river valley.

What you can do: Contact US EPA Administrator Carol Browner and ask her to prevent unnecessary dioxin pollution *at the mill.*

Ms. Carol Browner
Administrator--US EPA
401 M. St. SW (A100)
Washington DC 20460
Phone: 202-260-2090



ASHLAND OIL POLLUTION

In April, Ashland Oil's Catlettsburg Refinery became the first industry in the US with 24 hour a day video monitoring by their regulators. Six high tech video cameras feed into the monitors at the regional KY Division for Air Quality office. KY officials came up with this idea after Barbara Christian and other Kenova folks videotaped refinery emissions problems that the company tried to deny.

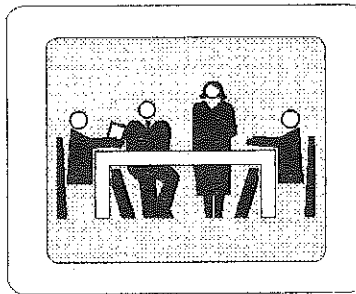
In response to OVEC pressure, US EPA Region IV conducted two separate audits at the Catlettsburg refinery: a safety audit and a virtually unprecedented audit of the accuracy of Ashland's reporting of Toxic Release Inventory data. We're working to find an outside refinery technical expert to help us evaluate these two reports when they are released.

After several meetings with OVEC members and friends, KY's Air Quality Director wrote detailed recommendations for needed improvements in both technology and in the attitude of the company. This list, which included many things that OVEC has asked for, was sent to the US EPA. As far as we know, Ashland has not agreed to make any of these improvements.

Ashland Oil and Kentucky officials are now "negotiating" penalties for numerous pollution violations over the past year. Kentucky's Air Quality Director has sought OVEC input over possible supplemental environmental projects at Ashland in lieu of some of the fine money.

In the midst of a largely African American neighborhood in Louisville, KY sits an abandoned Ashland Oil refinery. Recently, Kenova OVEC members joined with Louisville environmental justice activists to protest groundwater risks from the old refinery. Reverend Louis Coleman, a civil rights activist, led a prayer vigil.

OVEC has been in contact with US EPA scientists who are working on stronger ambient air standards for sulfur dioxide--a major problem downwind of the refinery. EPA identified our region as one where the current standards don't protect people who have breathing problems.



TRI-STATE GEOGRAPHIC INITIATIVE (TGI)

The TGI is a project involving the US EPA and three state agencies (KY, WV, OH). Its purpose is to "Define, prevent and remediate pollution problems" in our Tri-State region. Two OVEC representatives are members of the six-person Citizen Review Committee.

OVEC has successfully emphasized the need for government regulators to come here and meet with citizens who are directly impacted by pollution. Numerous meetings have been held here between regulators and citizens, especially in heavily polluted Kenova, WV, which is immediately downwind of several Kentucky industries. Such meetings have included: the overall secretary of Kentucky's environmental programs, the director of KY's Division for Air Quality, and the Top Administrator of the US EPA's Region IV office in Atlanta (the region that oversees KY). Brian Holtzclaw, who has been the coordinator of the TGI, has frequently attended OVEC meetings, and gone to active members homes in order to fully understand citizen concerns. He's also met extensively with industry representatives.

The TGI has relied heavily on industry's voluntary cooperation to improve well documented current pollution problems. A major difficulty has been that the largest regional polluter, Ashland Oil (Catlettsburg, KY) continues to be extremely uncooperative with regulators.

Ashland officials have refused voluntary improvements, arguing that unless all other industries in our region agree to similar improvements, that Ashland should not be expected to do so.

Organized OVEC pressure stimulated Holtzclaw to thoroughly investigate and compare the various regional pollution sources. This past fall, three TGI reports were released, which concluded that:

- The Kenova area bears the highest health risks due to air pollution in the Tri-State region.
- That Ashland Oil, immediately upwind of Kenova, has the highest rate of chemical accidents in the state of Kentucky.
- That it is appropriate for the EPA to do an Environmental Assessment of the Kenova area before permitting more sources of pollution such as proposed new Huntsman Chemical plants.

In this third report, the issue of environmental justice was stressed. Nationwide, it is poorer and minority communities that suffer the risks from the chemical industry while those who reap the most benefits live safely far away from the plants. The poverty rate in Kenova is three times the national average. Air pollution is already a serious problem and health studies have documented the effects on the health of Kenova residents. In addition to thoroughly documenting the existing pollution issues, Holtzclaw has also paved the way for expanded air monitoring in the region.

Apparently, Holtzclaw's success at documenting the problems here was not welcome, and his effort not appreciated. In December, without warning, Kentucky officials ordered Holtzclaw to report back to EPA for reassignment.

Kentucky's actions have enraged not only OVEC members but also environmental justice activists throughout Kentucky and the southeast, where environmental justice is the most lacking.

On Dec. 15, OVEC held a joint news conference in Frankfort, KY with the Southern Organizing Committee (based in Atlanta), the Coalition for Health Concerns (from western KY), and the Justice Resource Network (Louisville), to publicize the situation and to ask that Brian Holtzclaw's contract be renewed.

In December and January, representatives of OVEC and other groups met with Kentucky's top environmental regulator and with the Governor of Kentucky. Twenty-six organizations joined with us to ask that Holtzclaw be brought back as TGI coordinator. Holtzclaw has taken a leave of absence from his new EPA assignment to legally challenge his removal from the TGI.



PROPOSED HUNTSMAN CHEMICAL PLANTS

In September, Huntsman Chemical announced their intention to build one or two new chemical plants adjacent to Kenova, WV, our most polluted community. The plant would buy feedstock from Ashland Oil. Shortly after the announcement, OVEC members organized a news conference to publicize the pollution problems at existing Huntsman chemical plants and to emphasize that Kenova people are already sick from existing pollution and simply can't handle any more. The environmental justice implications were emphasized.

OVEC members appeared on TV news shows several times to explain their objections, and as a result have endured criticism in a local newspaper by local businessmen as well as personal harassment.

An OVEC board member, Carol Ramey, filed suit to try to stop the siting of these plants, arguing that this would violate the Federal Executive Order on Environmental Justice. In November and December, West Virginia's Governor Caperton publicly criticized Ramey's suit and the WV Attorney General publicly pointed out that the governor's personal lawyer was harassing Ramey. The Governor and Attorney General continued to disagree in the media over the state's response to Ramey's legal challenge.

In January, Huntsman Chemical announced that they would delay for one year their decision on whether or not to site new plants here. We believe that the involvement of Carol Ramey and others was crucial to this decision.



EMERGENCY PLANNING

Kenova, WV, our most heavily polluted community, has no adequate alarm or evacuation system to be used in case of chemical emergencies. For the past year, OVEC members have been attending Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) meetings, but until recently the industry-dominated LEPC refused to take our concerns seriously.

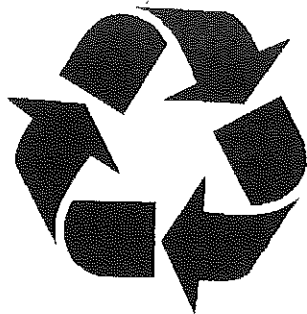
After several TV news shows featured OVEC members explaining the need for emergency planning, and after door-to-door contacts resulted in more citizen pressure on the LEPC, some progress has been made. An OVEC representative has been appointed to a new LEPC committee

to plan an emergency alarm system, and the LEPC agreed to apply for a state grant to help fund the development of an emergency evacuation plan.

Since the chair of the LEPC is an Ashland Oil chemical plant executive, continued OVEC pressure will be necessary to keep this issue moving.

GARBAGE INCINERATION

The city of Huntington, WV is being courted by incineration salesmen. The mayor and some city council members think incineration is the answer to Huntington's garbage problems. OVEC representatives have met with the mayor and attended city council meetings to present information on the air pollution and toxic ash disposal problems associated with garbage burning and to give them reports on the problems other cities are having with existing incinerators.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

OVEC keeps interested and potentially interested citizens informed on specific issues by distributing fact sheets, newsletters and relevant news clippings. Our members have frequently been interviewed on local TV news shows, and staff and members maintain close contacts with newspaper reporters.

In August, OVEC organized a week long children's nature camp, staffed mostly by OVEC volunteers, and attended by 42 kids.

OVEC is working with Ohio University--Southern Campus to plan an environmental symposium to be held on campus in April.

We've frequently provided information to high school and college students working on projects with environmental topics.

OVEC's director spoke about grassroots organizing at the statewide WV United Methodist Youth conference. OVEC staff have participated as panelists or speakers at numerous other regional and national conferences.

OVEC PROGRESS REPORT 1994

To all OVEC members and supporters:

Enclosed is OVEC's annual progress report for 1994.

All this was made possible because of YOU!

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;
Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

OHIO VALLEY ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

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