Kids Help Monitor Newark’s Dirty Diesel Near Their School

In December member groups of the Coalition for Healthy Ports (CHPs, which NJEF chairs) and dozens of environmentalists, carpenters, dock workers, drivers, and students conducted a truck count at various locations in the East and South Wards of Newark where port trucks first hit the local streets. The Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC) did a great job organizing truck counting in front of the Hawkins Street School and other neighborhood locations in Newark. Additional truck counting was conducted in the South Ward by the graduates of NJEF’s Newark-based Urban Environmental Institute.

“Every week, thousands of trucks pass through the Ironbound going to and from the port, spewing toxic diesel emissions, which we know are a major cause of asthma,” said Cynthia Mellon, community organizer for ICC and Ironbound resident. “We now have the numbers to prove it. Until the Port becomes a better neighbor, we will continue to see high levels of asthma and other respiratory illnesses in our neighborhoods.”

The intention of the “port truck count” was to raise public awareness about the dangerous effects of pollution from the goods movement in local port communities, amongst the drivers, and their families, many of them low-income and without health insurance.

CHPs has already drafted it’s own Clean Air Action Plan and plans to press the Port Authority of NY/NJ to adopt it. The Coalition is also pushing officials here to adopt a comprehensive clean-air plan modeled after a landmark Port of Los Angeles policy. The LA “Clean Trucks Program” has been lauded by economists and environmentalists alike, as the October 2008 green-growth initiative will reduce emissions from port trucking by 80 percent, deliver over $5 billion to the regional economy, and drastically reduce security risks through key enforcement provisions that require the industry to take responsibility for clean vehicles and its workforce.

New Jerseyans now face the nation’s second greatest cancer risk from diesel soot in the nation. According to UMDNJ, treatment for asthma alone accounts for 12 percent of New Jersey’s managed care costs. Newark’s school children experience a 25 percent asthma rate, double the state and national rates. The city’s residents are hospitalized and experience premature deaths at twice the rate of Essex County Suburbs.

“This is an environmental injustice,” remarked Amy Goldsmith, State Director of NJEF. “The Port Authority can bury their heads in the sand and remain one of the most anti-environmental ports in America, or they can start listening to the people and act responsibly.”

“Kids Help Monitor Newark’s Dirty Diesel Near Their School” by James, continued from page 1: A New Year Confronts Old Problems

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January 2009

A New Year Confronts Old Problems in NJ and the Nation

Economic, Climate and Foreign Policy Crises Create Opportunity

To have would thought this time last year that Barak Obama would be President and our nation would be facing its worst economic crisis since the Depression? Coupled with the international global warming and New Jersey’s multi-year budget crises, we certainly have our hands full!

Fortunately there are solutions. The 2008 federal election results and upcoming 2009 state elections create the opportunity for change.

The most anti-environment policy in the nation’s history is behind us and President Obama has made confronting the climate crisis and energy policy, which are inextricably linked to the economy and foreign policy, one of his top three priorities.

We are optimistic that his “green team”, most notably NJDEP Commissioner Lisa Jackson as head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), and a new greener Congress, including the two new Reps. from New Jersey—John Adler (D-Camden) and Leonard Lance (R-Hunterdon)—are up to the challenge.

While climate and energy might be the top of the list, it’s not a short list. Our federal government must not only undo the damage done by the Bush Administration, e., restoring the Clean Water Act to its original intent, but also be forward thinking. Making decades and centuries old water and transportation infrastructure worthy of a green 21st century, and reforming the chemical system to protect public health and the environment would be two great places to start.

Green jobs will play a huge role—addressing the aging, inadequate grid, upgrading water plants and sewer lines; making old buildings and new developments energy efficient; manufacturing new solar panels and wind turbines; cleaning up and redeveloping contaminated sites; fixing existing bridges and roads; building high speed rail lines; retrofitting diesel vehicles; and more.

While meaningful action on these priorities is just getting started in DC, it’s already happening in New Jersey to varying degrees. In the last few months of 2008, the state took major steps to begin meeting the mandates of its 2007 Global Warming Response Act (GWRA) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The state set down the road to 80% reductions by 2050. These are the reductions the scientific consensus says is needed to avert the worst impacts of global warming.

In December, New Jersey became the nation’s leader in developing offshore wind in approving a pilot project off of Atlantic City, thus encouraging others. In October, Governor Corzine released an Energy Master Plan that increased emphasis on energy efficiency and clean renewables while de-emphasizing reliance on fossil (with the unfortunate exception of liquefied natural gas) and nuclear fuels.

In December, NJDEP also laid out new recommendations as to how the state could meet the GWRA mandates with a moratorium on new coal plants and major changes in the land use and transportation sectors. While this is just the beginning and implementation is key, the Corzine Administration deserves credit for really turning up the heat (no pun intended) these past few months.

Unfortunately for much of the rest of the environmental agenda, the Corzine Administration and NJ Legislature have not measured up as we head into an election year for the Governor and NJ Assembly. Despite repeated commitments to the contrary, the Governor has permitted funding for open space, farmland and historic preservation to dry up while the Legislature with a few notable exceptions just points fingers or doesn’t care.

Further, the state has some 20,000 contaminated sites with the vast majority not getting cleaned up at all, well, and/or fast enough. Rather than fixing the root of the problem—providing the state’s Water Supply Master Plan that would get the job done—the Governor with nary a peep from the Legislature at least so far has made the purely political call to provide the clean-up program. Under draft legislation expected to move early in the year, polluters could too often hire and pay contractors to sign on clean-ups—the proverbial fox watching the henhouse.

Also expected early in this New Year is an off-delayed update to the state’s anticipated Water Supply Master Plan. Whether it ensures that development only occurs where there’s clean, plentiful, and affordable water remains to be seen.
A Safe Energy Future

The ongoing battle to stop the relicensing of the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station in Lacey Township is entering its third year. The station was built in the 1960’s and has already operated for 45 years with 1950’s technology that was scrapped in the past for new. Despite this, a U.S. Environmental Protection (USEPA) regulation calling for the use of the “best” technology at nuclear power plants, our efforts to push the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to require cooling towers at Oyster Creek and slash the impacts on Barnegat Bay continues to be stonewalled by the Bush Administration. The Supreme Court will soon rule whether to overturn an Appellate decision that upheld the USEPA’s ruling.

While we continue our legal effort in the courts, the coalition is also spearheading a congressional effort to rewrite the nation’s radiation exposure standards. Currently, acceptable doses of low level radiation from nuclear plants are set according to the most robust—a healthy 35-year-old 170 pound male, rather than the most vulnerable, infants and pregnant women. We are working with Congressman Christopher Smith (R-4th District) on the rewriting of the standards.

Helped secure changes to New Jersey’s new Energy Master Plan (EMP) that shift the state away from relying on traditional fossil and nuclear fuels and instead for substantial increases in the generation of energy from renewable sources and the implementation of comprehensive energy efficiency measures.

Strengthened the NJ Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) to regulate development in 1,250 square miles in the NJ Highlands region, a valuable area that provides water for 60 percent of the state’s residents. Helped pass an Executive Order (EO) that addresses some of the RMP’s remaining flaws and strengthens the document further by ensuring little to no growth in preservation zone communities.

Helped pass three important bills to increase recycling of residential and electronic waste and strengthen enforcement of key pesticide and land use laws.

Join our grassroots organizing, public education and fundraising staff. Earm $12-$17 per hour plus benefits. Past training: (732) 280-8988; (973) 744-3005.

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We need to hire top-drawer technical experts to support our legal case. This is expensive, but it is the only way we can win in courts.

Support Our Work by making a tax-deductible contribution payable to Clean Water Fund.

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NJ Environmental Federation’s Environmental Victories in 2008!

Helped implement green cleaning policies in five municipalities, two churches, and one school; idle-free policies in six municipalities and two schools; and pesticide free zone policies in ten municipalities, one school district, and one church.

NJEF coordinated a dozen School Integrated Pest Management (IPM) training sessions for school personnel including additional onsite trainings. To date, over 3000 facility managers and principals have been to our IPM trainings as mandated by state law.

NJ EF co-led Stop the Relicensing of Oyster Creek Nuclear Power Plant Coalition (STROC) to obtain a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on lack of plant oversight of the plant by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Recently won a crucial legal round when the federal Atomic Safety Licensing Board agreed that age management of the radiation containment vessel at Oyster Creek needs independent review.

Working in coalition with the NJ Working Family Alliance (WFA) to ensure that as NJ faces the current economic crisis, core government programs and services are adequately funded through progressive taxation and other means, inappropriate subsidies are opposed, and polluters pay their fair share for wrong doing.

9 out of 9 candidates endorsed by NJEF in 2008 won.

Our newly formed Newark-based Urban Environmental Institute, held successful environmental justice leadership training courses in the spring and summer of 2008. Students from the course later held a “Green Jobs Now” rally, installing a cool/refractive panel on the roof of a local bakery in the South Ward of Newark.

Our “Sustainable Communities” programs helped implement green cleaning policies in five municipalities, two churches, and one school; idle-free policies in six municipalities and two schools; and pesticide free zone policies in ten municipalities, one school district, and one church.

NJ Working Family Alliance