

Everyone's Backyard

CITIZEN'S CLEARINGHOUSE FOR HAZARDOUS WASTE, INC.

Vol. 4 No. 1 — Winter, 1985

News Briefs

On 11/6, CCHW's Director Lois Gibbs gave birth to Ryan Alexander, at 7 lbs, 14 oz, healthy and beautiful. Last year, Lois married CCHW Science Director Steve Lester. This is their first child. Like Lois's other children, Michael and Melissa, Ryan's good health is a tribute to the Love Canal victory in winning the federal buy-out and evacuation of residents.

On September 20, CCHW hosted a Roundtable on Source Reduction with presentations by experts who *proved* that companies can reduce hazardous waste through recycling *and make money!* On September 21, we held a second Roundtable on the *big* issue of "How Clean Is Clean?" (i.e. when sites are "cleaned," what does this *mean*?) After looking at the options, leaders agreed they should push for *zero* (no contamination at all), understanding this is difficult, maybe impossible, to do. The minimum goal is "background"— restore the site to the way it was before contamination. The group acknowledged that some areas were contaminated before the site was built. In such situations, the Roundtable group said "baseline" could be an acceptable goal. "Baseline" is a cleanup goal that attempts to reduce contamination to so-called "safe" or "acceptable" levels set by EPA; EPA has standards for many (not all) commonly found toxics. This is the most favored approach for industry, EPA and many

See NEWSBRIEF, page 2



Leaders from 16 states brought together by CCHW to protest the "Toxic Merry-Go-Round"
— see NEWSBRIEFS for more.

LRCC Dumps Sorry Cleanup Plan

Most people envision antelopes, Yellowstone and wide-open spaces when they think of Wyoming, not hazardous wastes. We wish that was the case, but, unfortunately, Wyoming has its share of toxic waste dumps contaminating groundwater, rivers and threatening people's health. The worst Wyoming site is the J.H. Baxter Railroad Tie Treatment Plant just south of Laramie, WY's only Superfund site. Baxter was operated by Union Pacific Railroad (UP) from 1886 to 1983 to preserve railroad ties and other wood products with zinc chloride, creosote and pentachlorophenol.

The plant lies in the Laramie River's floodplain. For most of its history, wastes were just dumped in low areas around the site. In the 60s,

by Jeff Stern, Laramie River Cleanup Council ponds were built to contain the wastes, but they were unlined and leaked.

UP's disposal "non-method" contaminated 140 acres around the plant with pentachlorophenol, dioxins and other toxics and polluted the shallow water table and three bedrock aquifers under the site. Wastes enter the Laramie River (the west boundary of the site) and move under the river to the west.

We formed the Laramie River Cleanup Council (LRCC) in 1983 to deal with the Tie Plant situation and first went public in March 1983 at an EPA hearing on UP's plan to clean the four waste ponds. LRCC blasted the plan because it wouldn't really cleanup the site and would let UP get

See LRCC, page 7



Local leaders in their snappy, new CCHW t-shirts ride the Smithsonian carousel to protest the Toxic Merry-Go-Round (see NEWSBRIEFS story).

NEWSBRIEF, from page 1 national environmental groups. However, grassroots leaders at CCHW's Roundtable saw it as a poor, last choice, good only under very special circumstances. When CCHW polled nearly 200 local groups dealing with cleanup problems, *nearly 85%* voted for "background," saying responsible parties must "put it back the way it was!"

After the September 20-21 Roundtables, most local leaders stayed over to be part of a protest organized by CCHW and Environmental Action kicking "Superfund Action Week." We took over an antique merry-go-round at the Smithsonian Institute, decked out in CCHW T-shirts, carrying signs made by Greenpeace. We did this to make the points that (a) the Smithsonian was found to be *loaded* with PCB transformers; when the PCBs are removed, they'll probably be shipped to already-leaking dumpsites (b) John Dingell/Dennis Eckherdt's version of Superfund supports the stupid practice of taking Superfund waste to leaking dumpsites (e.g. CECOS, Williamsburg, OH; WMI, Emelle, AL) and (c) Congress will have to answer to its constituents. Later that week, four vans from the "Superdrive for Superfund" organized by the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards arrived with drinking water and soil samples declared "safe" by EPA from dumpsites around the country. These

samples drove home the point that "safe" is definitely in the eye of the beholder.

FIFTH ANNIVERSARY: please stay alert for mailings on plans for the 5th Anniversary of CCHW and the Grassroots Movement on hazardous wastes. The highlight is the first ever National Grassroots Convention on Hazardous Wastes this spring. We'll be telling you about specific ways that *you* or your group can join in the celebration.

We've been on the road a lot to help local groups fight specific local issues. Among these was New Castle, PA, where "Citizens Against Toxic Sites" (CATS) is fighting one of the last proposed, hazardous waste landfills. Nearly 1500 people came out to a rally to hear Lois Gibbs urge them on to not only win their fight but push for a state-wide moratorium. We also visited Wyoming to help the Laramie River Cleanup Council win the next stage in cleaning up WY's only Superfund site. The dumper, Union Pacific Railroad, wanted to let the site sit after *moving the Laramie River!* Residents didn't buy that as any way to carry out a complete and permanent cleanup.

CCHW's 3rd Annual Ohio Leadership Development Conference was held on September 13-15 and drew a record crowd. We went regional with this conference and drew participants from OH, MI, PA, IN, WV, VA and KY. The 1986 calendar for Leadership Development Conferences already includes LA, NJ, VA, the 4th Annual in OH and probable conferences in ME and PA. Call or write for more information on these, or if you'd like to see one in your state. ●



On our site visit to New Castle, PA, we saw lots of creative signs people had put on their lawns to show their support for Citizens Against Toxic Sites (CATS).

Safety Plans: What Makes A Good One

The most important aspect of the cleanup is the safety plan. This plan lays out how workers and *the community* will be protected during cleanup. You need to be involved in developing it so it addresses your community's needs *before* any construction begins.

They Say Our Fears Are Unfounded

The first thing you'll hear is "A good on-site plan is a good off-site plan." If workers aren't exposed, the community will be protected. Not true! Workers on-site have protective gear and go home at night. You don't. Further, in case of an accident, you can reasonably expect that workers will attend to themselves and their co-workers first. You're on your own! You're also going to be told that your fears are unfounded—"It can't happen here." This isn't true either. What magic formula do they have for your site that no one else has? Blanket assurances are pretty irresponsible. Accidents do happen, and a proper plan is needed to prevent disaster.

What Are The Risks?

Lots of things can go wrong during cleanup: chemical releases; explosions when barrels with explosive chemicals are struck; releases of volatile chemicals exposed to air; vehicles tracking contamination off-site; dust blown by the wind and wastes washed off by rain. A good plan addresses each of these and relies on good information. Here are some key questions:

- What's buried at the site—are the wastes explosive, flammable, corrosive, reactive, volatile or stable?
- Do these chemicals move through groundwater, surface water or soil? Do they stick to soil that's going to become wind-blown dust? Will the presence of other chemicals change their behavior (e.g., dioxin will move if organic solvents like benzene or toluene are present)?
- Will wastes react to sunlight, water, air or other chemicals? Dioxin, for example, will slowly break down in sun light while MIC (the chemical killer in Bhopal) will create a toxic cloud if mixed with air.



When the clean up exposes the chemicals, it can become more of a hazard than the site itself.

- Are the wastes in barrels, special containers or just emptied in the ground?

What Should Be Included In The Safety Plan?

It depends on the wastes at the site, and the cleanup plan. For example, if the plan calls for excavation and removal, you'll need more details than if they were just topping it with a clay cap. General ingredients for a good safety plan:

- *Safety Coordinator*—responsible for plan, coordination of emergency team, activating contingency plans, reporting on-site activities to general public and maintaining constant link with safety officer.
- *On-Site Safety Officer*—ensures plan is carried out, notifies coordinator and emergency response personnel of all dangers and problems and "sounds the alarm" for workers and the community.
- *Limited Access To The Site*—keeps unauthorized individuals out and avoids contact by the public to the contamination.
- *On-Line Monitoring*—provides quick (several minutes) air test results. A special mobile lab equipped with a toxic vapor monitor to measure total organic halogens or an infrared spectrophotometer (IR) measures chemicals like benzene, toluene and chloroform.
- *Temporary Evacuation Plan*—for sensitive people such as children,

the elderly or people with respiratory problems that could be aggravated by even small exposures.

More situation-specific measures could include:

- Careful dust control.
- Cover all excavated spoils (contaminated soil) and trenches at the end of each day.
- Restrict on-site vehicles to reduce spreading toxics beyond the site.
- Clean all vehicles before they leave the site.
- Designate specific "clean" staging areas where materials and supplies could be delivered without coming into contact with contaminated soil.
- Maintain equipment on-site for as long as needed (avoids cleaning equipment more than once).
- Use berms around work areas to prevent runoff to clean areas.
- Place charcoal or lime piles close to trenches to quench fires or neutralize chemicals.

Stack these measures against the safety plan for your site. How close they come depends on the situation and on you. It's up to your group to make sure these safeguards are built into the safety plan to protect your community as well as the workers. Plans should address every reasonable fear and concern. Be prepared for the unexpected and take nothing for granted. Remember the old saying: "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". For more details on safety plans, contact CCHW. ●

Organizing Toolbox: Getting Churches Involved

By Will Collette

Is your church active on toxics issues? Are other churches? Are they helping your group? If you said "No," WHY? Have you asked them? Among the most important institutions in any community are the churches. Your fight is seen by many churches as a *social justice* issue, shown in resolutions by the United Church of Christ, United Methodists, Unitarians and American Hebrew Union. Maybe it's time *you* talked to them about joining in your fight.

Why Is This Important?

Besides being a voice for justice, churches have resources. For example:

- **Legitimacy.** When I first started organizing, we had a motto: "Collars up front!" Every time we had an event, we recruited clergy for added credibility. Members were also reassured that their cause was right. When local clergy open your meetings with an invocation, this can reassure people trying to make up their minds about your group ("Are they commie radicals, or are they people like us?").

- **People.** Do you have access to church membership? Do churches post notices of your events? Is the priest, minister, deacon or rabbi talking about your issue from the pulpit? All of these are possible and have been done. The time is ripe: for example, the United Methodists held conferences this summer for church women leaders on "The Stewardship of God's Earth."

- **Resources.** Instead of renting a meeting hall, why not ask churches for space? Also: using church *office* space; phones; copier, mimeograph, other office equipment. Churches won't give you these just because you ask (though if you never ask, you won't get). *You* must connect your cause with the moral beliefs of the church.

- **Perspective.** As toxics groups mature, many start looking at the "Big Picture" (i.e., how our fight shows the way powerless people get treated by the powerful). When groups make the transition from being focused only on a single, local



Churches are great places to hold your meetings.

"We're Against X" issue to being broadly concerned about good government, empowerment and justice, the churches can get interested. And sometimes, groups have found that churches provide a healthy setting to start looking at these broader questions.

- **Money.** Churches *can* offer financial support. Unlike most donors, they're not bound to only give money to official, tax-exempt groups (i.e., so-called IRS "501(c)(3) corporations"). Usually, you have to talk to the pastor and the church governing board or social justice committee. Also, local churches can act as a "sponsor" or "channel" for you: people, institutions or foundations could give money intended for your group to the church and they can pass it on to you. Further, if you have a relationship with local churches, it's easier to apply to church social justice funding programs. For example, the Catholic Church gives nearly \$10 million for community organizing through the *Campaign for Human Development* (CHD). Seventy-five percent of CHD grants are given through their national program and 25% through local "dioceses." The Presbyterians have *Self Development of People*, the United Church of Christ has the *Board of Homeland Ministeries*, the United Methodists use their *Board of Church and Society*, the Unitarians

have two: the *Social Concerns* program and *Northshore Veatch Program*. For \$8 plus postage, you can get a great directory, "Church Funds for Social Justice," from the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, 122 W. Franklin Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55404.

How Do You Approach The Churches For Help?

Start by talking to local church leaders. If you belong to a church, talk to your pastor or people on your church's social justice committee. Ask others to do the same. Talk like a person: don't play games, but simply say what your group is doing and why it's important the church gets involved. Be clear about what you need and start from there.

Churches get involved in toxics when they see what it does to people and the moral injustice done to families, children and whole communities. They might want to get involved for the very same reasons *you* got involved.

If you want help from larger church bodies, like CHD, the Methodist Conference or Presbyterian Synod, remember most church social justice funds are earmarked to help empower powerless people. This means they prefer to fund groups of low and moderate income people or with large percentages of racial or ethnic minorities. Even if your group isn't mainly poor or minorities, you've probably seen how your fight has *bridged* historic divisions and brought together people who've never worked together before. For instance, we've seen some terrific coalitions of Blacks and Whites in the Deep South. Stress this when you speak to church groups. Point out also how your group empowers people who've never gotten involved before. But, you get churches involved by organizing them. If you want national churches to support you and the national movement, you'll have to work with local churches and raise the call from the bottom, up. Like any other organizer, you start by talking to one person, then another, then another...another... ●

LEGAL CORNER

By Ron Simon

Q. My lawyer said I have to take a deposition. What does this mean? I'm afraid of going to court. What should I do?

A. Before trial, the other side's lawyer can "take a deposition": meet with you (and your lawyer) outside of court to ask you questions. Why? It's a procedure designed to allow parties to a lawsuit to find out underlying facts and the other side's story *before* trial. The idea is that if everybody knows the facts, the trial won't be governed by surprise and the results will be fairer. Further, when both sides know the underlying facts, attention should stay on the real issues, each side will know the other's strengths and weaknesses, and it'll be easier to settle the case. The whole process is called "pre-trial discovery."

There are several pre-trial fact-finding procedures. "Interrogatories" are written questions one party requires another party to answer. These answers become part of the official case record and can become evidence. Interrogatories are sent to your lawyer, who then sends them on to you and (usually) meets with you to discuss the final draft of your answers.

Your opponent in a lawsuit can also require you to produce documents (such as medical or tax records) or other objects for inspection. In a personal injury case, they can make you undergo examination by a doctor they select. If the case involves property, the opposing party has the right to enter and inspect the property in question.

But a face-to-face deposition is the most common discovery method. Depositions aren't limited to parties to a lawsuit. They can include witnesses, experts or others with pertinent information. Depositions typically occur in the office of the attorney

taking the deposition. Present are the lawyer taking the deposition, person giving testimony, lawyers for other parties in the suit and a stenographer to take a transcript. Sometimes the parties agree to let the deposition also be audio or video-taped.

Generally, the opposing attorney begins by asking general background questions about your life (where you live and work) and moves on to important parts of the case. At times, your attorney may object to questions. Listen to the objection and *don't answer* until your attorney tells you to. If your attorney objects a lot, there'll also be a lot of arguing between the lawyers, since there's no judge in the room to resolve the debate. If you don't understand a question or feel you have some problem in answering, you can ask to go "off the record," leave the room and talk with your attorney.

Generally, your attorney only asks you a few questions to help clarify something you've said. When the deposition is over, the stenographer writes up a transcript. You get to review it to make sure it is correct and to sign before it becomes official.

General advice: you don't have to be perfect. During the deposition, you'll be asked for lots of specific information—dates, names, places and details about lots of incidents. Inevitably, you'll feel stupid for not remembering everything or guilty afterwards when you think of all of the things that you "should have said", or remember some mistake. No one's memory is perfect, so such feelings are inevitable. Here are two suggestions: (1) say you don't know or can't remember when you are asked for details you can't remember. Do your best, but remember that it's better to say you don't know or can't remember than to give wrong testimony.

Of course, after the deposition is over, you'll remember additional things—this is inevitable.

(2) listen carefully before you speak and don't volunteer information. Often people are so worried about a certain point or fact that they start talking about it even when they're not asked about it. If you listen carefully to the question, you may be able to answer it in a way that does not raise the points you are concerned about. A long discussion with your lawyer before the deposition is the best way to deal with your concerns.

Sometimes a lawyer will ask you whether you talked to your lawyer about the case and about the deposition. This question is supposed to make you feel guilty and suggest that you've done something wrong. The lawyer hopes you'll lie and deny speaking with your lawyer when everybody knows you have. Tell the truth. Remember that what you said to your lawyer is confidential.

Sometimes depositions are taken not to find out facts to be used at trial, but to "preserve" testimony that may not be available at trial (such as when a person will be leaving the area or is expected to die). In these depositions, questions are asked by the lawyer who wants to use the witness's testimony at trial. Preparation for these depositions is the same as for trial.

Depositions can be difficult, but will be less so if you're well-prepared. Remember that you don't have to answer any questions, and you'll be a lot less nervous. ●

Ron Simon is special counsel to the Citizens' Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste. He is on the faculty of American University Law School and represents citizens around the country exposed to hazardous chemicals. He represents workers who are exposed to chemicals in the workplace. He is also counsel to the White Lung Association (asbestos victims).

DANGER, from back cover

Emergency personnel training is often lacking. Crews don't know what's being transported, so they don't know how to handle it. Most firefighters use water on a blaze, but sometimes that's the *worst* thing to do. Usually, only large departments *may* have hazardous materials experts, but many don't. Most firefighters are volunteers with a large turn-over rate, so training is a huge, expensive task. Who should pay? One answer is to charge generators for firefighter training.

Other problems call for better laws *and* stricter enforcement. Federal law regulates hazardous materials transport, packaging and labeling, but states and localities can impose even stronger rules. U.S. law bans trucks with hazardous substances from heavily populated areas or dangerous places (e.g., tunnels) unless there's no practical alternative. This rule isn't enforced, but can and should be. Dallas, Houston, Boston, Portland and New York have routing regulations, curfews or both. Cincinnati fines truckers if they take the interstate through the city, instead of the beltway. Such localities as Prince Georges County, MD, and New Orleans have conducted elaborate mock disaster drills to train emergency personnel.

Industry can contribute to safety, too. Dupont eliminated the need to store and transport MIC (the chemical killer in Bhopal) by redesigning its LaPorte, TX, plant so that the MIC is processed as soon as it is produced. Closing or blocking regional hazardous waste facilities and promoting on-site recycling and responsible management of toxic waste also cuts down disasters like the recent Fairfax, VA crash. Between 1981-3, railroads replaced short-segment, worn track with new, almost seamless track that's much safer. Most railroads now have alcohol treatment programs for workers. These grew up after the 1982 Livingston, LA, crash when 50 cars jumped the track, blew up, spilled 20,000 gallons of chemicals and released a toxic cloud that forced 3,200 people to evacuate. The engineer was too drunk to sit up, so

his girlfriend tried to run the train. Despite this tragedy, alcohol will probably remain a chronic problem.

Other issues: railroad highway crossings need better protective devices. Since half of all hazardous truck accidents involve gasoline trucks, they need to be made as crashworthy as possible. So should rail cars. Rules must be better enforced and coordinated perhaps through a single federal agency.

What You Can Do:

A Case Study

Chickasaw, AL, residents learned in 1981 that Waste Management planned to store toxics in the neighboring port of Mobile for burning in its incinerator ship, the Vulcanus II. WMI was transporting Hooker Chemical waste from Love Canal to Mobile for a "test burn" to get an EPA license for the ship. Trucks ran right through town, an immediate concern, *plus* WMI planned to build two 800,000-gallon storage tanks in the port. In 1982, the Chickasaw Community Affairs Group got mobilized and their first action was to stop construction of the storage tanks. They found out the Teamsters' Pension Fund owned the land WMI wanted and WMI needed their permission (the Teamsters didn't know they owned the land). Futher, EPA planned to waive restrictions on having such a facility in a 100-year flood plain. CCAG enlisted Mobile official Bubba Jones, who got the Federal Emergency Management Agency to redefine the area as a 500-year flood plain and not subject to EPA waiver. Between this and the Teamsters' support, CCAG blocked WMI's tank farm. Concerned that WMI would just off-load chemicals from trucks to the incinerator ship, CCAG turned its attention to blocking truck traffic through town.

Through ordinances from both the Chickasaw and Mobile City Councils, CCAG got the following restrictions imposed on WMI's trucks:

- The hauler must notify the Chickasaw police chief in advance of route and time, go to a police-designated "staging area" and only move under police escort (hauler pays for the escort). While waiting for the escort, police and the trucker must inspect the vehicle for leaks and

defects. If any are found, the trucker can't proceed unless the trucking company posts a \$10 million bond to cover any potential damage.

- When traveling through Chickasaw, trucks keep 150 feet away from the nearest vehicle, with the exception of their police escort.

- Headlights on, two-way radio going. Trucks must be marked according to DOT and RCRA rules and drivers must give police their RCRA manifests.

- Only two streets lead into the Port of Chickasaw and trucks are banned from one of them. On the other, Viaduct St., there's a "gross vehicle weight limit" of 30,000 lbs., enforced by new weigh stations at either end of a rickety bridge. This limit is lower than the average WMI truck and when WMI complained, they were told to get smaller trucks. The AL Highway Dept. recently recommended the limit be further lowered.

- Waste trucks can't travel through the area when it's raining, has rained or is forecast. Same for freezing conditions, hurricane or tornado warnings or watches and wind conditions of 50 mph or more.

- Mobile City Commission totally banned hazardous waste shipments from the city limits.

- Truck speed limits: 40 mph (Interstate), 30 mph (state highway), 20 mph (city street) and only between 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

Waste Management dropped not only Chickasaw and Mobile from its docksite candidates list for the Vulcanus II, *but all Alabama ports!* After WMI Lost in Chickasaw and Mobile, they looked at other Alabama sites, but CCAG encouraged local people to take similar measures. CCAG celebrated its victory with a ceremonial burning of the black ribbons and banners that were draped all over the county as symbols of their fight. CCAG remains active in the nationwide fight to stop the EPA/ WMI plan to launch a fleet of incinerator ships off our coasts. For more information on what CCAG did and what's next, contact Collette King, CCAG, 314 6th St., Chickasaw, AL 36611.

Can you do the same? What's stopping you? ●

LRCC, from page 1

by with minimal work. Our Chair, Tom Hill, said Union Pacific's efforts were like "applying a bandaid to a gut wound."

EPA changed the pond closure plan to include many of our suggestions (our first victory!). But then UP sued EPA over the cleanup order. "Union Pacific found a solution to the problem—hire more lawyers," Hill commented.

There was a lull as both sides prepared for court. LRCC used that time to build media attention, do public education and canvass South Laramie, a low-income neighborhood next to the plant. UP was most sensitive to being exposed to the media.

EPA and UP settled out of court in July, 1984—the settlement upheld LRCC's ideas on proper cleanup, our second big victory! But there were still over 130 contaminated acres to be cleaned. UP published a "Risk Assessment" showing wastes weren't a serious threat. LRCC was particularly concerned that UP only tested two deepwells before drawing this shaky conclusion that South Laramie's drinking water wasn't harmed. UP neglected to test *shallow* wells that faced a more immediate threat. "They're not taking into consideration the people who live around the plant," said Mike Burns, South Laramie LRCC member. "Those wells are the sole source of water for many people living there."

LRCC petitioned EPA for tests on wells closest to the plant and they finally agreed. The results showed no contamination at the time of sampling and South Laramie folks were



Linda Burns of LRCC (left) compares bellies with CCHW's Lois Gibbs (center) on Lois's visit to Wyoming about a month before giving birth to Ryan Alexander (see NEWSBRIEFS).

relieved. Then UP decided a slurry wall was the best way to deal with remaining contamination. We didn't agree. The slurry wall would leak (they all eventually do), it wouldn't stop waste contamination of groundwater and cleanup work in addition to the wall was needed. We pushed our concerns at public hearings and in the media.

That was October 1984. Since then, everyone from County Commissioners to the State of Wyoming has followed our lead and questioned the slurry wall. Faced with a "wall" of opposition, UP reversed itself and agreed a

slurry wall will be only part of the final remedy. Final cleanup plans are coming out in November 1985. Meanwhile, LRCC is researching other sites in Laramie (there's a depressing number of them) and working on ways to improve WY's hazardous waste rules.

LRCC played a crucial role in cleaning up Baxter Tie. UP has learned Laramie residents are watching their every move and won't tolerate shoddy cleanup. Experience shows that when people organize, they can make industry and government deal responsibly with hazardous wastes! ●

Everyone's Backyard is published by the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, Inc. CCHW is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, environmental crisis center which primarily focuses its work on grassroots environmental organizations across the nation.

Lois Marie Gibbs, Executive Director
EDITORIAL BOARD: Will Collette, Lois Gibbs, Stephen Lester, Sybil Petersen, Iris Rothman, and Ron Simon.

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CCHW
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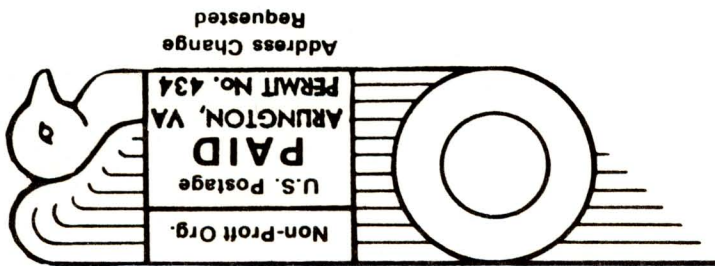
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CITIZEN'S CLEARINGHOUSE FOR HAZARDOUS WASTES, INC.
POST OFFICE BOX 926 ARUNGTON, VIRGINIA 22219



Danger On The Road

by Sybil Peterson

In one 48-hour period last August, everything that could go wrong in the chemical industry went wrong. Union Carbide's Institute, WV, plant leaked a toxic cloud that sent 135 people for medical treatment. A spectacular chemical train explosion in Valentine, AZ, sent residents to evacuation centers. A chemical waste truck crashed on the Washington Beltway, stranding 7,000 motorists and forcing 300 families to flee. In Camden, NJ, residents were evacuated when a chemical storage tank was ruptured by careless handling. It's not just dumps that threaten our homes and families.

If you live near railroad tracks or a highway, it's only a matter of time before you're blown up, poisoned or evacuated because of hazardous materials that's "just passing through." Some cargoes are hazardous waste, but others are even more lethal, like loads of pure toxic or explosive substances that travel through our

communities, noticed only casually, if at all.

These shipments present several problems. For instance, what's in them? The shipper has no records, except financial ones. You can find out what's on a freight car from the railroad, but not from labeling on the car because it's often absent or unreadable. Railroad cars leak, making their tracks long, narrow landfills. Last May, the National Transportation Safety Board called for the inspection of 3,800 tank cars and found a design flaw in most cars that cause leaks. Leaky cars are most dangerous when they sit in yards set up by many railroads in cities. Some dripping chemicals vaporize; others react with air, form toxic clouds and can cause mass evacuations. Both trains and trucks can be built to resist breaking open on impact. However, this is expensive to do and hasn't been field-tested. In the meantime, there are accidents like last



Collette King, leader of Chickasaw, Alabama, Community Affairs Group, speaking out on transportation hazards.

August's Burlington Northern crash where a train hauling drums of uranium oxide crashed into a truck near Bowdon, ND, killing the driver and spilling the contents of 30 radioactive barrels.

Further, half of the trains have brakes that tend to lock, making them tear apart and force cars to derail, the suspected cause of last June's accident near Pine Bluff, AR. A tanker car exploded, triggering almost 50 derailed cars, some carrying toxic chemicals. Officials waited two days until the fire died down before approaching, while 4,000 people stayed in shelters.

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