

Ohio Citizen Action 2015 Year in Review

Coal and Clean Energy

From helping to turn out 200 people opposed to a FirstEnergy bailout proposal at a January hearing to our 12 Days of Christmas Outrage, 2015 was a busy year fighting for clean and affordable energy in Ohio.

More than 100 people turned out to our Day of Action at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio on June 15 to protest FirstEnergy's proposal for a consumer bailout of its least profitable, and arguably most polluting, coal plants and the problem plagued Davis-Besse nuclear plant. Earlier in the year, PUCO denied two similar bailout requests from Duke Energy and American Electric Power, against which thousands of members and supporters spoke last year. Ohio Citizen Action members and supporters submitted more than 11,206 comments into the official FirstEnergy case docket this year.

Governor Kasich also heard from Ohio families who want to see our energy efficiency and renewable energy standards unfrozen, so we can speed the transition away from burning coal for electricity. Our phone canvass connected 3,759 people for "patch-through" calls opposing the bailouts and urging the standards be reinstated, in order to meet state targets under the federal Clean Power Plan. In the fall, Ohio Energy Mandates Study Committee suggested a permanent freeze on the standards and the governor fired back immediately that such a move was "unacceptable".

Perhaps fearing all their bailout requests would be denied, FirstEnergy, AEP and Duke worked to include a last-minute provision in the 2016 budget to hedge their bets. The amendment would have transferred a key property tax, worth \$72 million, from the generation side of their businesses to the transmission side, allowing them to pass the cost on to customers. With just five days before the governor signed the bill, we organized more than 500 calls to the governor's office urging him to veto the amendment. We argued that the large price tag deserved more than five days' study and that any tax changes should rightly be considered by the special 2020 Tax Commission. This quick action saved the day, as the governor *did* veto the amendment, citing our message exactly.

Fracking

OCA joined 24 other local, state and national groups to petition U.S. EPA to drastically reform the state's fracking waste disposal program, charging that the state agency in charge is too influenced by the industry. This action came on the heels of issuing our report, "Filling the Void: A Citizens' Audit of Ohio Oil and Gas Waste Injection Wells" in December 2014.

We also submitted a proposed rule change through the State Emergency Response Commission that would have required oil and gas drillers to report new hazardous chemicals coming to drill sites 30 days prior to their arrival. This advance notice would eliminate confusion and delay in responding to emergencies, protecting first responders and the public more effectively.

Toxic Air Pollution

Ohio Citizen Action and 8 other community-based environmental and public health groups filed suit in federal district court in Washington, D.C. against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ('EPA') for missing legally required deadlines to protect public health from toxic air pollution. To protect people's safety, the Clean Air Act requires EPA to perform reviews of the health and environmental hazards people near major industrial sources face from toxic air pollution and the pollution

control developments available. As a result of these rulemakings, EPA must strengthen air standards as required to provide an ample margin of safety to protect public health and make sure no local communities are left behind as pollution reduction methods advance in some parts of the United States. EPA is years overdue in fulfilling its legal duties to protect people from 21 industrial sources of toxic air pollution, including chemical companies, metals and plastics operations, and municipal landfills, including some sources located in Ohio.

The groups bringing this lawsuit represent communities exposed to toxic emissions and are asking a federal court to ensure that EPA finally completes rulemakings to strengthen national health protections that are especially needed to protect the health of people in Ohio.

Organizational News

We cemented our role on the steering committee of the Ohio Energy Table, a coalition of local, state and national non-profit groups working to reduce Ohio's dependence on coal and promote energy efficiency and renewable energy standards. In 2015, the committee built the coalition's strength, defined its vision and plans and raised the resources necessary to accomplish its goals. A pilot project to focus grassroots outreach on just four Ohio senate districts paved the way for larger scale identification, education and mobilization of clean energy voters in 2016 and beyond. Melissa English accepted the Risk Communication Excellence Award at the January banquet of the Alliance for Chemical Safety for the organization's work to improve hazardous chemical reporting by the oil and gas industry.

We welcomed Hali Greene as the new canvass director in the Cincinnati office, Tommy Ferguson joined the Ohio Citizen Action board of directors and Heather Zoller joined the board of Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund.

We celebrated our 40th anniversary with a celebration, "The View From Here" at the home of member Scott Knox and held another successful Rock 'n Roll Against Dirty Coal Live Band Karaoke Challenge event. Both events were in Cincinnati.

We knocked on 156,257 doors, reached 85,745 people and activated 8,897 field members throughout the state.

In memoriam

Ken Jansen, Ohio Citizen Action phone canvasser from 2003-2004 passed away on New Year's Eve 2014 from Lou Gherig's disease. He was a long-time Cleveland musician and booster for the Waterloo neighborhood, where he made his home and helped others make theirs as a real estate agent.

We also lost legendary Cleveland field canvasser Earl F. Peoples, Sr., who died in March at the age of 85. Earl was decades older than many of the college-age canvassers he worked with during the 1980s and '90s and served as a mentor and inspiration to many. He never complained about going door-to-door in Cleveland winters, even into his seventies!