

Ohio Citizen Action 2013 Year in Review

Fracking

We worked with legislators in both houses of the Ohio General Assembly to introduce the Fracking Emergency Medical Right-to-Know Act (SB 17/HB 42), a bill to improve Ohio's fracking chemical disclosure. The Ohio Public Health Association and the Midwest Ohio Association of Occupational Health Nurses endorsed the bill and we garnered co-sponsorships from 17 legislators.

On March 20, we held a lobby day in Columbus to encourage and prepare citizens to advocate for better fracking chemical disclosure. Participants were given basic materials and help setting up appointments with their legislators. We also provided transportation from Cleveland and Cincinnati.

We joined other groups in a formal request that the U.S. EPA thoroughly audit the Ohio Department of Natural Resource's management of the underground injection control (fracking waste disposal) program.

Ohio Citizen Action members wrote 14,221 letters to their state senators and representatives and to Governor Kasich, urging them to fix Ohio's fracking chemical reporting law. We asked the authors of 521 of the best letters to convert them into letters-to-the-editor. In just eight weeks, 25 of them were published in papers from Cleveland, Cincinnati, Akron, Columbus, Youngstown, Medina, Kent, Niles and Canton.

We helped citizens in Youngstown and Oberlin to get fracking and injection well bans on their ballots for a citizen vote, challenging a state law which prevents citizen input on any oil and gas related permit applications.

We spoke out against a phony set of "tough" new voluntary pollution prevention standards for drillers in Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, via the Center for Sustainable Shale Development. The standards and the Center were the brainchild of a coalition of industry groups, philanthropists and the Environmental Defense Fund. We exposed the effort as an attempt to speak for Ohio, when neither Ohio citizens nor Ohio's largest oil and gas leaseholder (Chesapeake) were party to drafting the standards and challenged the motives of the entities who were to arbitrate violations. After our initial objection, 68 other groups later challenged the Environmental Defense Fund for purporting to speak on their behalf as well.

Coal

We provided information and encouraged Cleveland City Council members to request that the Ohio Attorney General investigate Cleveland's deal to buy electricity from the very expensive and problem-plagued Prairie State Energy plant.

Waste management

We worked to turn out people for a public hearing on Rumpke's proposal to increase the use of odor control spray at the perimeter of its flagship landfill in Colerain Township. The proposal was a response to hundreds of odor complaints resulting from an underground fire that began in 2009.

Candidate Forum

In partnership with the Cincinnati Green Group, we helped to organize a Cincinnati City Council and Mayoral candidate forum in September. All candidates were given the opportunity to participate through filling out a questionnaire and/or attending the forum to take questions from the audience about Cincinnati-related environmental issues.

Defending freedom of speech

When the town of Bay Village attempted to limit our ability to canvass there through hours restrictions and unreasonable licensing requirements, we sued them. We won in December, when the village passed a resolution distinguishing canvassers from peddlers, who must follow the stricter prohibitions.

We also discouraged the community of Hudson from passing a similarly restrictive statute.

Organizational development

After twenty years at the helm of Ohio Citizen Action, Sandy Buchanan stepped down to head newly-formed Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis. She was replaced by the organization's third Executive Director, Rachael Belz, who joined the staff in 1996.

In October, we held Music for the Mountains 2, a one-day music festival featuring 20 bands on 3 stages at the Southgate House Revival in Newport, KY. The event also

featured speakers Teri Blanton, Chuck Nelson and Mari Lynn Evans, who spoke about how Appalachian communities are fighting back against mountaintop removal coal mining. Ms. Evans also showed a short clip from her upcoming documentary release "Blood on the Mountain". The event benefitted Ohio Citizen Action and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and was commemorated in a companion CD with music from participating bands.

We worked with allies at the Sierra Club to organize citizen opposition to SB 58, which would have repealed Ohio's energy efficiency and renewable energy standards. Our knowledgeable and professional phone canvass staff spoke with 2,212 people and patched 2,091 of them directly through to their legislators' offices. Because of our unique capacity to do public outreach, we were able to help defeat the bill in less than 12 weeks.

Victory!

We raised the alarm that in exempting oil and gas drillers from reporting chemicals used or stored on well pads, Ohio had violated the federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act. We testified at the State Emergency Response Commission and collaborated on a petition to U.S. EPA for a formal determination on the matter. Their response led to drillers resuming reporting directly to emergency planners and first responders later in the year.

We also organized hundreds of citizens to turn out for hearings on Cleveland's proposed new garbage incinerator. If built, the facility would have been one of the largest air polluters in Cuyahoga County, releasing soot, lead, mercury, dioxin, and other pollutants into the air. City council finally cancelled the project, after firing the consultant who failed to provide accurate information on the cost in a report that was the basis for the air pollution permit.

In memoriam

With great sadness, we said goodbye to Jane Sandlin, a talented organizer who worked with our phone canvass from May 2002 to September 2003 and again from August 2006 to October 2010.