Resist Newsletter, Apr. 2002
at least on the surface, times look bleak for the protection of the environment. The Bush administration is pushing hard to drill for oil in the Arctic and, despite decades of grassroots and indigenous people's successful efforts to delay and stop the proposal, to store radioactive waters in Yucca Mountain.

The administration's efforts don't stop with oil and nuclear waste issues. Bush also opposes signing an international treaty that will reduce damage resulting from the greenhouse effect. Bush's Environmental Protection Agency has opposed lowering the level of arsenic in drinking water to a safer standard and continues to erode many other protective policies and practices that have taken decades to win.

Environmental Movement Stays Focused

Undeniably, our comfort and confidence about the future of the planet has dramatically changed due to the September 11th events and the election of President Bush. However, leaders that make up the grassroots environmental movement remain determined, refusing to throw up their arms in defeat.

Why? The leadership within this movement has always affirmed that change comes from the bottom up, believing that people plus organization equals power. The grassroots environmental movement has a long history of success even under unhealthy administrations.

Its most accomplished achievement has been building a diversified base of support. The movement is broad and includes workers, people of color, indigenous peoples, and rural and urban families; Parent Teacher Organizations concerned about the use of pesticides, schools built near contaminated ground, or materials that off-gas toxic chemicals into the classrooms; and those who make their living fishing or who depend upon fish as a primary food in their diets. Even the historical argument over whether we can have jobs or protect the environment has taken a positive turn: grassroots leaders and workers are pursuing only jobs that don't threaten health and the environment of the surrounding neighborhood. [See article on page two.]

For example, residents of a low-income community of color (commonly referred to as an environmental justice community) in Convent, Louisiana refused to allow a new factory in their neighborhood. They rejected the factory's offer of hundreds of jobs because of the threat posed by the daily release of toxic chemicals.

In another example, a strong grassroots base provided the impetus behind two Clinton administration executive orders on environmental justice and children's health. Environmental justice communities, tired of being the target of polluting facilities, demanded that companies reduce their waste. These communities fought hard at the local, state, and national levels to change the disproportionately high poisoning of their families. They organized and linked hundreds of communities, made their concerns a political platform issue, and changed public opinions about the problem. It was only then that Clinton's executive order was written.

Build the Base

The environmental justice movement has learned many lessons over the past two decades. The keys to this success have been building the base, connecting groups, and broadening the reach to deepen the impact.

With every local effort, a few people... [continued on page seven]
Labor and Green Activists Together

Cross-Movement Organizing Confronts Common Corporate Enemies

BRYONY SCHWAN

Despite a five-fold increase in economic output since 1950, we are experiencing a world of accelerating social and environmental disintegration. In the US, the richest country on earth, we are seeing an alarming expansion in the gap between rich and poor. Bill Gates alone has more money than the poorest 45% of Americans. We are becoming increasingly dependent on foreign debt; and our air, water and food (even human breast milk) are contaminated with toxic chemicals.

We face an unprecedented global social and environmental crisis, driven by the quest for short-term financial gain. "The only two groups positioned to challenge this corporate power are environmental groups and organized labor," says Les Leopold of the Labor Institute. "In fact, labor is the largest organized group in the country. We have no prayer of taming corporate power without these two groups and that is why it is critical that these two movements work together."

"Labor unions and environmentalists really need to work together for very practical reasons" says Rick Engler of the Work Environment Council in New Jersey, "because neither has the power to win alone."

Labor and Green Converge

Working together and debunking the "jobs-versus-environment" dichotomy is one of the greatest challenges facing these two movements. "Relations between labor unions and environmental organizations are too often characterized by high-profile conflicts such as loggers battling wilderness preservationists or construction workers squaring off against anti-sprawl activists," writes David Moberg in the January/February 2002 issue of Sierra. This has been particularly challenging in the Pacific Northwest over protection of forests and endangered species like the spotted owl. Another example occurs in Montana, where the AFL-CIO passed a resolution opposing a successful citizen's environmental initiative that banned cyanide heap-leach mining in 1998.

Despite these incidents, labor unions and environmental groups both care about a clean and healthy environment for themselves and their families, as well as workplace safety and health standards. Karen Pickett, of the Bay Area Coalition for Headwaters says, "the common ground is so much larger than the differences. One group is working for biological sustainability and the other for economic sustainability, and while they are not the same thing, both goals are being undermined by the same [corporate] force."

When John Goodman—an imposing man nearly six feet tall, face shadowed by a large brim cowboy hat—stands up to speak about globalization and free trade, most in the audience are surprised by his eloquence. This loquacious Steelworker from Local 338 in Spokane lectures about the threats to forests, endangered species and other green issues with such veracity and passion that witnesses appear dumb-founded. It's not exactly the rhetoric that most people have come to expect from a tough speaking mill worker.

At the same time, Goodman does not mince words about the threat to workers from the increasing domination of corporate power. Goodman, along with fellow Steel Worker Don Kegley, are members of a once rare, but now growing, blue/green movement.

Kegley and Goodman were part of a protracted labor struggle against Kaiser Aluminum, which began in September 1998. When Kaiser hired a notorious security firm, indicating that the company expected a strike and was going to hire scabs in response, several of the steelworkers started researching how they could fight the company and its parent corporation Maxxam.

They soon learned that Maxxam Corporation also owned Pacific Lumber and that environmentalists had been fighting Charles Hurwitz and Pacific Lumber over their plunder of old growth forests in the Headwaters Forest in California. Some of the activists from Headwaters joined the Steelworkers on the picket line at Kaiser.

Later that year, two bus loads of steel workers traveled to the Bay Area in California where they held a joint rally with environmentalists in Oakland. The rally of approximately 300 protestors was an historic event, a public statement that together environmental groups and labor unions would take on corporate domination using

continued on page three
Maxxam as an example. The Steelworkers later established a “road warrior” outpost in Humboldt County, California, providing a furtive meeting ground for further meetings between union members and environmentalists. Both groups rallied at Maxxam’s shareholder meeting the following spring and discussions began about forming a more formal alliance.

Forming Cross-Issue Groups

By August of 1999, the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment (ASJE) had been established with John Goodman, Don Kegley, Karen Pickett and others as founding members. David Brower, one of the leaders of the Sierra Club, and David Foster, Director of District 11 United Steelworkers of America, were made honorary co-chairs. The organization announced its formation at a press conference at the San Francisco Press Club and with a full-page ad in the New York Times.

Governed by a Board of Directors of six labor and six environmental representatives, the work of the organization now reflects the mutual goal of challenging corporate power in different arenas with member-driven work groups led by labor and environmental co-chairs. The organization confronts issues such as global trade, formulating and implementing sustainable job creation programs, corporate accountability campaigns and advocating for sustainable energy policies that support family wage jobs.

While ASJE represents a more formal alliance between organized labor and the environment, the two movements have a deeper and longer history of working together. “Environmentalists bolstered the labor campaign that won the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 1970, just as support from unions like OCAW [Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers] and the United Steelworkers of America helped pass the Clean Air Act that same year,” reported Sierra magazine. In the early 1990s, labor and environmental groups worked together to oppose various trade agreements—first the North American Free Trade Agreement and more recently the FTAA and fast-track negotiating authority for President Bush. Nowhere has the power of a united blue/green movement been more vivid than at the infamous World Trade Organization summit in Seattle. “Teamsters and Turtles Unite” has since gained almost global recognition as the sign of a new era in relations between these two movements.

One of the most important blue/green efforts of late has been the diverse coalition of labor and environmental organizations—including the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Sierra Club, the United Steelworkers of America, District 11, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees, the Just Transition Alliance and many others—who have been working to find a solution to global warming that protects working families and the economy.

At a press conference held in Washington, DC on February 20, 2002, the coalition embraced a new study by the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for a Sustainable Economy. “Working men and women care about the environment as much as anyone else does. It is not right that workers in a few industries should carry the entire burden of securing a stable climate that we all benefit from. It’s now clear that there are solutions that can protect the environment and the livelihoods of working people,” said Service Employees International Union president Andrew Stern.

The coalition (whose unions represent more than three million workers) along with the Union of Concerned Scientists released a joint statement stating, “Global warming is a problem that needs to be solved. The science is clear on that point. The only question is whether we will approach the global warming problem in a way that protects workers and communities, or a way that further enriches large energy corporations.”

The coalition’s statements were clear: it is possible for labor and environmental groups to work together to solve environmental challenges while protecting workers and their jobs. “[The study] supports what Americans have always believed—that through good will and hard work, new technology and wise public policy, we can solve even the most difficult problems.”

More work lies ahead for these new blue/green efforts. Labor unions must educate their rank and file about environmental issues, that environmentalists are not their enemies and that worker-friendly solutions can be found. Environmental groups must educate their members that supporting organized labor in their struggles and looking for environmental solutions that protect workers are critical to the success of their own campaigns.

As Peter Montague writes in a recent issue of Rachel’s Environment & Health News, “probably the single most important thing that environmentalists could do to protect the environment would be a multi-year campaign to change US labor law, to allow workers to form and join unions, in accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.” Montague argues that one of the major reasons the environmental movement should support organized labor—aside from the opportunity to build real political power—is because labor unions have been key in controlling corporate power.

Bryony Schwan is the National Campaign Director of Women’s Voices for the Earth. WVE received a grant from RESIST in 1997. For more information, contact them at PO Box 8743, Missoula, MT 59807; swan@wildrockies.org.
Stopping the Corporate AMBBush

Kandid Coalition Works to Hold Kodak Responsible for Dumping

JACK OSSONT

Rochester, New York is the home of one of the largest corporate polluters in the nation. Kodak resides on a more than 2000-acre industrial park that dominates the neighborhoods of Rochester both politically and socially. To organize in Rochester around Kodak’s pollution means one must confront its largest employer, with sympathizers in every area of the city of approximately 350,000. Low level community awareness about the extent of the pollution, fueled by a consistent Kodak public relations campaign of the wonders of modern—and not so modern—photographic chemistry, contribute to a two steps forward, one-and-a-half steps backward progress in community organizing.

Last year the Kandid Coalition (KC) participated in and helped coordinate community support for an Issues Conference with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Kodak’s attorneys. The conference concerned the proposed air pollution equipment upgrade for a hazardous waste incinerator that burns (according to Kodak’s figures) between 35,000 and 45,000 tons of hazardous waste per year.

This 70-90 million pounds of waste is burned within three miles of over two dozen elementary and secondary schools. Studies conducted by the Environmental Background Information Center (EBIC) in 1996 showed that within a half mile radius of Kodak Park there is a “...higher than average concentration of children under the age of 10, when compared to the rest of the block groups in Monroe County.” Several clusters of statistically high occurrences of rare medical conditions have been noted and are under investigation through lawsuit or organizational inquiry.

KC’s members did not and still do not feel that Kodak installed the Most Achievable Control Technology as stipulated in the EPA Clear Air Regulations. KC advocated for the installation of an activated charcoal system that has been utilized at the WMI incinerator in Ohio. During the issues conference it was discovered that Kodak and the state had failed to put the required documents in the public depositories prior to the public hearing process. Of 27 required documents, only seven had been available for public review. When the administrative judge who heard the case ruled in favor of the KC position for a new public review process, 46 documents found their way into the public docket.

The second Issues Conference and public review process enabled KC to widely publicize the issues and to generate new contacts within the community. The efforts of Valerie Gardner, an attorney and Board Member of New York’s Citizens Environmental Coalition (CEC), who represented KC’s position during the Issues conference, and the testimony of Dr. Paul Connett, a chemist and internationally known incinerator opponent were pivotal to the coalition’s efforts.

Developing a Wider Base

KC continues to build its coalition base with a variety of strategies. With the coverage of the Issues Conference by major local television and print media broadening the community’s interest in Kodak’s pollution, and with staff assistance from coalition partner CEC, neighborhoods were canvassed with informational handouts. The heightened regional and state awareness coupled with the National Dioxin Network’s recognition of the Kodak Cam-aign as a priority issue generated interest and funding for the work.

Other coalition partners—the Sierra Club, SUNY Geneseo Sociology Department, the National Sludge Alliance Great Lakes United, the Rochester Area Greens, the Alliance for Democracy and others—performed major outreach efforts including co-sponsorship of a teach-in at Geneseo College on Kodak’s Toxic Legacy.

A grant from RESIST enabled the Kandid Coalition to continue its community-based networking with local and regional organizations and to have enough resources to broaden its community outreach. Recently KC has had more success in reaching and hearing testimony from people whose lives have been forever and adversely altered by their exposure to Kodak’s practices.

CEC, with KC support, is requesting that the New York State Health Department and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry reopen their Kodak risk assessments based upon the new EPA dioxin reassessment. There is a statistically high number of rare childhood cancers in Rochester. A press conference to address this issue is planned very soon.

Outreach to other organizations with an interest in water quality or in preventing the land application of waste is continuing. The Waterkeepers Alliance has been working with KC members in an effort to get the Genesee River that receives much of Kodak’s wastewater effluent, incorporated into the Waterkeepers’ oversight. KC is also strategizing on ways to involve a Canadian environmental organization in the off-site disposal questions that arise from Kodak’s dramatic increase in the percentages of off-site disposal of wastes.

Recruiting additional community support in these times of AMBBush (Annihilating Machine) where business interests and
More, a high percentage of low-income seniors (29.2%) live in an area within a half-mile on the East side of the plant. This is particularly distressing due to the blocks’ windward position and the lower resistance that elderly populations have to chemical exposures.

Today KC is concentrating on securing the help of college interns to further our community outreach efforts and to make more extensive inroads to the labor and church communities. The issue of environmental justice connects to a growing list of organizations, some of which have traditionally been geographically separate. In upstate New York when we discuss Genesee River pollution the impact of concentrated animal feeding operations upstream cannot be denied. Thus, the point pollution issues become broadened and linked to rural advocacy groups dealing with sustainability issues and rural best management practices in agriculture.

In keeping with the issue of sustainability, the call for closed loop manufacturing is an integral part of the Kodak Campaign and CEC, KC and NYPIRG are actively supporting its expansion and implementation at Kodak. The same members are also working on the Title V EPA Air Permit for the Hazardous Waste Incinerator at Kodak Park, with the hope that at minimum a better method of Kodak waste treatment can be required by federal agencies. Admittedly, this is an uphill struggle. But the size of the Goliath Kodak makes it difficult not to hit part of the problem, and together community activists hope to control the giant.

Jack Ossont is a member of Kandid Coalition, which received a grant from RESIST last year. For more information, contact them at PO Box 14044, Rochester, NY 14614; www.kandidcoalition.org.

Nuclear Waste Resisters Near 25 Years

MARIA SANTELLI AND JANET GREENWALD

The year 2002 marks the 24th year that CARD (Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping) has worked to safeguard the land and people of New Mexico from nuclear threats. In our tenure, we have enjoyed many victories, but in recent years, we also have seen many disappointments, including the opening of WIPP (the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant—the first permanent underground repository for military radioactive waste), the doubling of the budget at Los Alamos National Laboratory (the birthplace of the nuclear bomb), and the shrinking of the Department of Energy’s (DOE) clean-up budget. Still, our work continues, because we know that we must stand up—and stand united—against nuclear bomb production and nuclear dumping.

New Mexicans are realizing that our state is home to all aspects of the nuclear cycle—from uranium mining to waste disposal. Therefore we have an important role to play in the peace and justice movement of the twenty-first century. New Mexico is at present—and has been historically—a minority/majority state. Our economic resources are very limited and concentrated in the hands of the few, and our political representation rarely reflects the make-up of its constituency.

We are a culturally and geographically diverse population, with long distances separating communities. This often makes it difficult to rally resistance, even against deadly nuclear projects. Still, with help from RESIST, CARD and many other groups dedicated to peace and justice continue to challenge nuclear dumping.

Regional Coalitions Face Challenges

Communities in the Southwest United States and near the US/Mexico border share a disproportionate burden when it comes to the nuclear cycle. WIPP is the nation’s only repository for weapons-generated, or transuranic, waste. Recently, the White House announced that it will push to open two more major DOE dumps in the Southwest: Yucca Mountain in Nevada, and the Monitored Retrievable Storage site in Skull Valley, Utah. Both proposed sites are on Indigenous lands. All three waste sites are in states with large communities of color.

In the Southwest/border state of Texas, plans for a low-level radioactive dump were defeated in the small town of Sierra Blanca, in large part due to the binational coalition of communities living nearby. But the danger is not past for Texas. The state is required to take the waste agreed upon in the Texas/Maine/Vermont Compact. None of these dump sites solves the nuclear waste problem in this country, because both commercial and military nuclear production have no end in sight and may actually increase if the Bush Administration gets its way.

Throughout its history, CARD has continued on page six
worked together with and supported our colleagues in the Southwest US and Mexico, who face similar issues of nuclear production, testing, and waste disposal. We do this so that feelings such as “Not In My Back Yard” don’t pit community against community. Coalitions and relationships with other communities help us realize that the Earth is everyone’s backyard. We know that if Yucca Mountain is defeated, WIPP very possibly could be the next in line to take that waste, but still we cannot support the Yucca Mountain dump for many ecological and political reasons.

We know that fighting unsafe and irresponsible nuclear dumping and transportation not only protects us from those dangerous projects themselves, but is also a powerful way to fight nuclear production. As long as communities remain divided against one another, the burden of environmental injustice will simply shift to less empowered and less organized communities, and nuclear production—or any injustice, for that matter—can continue with ease. But when targeted communities band together to say “No!” to nuclear dumping and transportation, we can begin to force a shutdown of nuclear production.

The precedent has been set in Germany where tens of thousands of protesters have blocked or impeded many nuclear waste shipments through their country. As a result, the government has set a time limit for the country to make the transition from nuclear power to alternative, renewable forms of power generation. We hope the same can happen here in this country: with no place left to dump nuclear waste, the only alternative left will be to stop producing it.

State and Local Resistance

Coalitions and relationships are important to the work CARD does here in New Mexico. Our state anti-WIPP coalition, composed of several state-wide environmental and social justice groups, works together to resist DOE’s attempts to weaken the state’s power to regulate and oversee WIPP and DOE’s continuing attempts to cut corners and safety at WIPP. By combining our organizing and technical expertise, we have been able to stop proposed modifications to DOE’s State Permit for WIPP that would have compromised the safety of WIPP’s operation and the safety of workers and New Mexicans.

Since the 2000 Cerro Grande fire that burned areas at Los Alamos, CARD has expanded its outreach program to include communities that are downwind from the laboratory, where contaminated ash fell on homes, farms, and gardens. Our outreach work also includes organizing in the Southeast New Mexican communities located closest to the WIPP facility and along the WIPP transportation route. It is especially difficult for communities in that part of the state to voice their opposition to the project, so support for their resistance, even if it comes from outside their communities, is very important.

Since September 11, in an effort to secure the National Laboratories around the country and move some of the more dangerous wastes off the Lab properties, the DOE has begun sending those wastes to WIPP. As many as two truckloads of waste per day traverse the small dark state roads in southeastern New Mexico. Although many of these loads contain enough plutonium to make a bomb, the waste trucks are unescorted, monitored instead by a satellite system that has malfunctioned at least four times in as many months.

School Outreach and Recruitment

WIPP and the National Laboratories are not the only DOE projects in New Mexico these days. The DOE has been very active in New Mexico’s schools as well. And so has CARD. By DOE’s own admission, the nuclear workforce is shrinking as cold war workers retire and fewer workers want to replace them. To try to reverse this trend, DOE has recruited heavily in the public schools. DOE has established a magnet school in the Albuquerque public school system to teach math and science to what it hopes will be a new generation of nuclear workers. Through the National Laboratory-

ries, such as Sandia in Albuquerque (which is operated by a private corporation dependent on huge US military contracts, Lockheed-Martin), DOE sends “experts” into classrooms to talk about nuclear issues and offers equipment, training, and scholarships to cooperative teachers and students.

To offer these young minds an alternative to working for nuclear war, CARD, along with teachers and other educators in New Mexico, has been building a strong education committee. We offer guest presentations to middle and high school classrooms on “Our Nuclear New Mexico,” and have held several workshops for teachers offering ideas on how to teach about nuclear issues in their classrooms.

The DOE carrot is a hard one to pass up when teachers in New Mexico are often strapped for resources and often pay for needed classroom materials out of pocket. As one Albuquerque teacher told me when I offered him a classroom presentation, “We have a very good relationship with DOE; they have money, your group does not.”

CARD’s education committee is one of our strongest and most diverse. We are developing our own multidisciplinary curriculum and resource library for teachers. And we will continue to monitor the educational activities of DOE because, according to Albuquerque public school bylaws, students are entitled to hear all sides of a controversial issue. As far as we can see, the nuclear issue is still very controversial.

In the coming months, CARD will release a new report on the geologic instability of WIPP, which we are looking forward to publishing on our upcoming website and in peer-reviewed scientific journals. We have recently filed the final documents in our National Environmental Policy Act lawsuit against DOE based on DOE’s use of false and concealed science to site WIPP and the environmental justice and safety concerns that plague the project. As we round the corner toward a quarter century of activism in New Mexico, CARD shows no signs of slowing—or backing-down.

Maria Santelli and Janet Greenwald are members of Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping. CARD has received numerous grants from RESIST, including one last year. For more information, contact CARD, 144 Harvard SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106.
Parents fought hard to stop a high school recruitment campaign against future assaults. To build a sustainable base needs to elect people to government. There isn’t a large political force of voters and opinion changers at the base of the work, then the chance of succeeding is slim. This means hard work at the local level, including door-to-door educational and recruitment campaigns. To build a sustainable base that will resolve the immediate problem and prevent future problems, the base needs to elect people to government. You can win on an issue, but if you don’t have people elected to govern your community you will constantly need to defend your community against future assaults.

In Quincy, Massachusetts, for example, parents fought hard to stop a high school from being built on an old contaminated site. In the midst of this effort they discovered many other environmental issues in Quincy that the public was unaware of. The group quickly realized during the struggle over the new school that the mayor and some council people felt very differently than they did about the condition of their city’s environment and concerns around acceptable environmental risks to the public’s health. This past November the group took the time to successfully elect a new mayor and replace 50% of the city council members. The group in Quincy is building the base and taking a proactive approach to their community’s environment.

**Connect Groups With One Another**

Connecting organizations with one another is critical to increasing the ability of the movement to win on the larger issues and to sustaining the base. My favorite saying is “think outside of the box.” Don’t exclusively connect with like-minded organizations but brainstorm a list of groups that you have not worked with before. Look in the Yellow Pages for ideas. Think about groups that are focused on a segment of your problem. Organizations concerned about a medical waste incinerator should talk with doctors, nurses and other medical professional organizations about getting involved.

Linking with one another does not mean completely agreeing with each other on every issue. Organizations need to be clear about the goals upon which they agree to work together, and they must know that disagreement on other issues is likely to occur. For example, if an organization is working to save a forest or to close an incinerator, not everyone at the table needs to be pro-choice. Leaders must agree to behave in a way that assures equality of all participants. Each group brings something different to the table, and those resources need to be embraced and utilized. You do not have to like everyone at the table—you’re not having tea—in order to work together to solve a common problem.

Since people-power has the most impact on decision-makers and elected officials at the local and state level, groups should join together and focus their attention at those levels. As difficult as getting the attention of the governor might be, it’s even more difficult to attract the attention of the president or his administrators. As Tip

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**Training Activists in Alaska**

**MARTHA LEVENSALER**

Alaska Women’s Environmental Network (AWEN) recently held its third Gwich’in Advocacy training in Venetie, Alaska. Venetie is a remote Gwich’in village of 182 people that is located on the north side of the Chandalar River, south of the Brooks Range and about 50 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The Gwich’in are the northernmost Athabaskan Indians in the US and live in 15 small villages scattered across Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada. The Gwich’in live in the midst of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge where they have lived in harmony with the Porcupine caribou for hundreds of generations. Caribou are the Gwich’in’s chief source of food, clothing, tools and ornaments.

Like previous training sessions in Fairbanks and Fort Yukon, the Venetie workshop was designed to provide activist and advocacy skills to help the Gwich’in gain a stronger voice in the political system and the media. The training covered a variety of topics, such as how Congress works, developing an effective message, how to lobby congressional members, writing letters-to-the- editor, and how to give television and radio interviews.

As many as 40 people attended the training. Each night, the community held a potlatch where they shared traditional foods such as caribou, moose and the infamous caribou jerky. On the last night after dinner, Gwich’in tribal leaders hosted a talking circle that lasted several hours. Echoed over and over again was the importance of caribou to the Gwich’in culture and their physical survival and the need to get the youth and other community members involved.

One valuable outcome of the Venetie training was the interaction and sharing of information between elders and youth. Both days, youth listened to stories about elders’ lives hunting caribou. Some youth said that they learned more about their culture in those two days than anytime before. Of the main points that elders and community leaders wanted to instill in their youth is the sense of responsibility to Gwich’in culture in order to ensure its survival. As a showing of their commitment to youth involvement, one outstanding student, 15-year-old Clarence Frank, was nominated by the Venetie Village Council to represent and speak for the people of Venetie at the NWF Energy Policy Capitol Hill Days in Washington, DC from February 2-6, 2002.

As a result of this training and the previous ones in Fairbanks and the village of Fort Yukon, the Alaska Women’s Environmental Network is helping to form a strong body of educated Gwich’in activists with a firm commitment to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and their Gwich’in way of life.

Martha Levensaler is the director of the Alaska Women’s Environmental Network, which received a grant from RESIST in 2000. For more information, contact them at 750 W 2nd Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501; www.nwf.org/women.
Broader the Reach, Deepen the Impact

If we look back at federal legislation that has been won, we can see how very powerful this strategy is. The Right To Know legislation began as a worker issue. Workers wanted to know what they were working with and what was stored and transported to and from the plant. Labor organized to get this information. Then they formed a coalition with non-labor organizations and passed city-specific Right To Know laws. Soon, more cities were being organized around this issue and corporations began to get worried, not only about releasing the information to the public but also about having to fill out a different form for each city for each of their facilities.

Eventually, the corporations’ lobbyists in Washington, DC began applying pressure to standardize the paperwork and to try and minimize the information. The federal Community Right To Know law was passed in 1986 as part of the Superfund legislation to clean up toxic dump sites. The experience of working locally and connecting nationwide to achieve change is a model that groups should explore closely and think about duplicating.

Social change can also come by altering public opinion. No new commercial hazardous waste landfills have been built in the US since the early 1980s. It is still legal to do so, but the public will no longer tolerate such a facility. For years, everywhere corporations filed for a permit, people joined together to stop the proposal and won.

Several very powerful coalition efforts have proven to be good models for both broadening the movement and deepening the impact. Health Care Without Harm is one such model. This coalition works together with statewide, national and international organizations to transform the health care industry’s practices and purchases in order to eliminate pollution without compromising safety or care. Each organization, at each of the various levels of work, plays a critical role in the strategy to accomplish the overarching goal.

The coalition sought to change toxic products that the health care industry uses to safe alternatives that either pose no public health and environmental chemical risks or are less damaging through their lifecycles. To accomplish this goal, the coalition identified the largest purchaser of health care products and pressured them to get a commitment to change their purchasing practices. The coalition believed that if you can change the largest purchaser, then, by default, the small purchaser would find safer products available at reasonable prices.

Kaiser Permanente was identified as the largest purchaser of many health care products in the US. While one segment of the coalition worked to secure a meeting with high level corporate executives, other segments worked to identify nasty products, alternatives and build the base pressure. At the base, local grassroots groups worked to close down medical waste incinerators and to pass local ordinances and laws around dioxin—a chemical released during the burning of chlorinated products such as plastics. Hospitals across the country began to see leaders carrying signs that urged the closure of the incinerators and demanded that doctors fulfill their oath of “first do no harm.”

Dioxin resolutions were introduced in towns, cities, and counties across the country. Berkeley, California (home of Kaiser’s corporate offices) passed a strong ordinance after an extensive public debate. When they finally met with representatives of the Health Care Without Harm coalition, Kaiser agreed to phase out the use of plastics with chlorine (PVC) due to the strong public opinion generated by the public debate and the city ordinance. This decision by Kaiser will by itself significantly change health care purchases, and these will change the waste stream. Health Care Without Harm is working with groups all across the globe to stop the use and disposal of chlorinated products.

Each of the successes over the past 20 years, which have resulted in legislation or other actions at the state and federal levels, were consistently linked to powerful grassroots efforts. By continuing to build the base—even across differences—we can face new challenges and demand greater justice.

Lois Gibbs is the founder and executive director of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ). Nearly 25 years ago, Gibbs led her community in a ground-breaking battle to eventually relocate the residents of and cleanup Love Canal. For more information, contact CHEJ, PO Box 6806, Falls Church, VA 22040; www.chej.org.