A PIONEERING STUDY OF THE POLITICS OF L.A.'S AIR POLLUTION

L.A.'s Lethal Air



Dedicated to the Future of the Children of Los Angeles

New Strategies for Policy, Organizing, and Action

LABOR/COMMUNITY WATCHDOG

L.A.'s Lethal Air

New Strategies for Policy, Organizing, and Action

Written by Eric Mann with the WATCHDOG Organizing Committee

A Labor/Community Strategy Center Book Los Angeles, 1991

DEDICATED TO ELOY SALAZAR (1920-1990)

Business Agent for the International Association of Machinists Concerned Member of Los Angeles' Latino Community Founding Member of the Labor/Community Strategy Center Dear Friend

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We get by with a lot of help from our friends.

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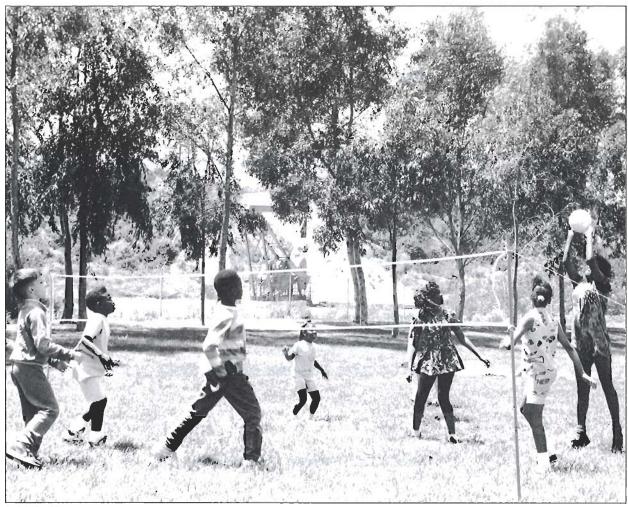
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Now it's time to put this product to work!

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PATRICK RAMSEY

A typical L.A. contradiction: volleyball players and an oil derrick at a Ladera Heights park.

CHAPTER 1 5

Los Angeles: A City of Contradictions

Many believe that the implications - scientific, economic, medical, social, technological and political — of L.A.'s environmental confrontation foreshadow the confrontation awaiting the entire world. That raises the question: If, with all its wealth, Los Angeles can't save itself, can anyplace? Alan Weisman, "L.A. Fights for Breath," New York Times Magazine, July 30, 1990



Basketball players at a Los Angeles playground: "running out of lung."

At the University of Southern California recently, scientists performed autopsies on 100 youths between the ages of 15 and 25 who had died as a result of violence, accident, and other non-medical causes. What they discovered was shocking: 80 percent had "notable lung abnormalities," and 27 percent had "severe lesions on their lungs." 1 Dr. Russell Sherwin, the pathologist who was the principal investigator of the study, said the youths were "running out of lung." While some of them might have been smokers, Dr. Sherwin observed, "the danger I'm seeing is above and beyond what we've seen with smoking or

even respiratory viruses . . . It's much more severe, much more prevalent. And these are pretty young people." If the youths had lived, Sherwin said, "they would have a very high probability of clinical disease within 15 to 20 years by the time they got to be 40."²

Our analysis of the research at USC, along with dozens of other studies and public health reports, leads to an inescapable conclusion: the air in Los Angeles is slowly killing us. ³

Photochemical smog, the brown haze that children in L.A. have come to know as "the sky" is produced mainly by ozone, carbon

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monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and fine particulate matter. All of these substances — alone and in combination — are extremely dangerous. Ozone inflames lung tissue and leads to decreased lung function; carbon monoxide impairs central nervous system functioning; nitrogen dioxide decreases lung function and resistance to infection; and the microscopic particles serve as piggy-back carriers for airborne carcinogens that eventually become lodged in the lung. According to Michael Belliveau of Citizens for a Better Environment in San Francisco, more than 125 million pounds of airborne toxins that you can't see, such as benzene, trichloroethane, perchloroethylene, and lead, are released into the L.A. air basin each year. 4 According to the California Public Interest Research Group, 14 percent of L.A.'s toxins are carcinogenic, 27 percent affect reproductive ability, 11 percent can cause acute disorders (many of them fatal), and 59 percent can cause chronic disorders. 5

On some level, we all know intuitively what Barry Commoner, the noted biologist, has explained scientifically: for the first time in the four billion year history of life on this planet, living things are burdened with a host of man-made poisonous substances, the vast majority of which are now even more prevalent in animal tissue and in the elements (water, earth, and air), than in 1970, when the first Earth Day forced itself onto the popular consciousness. ⁶

Some people deal with this by joking about it: "What are we supposed to do, stop breathing?"
Others attempt to put it in "perspective": "Look, given job pressures, the difficulty of holding a family together, the threat of gang

violence, and the disintegration of the health care system, worrying about air pollution is a luxury."

But the struggle to clean up L.A.'s air is not a luxury — it is a life and death necessity. If we don't eliminate the toxic chemicals in our air, they will eliminate us.

Dow Chemical, General Motors, Chevron, Arco, Unocal, Firestone, Northrop, McDonnell Douglas, Texaco, and a few dozen more like them, along with the finest politicians their money can buy, are largely responsible for the toxic air we breathe today. For years these corporations have exercised the decisive power in the workplace, the marketplace, and the political arena, and they will oppose any public involvement in critical decisions about what they produce and how they produce it.

According to their belief system, their ownership of these corporations gives them ''management rights" to determine profit and production — even if such decisions threaten the health and safety of the vast majority of workers and community residents. Moreover, as we shall see, while air pollution impacts all people in Los Angeles, it is workers in factories, low-income people, and residents of communities of color who are disproportionately impacted by the lethal air we breathe. Thus, if we want to change our chemical environment, we have to change our political and economic environment as well.

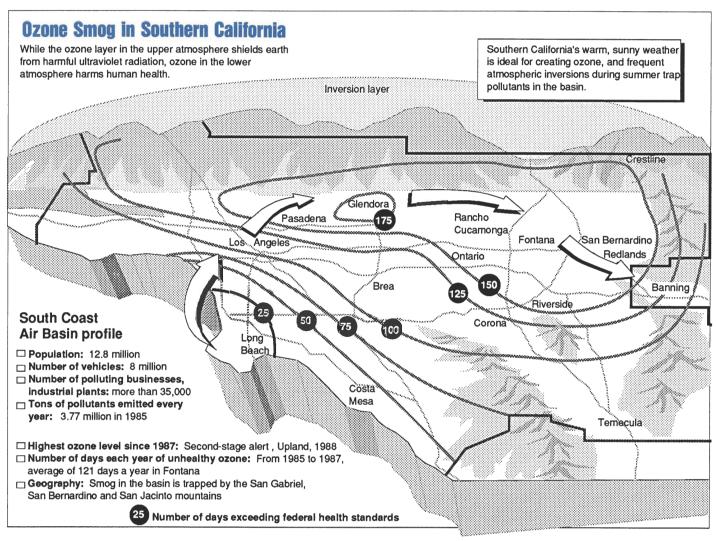
Knowledge is power. The research and analysis presented in the following pages is intended as a building block for effective action in the battle for clean air. The first step is to look briefly at the terrain for that battle: the geography, economics, social structures, and politics of Los Angeles.

The Context for the Clean Air Fight

Long before factories and cars began polluting the air, the Shoshone Indians who inhabited the area now known as Los Angeles called it "the Valley of Smoke" because its inert air mass and surrounding mountains trapped the smoke from their campfires. 7 Today, emissions from motor vehicles, from factories, and from barbeque lighting fluids, hair sprays, and floor cleaners are dispersed into the air, and they begin to rise. This upward movement is stopped by a blanket of warmer air, an inversion layer, that combines with the unique mountainous walls of the Los Angeles basin to create a bowl effect. Trapped under the roof of the inversion layer the pollutants are baked by the sun. The sunlight creates chemical reactions that make some of the pollutants even more dangerous — which is why it's called photochemical smog. 8

Unable to move higher in the atmosphere, the pollutants are driven east by winds from the Pacific Ocean. Thus, while metropolitan Los Angeles is a center of both auto and industrial pollution, the areas of Los Angeles to the west and closest to the ocean are least polluted as the smog moves eastward to Pasadena, Pomona, Ontario, Fontana, and beyond. The worst smog areas of all are Riverside and San Bernardino, where in the summer months breathing the air is said to be the equivalent of smoking one pack of cigarettes per day. 9

Within this ''Valley of Smoke,'' Los Angeles County reflects the demographics of polarization: great concentrations of corporate and private wealth, an inordinately large upper middle class, a rapidly



BETTS GRIFFONE/The Sun

shrinking lower middle class and unionized working class, and a growing army of the working poor, the unemployed, the homeless, and the criminally employed.

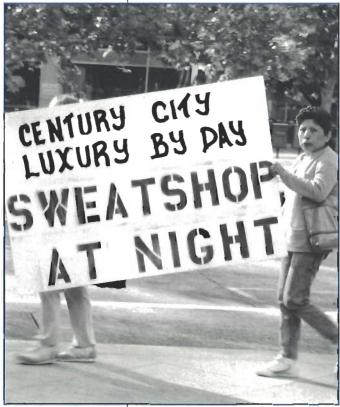
As early as the 1970s, with more than 900,000 manufacturing jobs, Los Angeles had supplanted Chicago as the largest industrial center in the United States, and has now become the second largest banking center in the country, replacing San Francisco. ¹⁰ But while there are ample signs of visible wealth, at least 16 percent of the population live below the "poverty line." (The income needed to be above the

poverty level is defined as three times the cost of the food basket needed to provide *minimal* nutrition to a family.) 11 With housing and rental prices rising much faster than inflation, and with 74 percent of the poor paying more than half of their total income for shelter, their lives have been reduced to a daily battle for physical survival. Moreover, while Los Angeles has grown in wealth during the 1970s and 1980s, in fact it is only some Angelenos who have grown wealthy while the percentage of the population in poverty has increased from 11 percent in 1969 to 13 percent in

1979 to 16 percent in 1987.

On top of this are the almost half million ''low wage workers'' in Los Angeles, workers who are making less than \$10,000 for a full year's work, while more than 25 percent of the people in the city have no health insurance whatsoever. ¹² So much for the trickle down theory.

The class structure in Los Angeles is overlaid with the inequities of race: of L.A. County's 8.9 million people, 3.4 million are Latino, 930,000 are African American, 910,000 are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 3.6 million are Anglo. While the majority of Angelenos



Courtesy JUSTICE FOR JANITORS

Maria Carmen Perez (right) picketing for a

union contract.

MARIA CARMEN PEREZ Demands Justice for Janitors

Maria Carmen Perez, a janitor in a Century City luxury office building, cleans, dusts, and works with an ammonia-based cleaning compound. After several years she developed a respiratory condition that left her exhausted after each day's work.

In March 1990, Maria Carmen and her co-workers filed a Cal OSHA complaint for chemically induced breathing problems. Finally, fed up with Cal OSHA's inaction, low wages, and the abuse that they received from management, 150 ISS workers joined the SEIU Justice for Janitors movement and went on strike.

After months of demonstrations, and a police riot in which strikers were severely beaten, the movement politically isolated ISS management and the strike was won.

Maria Carmen explains, "After the victory we returned to a changed workplace. Our supervisor found a substitute product that doesn't irritate my asthma. I just hope that the damage that was done won't lead to more serious health problems as I get older. We learned an important lesson: when we organized and took action ourselves, that's when things began to get better."

now are people of color, it is a small, wealthy, white elite that presides over the largest and fastest-growing industrial center in the U.S. While the vast array of aerospace plants and oil refineries provide jobs for a well-paid industrial work force, large segments of Los Angeles' electronic, chemical, furniture, solvent processing, hotel, restaurant, and garment industries are built on a foundation of low-paid, and often non-union, labor.

In the low-wage labor category, for example, 55 percent of the workers are Latino immigrants, primarily Mexicans, nine percent are Chicano, seven percent are Asian, four percent are Black, and 25 percent are white. (It is important to note that while 75 percent of these low-wage workers are people of color, there are also

significant numbers of highly exploited white workers.)

In terms of health and safety, it is workers of color who are concentrated in the metal-plating, furniture, electronics, garment, and janitorial industries. Many of these workers are Latino and Asian immigrants, and many of them are women. Their entry into the labor force has been met by the worst management abuses: "the reintroduction of home work and the sweatshop, of child labor, and of people earning below the minimum wage." ¹³

Carlos Mercado, a homeless immigrant from El Salvador, observed, "I believed that this country was powerful and that it had a solution to everything. Now I realize that was only an illusion. In this country there are as many poor



BRIAN GADBERY/L.A. Times

Carlos Mercado in quarters for the homeless.

"I believed that this country was powerful and that it had a solution to everything. Now I realize that was only an illusion. In this country there are as many poor people as there are in Latin America. It is possible that it is worse here because it is as if the poor don't exist."

- Carlos Mercado, a homeless immigrant from El Salvador.



MARIANNA DIAMOS/L.A. Times

Christmas shoppers on Beverly Hills' Rodeo Drive.

"Will the money on Rodeo Drive run out? I don't think so.

Every time someone gets poor, someone else gets rich. The
money doesn't go anywhere, it just changes hands, and we're
always here for those people who get rich."

— Carolyn Mahboubi, 25, whose parents own Rodeo Connection, a shopping complex on Rodeo Drive.

people as there are in Latin America. It is possible that it is worse here because it is as if the poor don't exist.'' ¹⁴

For the well-to-do, however, one person's misfortune is another person's gain. As Los Angeles has emerged as a "world-class city" and the dominant financial, corporate, and manufacturing center on the West Coast, it has generated a goldmine for corporate executives, film entrepreneurs, lawyers, accountants, real estate agents, stockbrokers, and owners of luxury shops, pricey restaurants, and car dealerships. Of California's 5,462 millionaires, more than half live in Los Angeles along with almost 10 percent of all the board certified plastic surgeons in the country. 15 A growing fad among the wealthy in Los Angeles is the residential

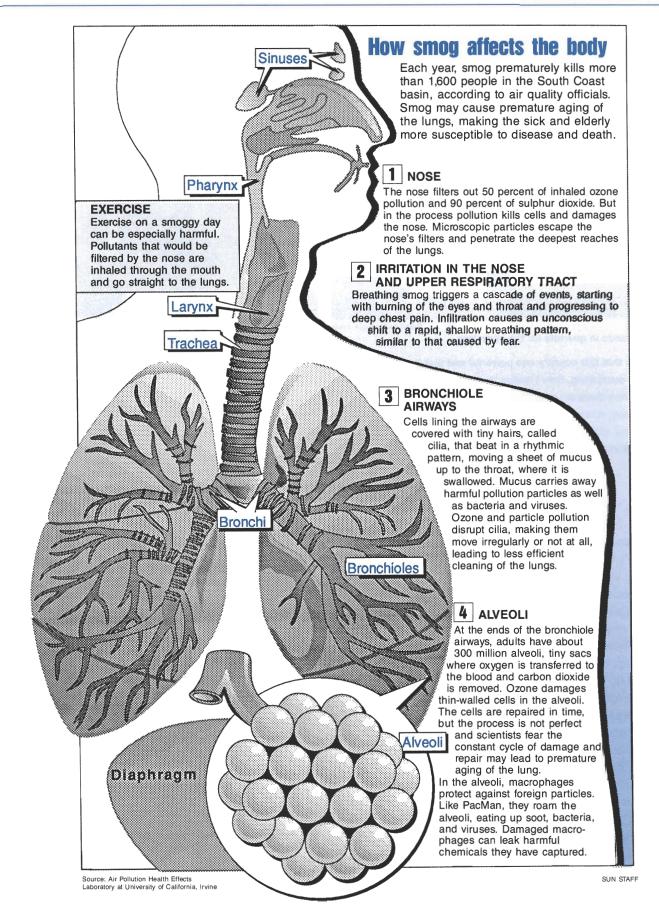
"teardown" in which the affluent demolish their 3,000 square foot homes to build 10,000 square foot personal palaces in an endless spiral of competitive accumulation. According to *Newsweek*, L.A.'s car of choice is a "Porsche with phone and fax," ¹⁶ while upscale restaurants, whose tabs are paid for with six figure incomes and expense accounts, are proliferating as rapidly as the downtown sweatshops.

The next 20 years portend a qualitative social deterioration. Recently, the *L.A. Weekly* published projections for the year 2010: 10 million people in the county, 5 million of whom will be living in poverty; 500,000 homeless; a two-hour average daily commute with a 15 m.p.h. average freeway speed during rush hour, and poor air quality contributing to 100,000 deaths per year. ¹⁷

While these projections may be exaggerated, the trend is indisputable.

All of these forces are coming together to create the environmental crisis particular to L.A. The air toxins are trapped under an inversion layer of warm, stagnant air while the majority of people are trapped under an inversion layer of class, race, and gender exploitation. While the geographic surroundings cannot be changed, the political and social conditions that produce and perpetuate L.A.'s lethal air must change. For if we cannot reverse the ecological destruction of our communities and the domination of our lives by a small corporate elite, then a Blade Runner L.A. is just over the horizon.

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CHAPTER 2 11

L.A.'s Lethal Air Pollution: Smog and Air Toxins

The Los Angeles basin remains the smog capitol of the nation with air quality that is three times worse than any other area.

Marla Cone, Los Angeles Times, November 1, 1990



A smog clouded view of downtown Los Angeles.

LARRY BESSEL/L.A. Times

Before there was air pollution, there was air. Twenty-one percent of the volume of air is oxygen, which is essential for life. As oxygen enters our cells it combines in chemical reaction with nutrients from food to create energy. People have been known to live more than a month without food and a week without water, but a person can only live a few minutes without air.

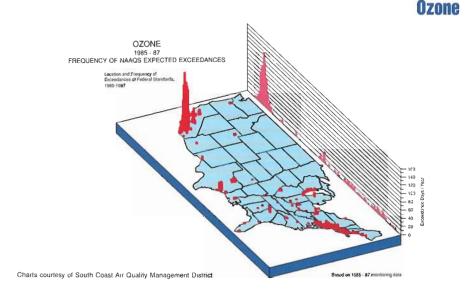
According to Webster's dictionary, pollution means anything to "corrupt, defile, dirty, contaminate." Thus, air pollution is any particle, mist, vapor, or gas that corrupts, defiles, dirties, and contaminates the air we breathe. In Los Angeles, the two major categories of pollutants are **smog** and **air toxins**.

Smog

Photochemical smog is a complex mixture of hundreds of dangerous substances, including four major pollutants — ozone, carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and tiny particulate matter with diameters of 10 microns or less (PM₁₀).

Ozone is the main ingredient of L.A.'s smog. It is a colorless gas produced when nitrogen oxides (primarily from automobile exhaust), combine in the atmosphere with reactive organic gases and undergo photochemical reactions through sunlight. These reactive hydrocarbons are released into the air when fuels burn or evaporate, when oil refineries leak, or when

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petrochemicals such as industrial cleaning solvents are used.

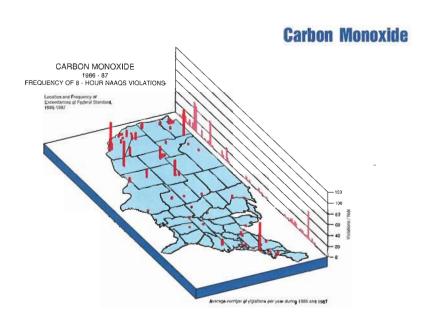
"A highly reactive molecule made up of three oxygen atoms (O_3) , ozone undergoes chemical changes in lung fluids and releases an oxygen atom. This results in the formation of small, highly reactive molecules called free radicals, which cascade through a chain of chemical recombinations and damage lung cells in the process. (It is free radicals that also cause tissue damage associated with radiation and cigarette smoking.)" 18 Ozone causes costly damage to crops and corrodes materials such as rubber, paint, and plastic, which can give us some idea of what it is doing to our lungs.

High concentrations of ozone result in reduced lung function, particularly during vigorous physical activity, and are especially threatening to children. Studies have shown that short-term concentrations of ozone inflame the lung tissue, but that the body is able to repair itself once it is removed from the high levels of the chemical. But if exposure occurs on a daily basis, according to Dr. Russell Sherwin,

USC professor of pathology, you can have ''big league'' loss of lung function. ¹⁹ Long-term exposure to ozone aggravates asthma, has been linked to emphysema, and may contribute to other diseases including cancer. In a study by Dr. Henry Gong, associate professor of medicine at UCLA, mice that were exposed to ozone developed more tumors than those exposed to air without impurities. Gong is now conducting studies on the long-term impact of ozone on humans. ²⁰

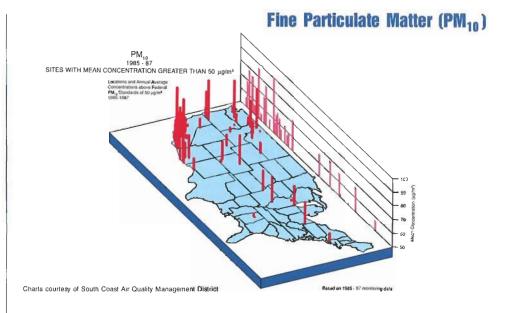
One constantly hears that protecting the earth's ozone layer is essential to human survival. So at first, it is confusing to learn that ozone as part of smog is very dangerous. But there are two locations of ozone concentrations, and they have very different effects. Ozone from autos and industry in the lower atmosphere (troposphere), attacks our lungs, while naturally produced ozone in the upper atmosphere (stratosphere), screens out harmful ultraviolet rays. Thus, auto and factory emissions are doubly dangerous — they contain hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides that produce ozone in the lower atmosphere, where we don't want it, and they release chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), and other chemicals that destroy the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere, where we urgently need it to protect us from the sun's ultraviolet rays.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas formed by the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, especially gasoline. It blocks the chemical receptors that carry oxygen to the



blood, cutting down the body's supply of oxygen. In large doses such as occur in auto-exhaust suicides or heater malfunctions, it results in rapid death. In smaller doses, it can cause dizziness and fatigue and impair central nervous system functioning. It can deprive the heart muscles of oxygen leading to heart attacks. Carbon monoxide has also been identified by the State of California as a "reproductive toxin" (under Proposition 65, the Toxics Initiative of 1986), because it can cause significant injury to pregnant women and the developing fetus.

Nitrogen Oxides (NOx) are toxic gases that give smog its yellow-brown coloring. They are produced as a result of burning fuel under high temperatures or pressure, from stationary sources (such as oil refineries and other heavy industry), and from mobile sources (meaning motor vehicles). Nitrogen dioxide decreases lung function and can reduce resistance to infection, influenza, pneumonia, and other lung diseases. Once in the atmosphere, it reacts to form ozone and particulate matter.



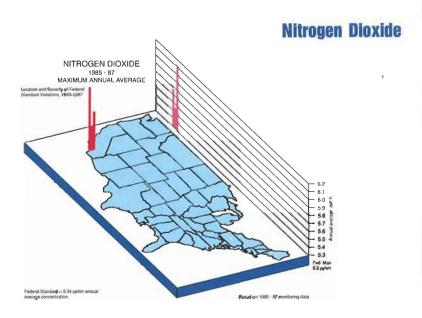
In a study using laboratory animals, Arnold Richters, USC professor of pathology, found a positive correlation between concentrations of nitrogen dioxide at levels similar to ambient air in Los Angeles and the spread of already existing cancers. "The animals develop a significantly larger number of cancer colonies or metastases in their lungs, and die sooner than the animals breathing clean air. The facilitation of cancer cell growth in lungs may be due to several adverse nitrogen dioxide

effects, in particular injury to blood capillaries and cells of the immune system.'' ²¹

Particulate Matter (PM_{10}) consists of solid and liquid particulate less than ten microns in diameter that are suspended in the air and invisible to the eye. Nitrates, sulfates, and small dust particles are major components of PM_{10} and are created by fuel combustion, oil refineries, power plants, wear on brake linings, and dust from paved roads.

Some of these tiny particles made up of asbestos, chromium, cadmium, nickel, arsenic, lead, and diesel particulates — are themselves highly toxic and often carcinogenic. Other particles, which derive from incomplete combustion from vehicles and industrial sources, are not in themselves toxic, but as they circulate in the air, various poisons, such as polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), dioxins, and furans, adhere to them. The particles facilitate the entry of these chemicals into the body, where they are deposited or lodged in the lung tissues.

Under normal circumstances the respiratory passages function as a



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Los Angeles Times

Friday March 29, 1991

Long-Term Lung Damage Linked to Air Pollution

■ **Health:** Respiratory deterioration is found in areas where air is dirtiest. The effects appear to be permanent.

By JUDY PASTERNAK TIMES STAFF WRITER

UCLA researchers say an 11-year study has demonstrated for the first time that the deterioration of lung function is long lasting with chronic exposure to air pollution, whether it be Southern California smog or East Coast-style industrial smokestack emissions.

A host of earlier experiments had revealed lung irritation lasting a day

or two in people who breathe polluted air for several hours. But the long-term study of three middle-class Los Angeles County neighborhoods showed that "pollution is more than an inconvenience," said principal investigator Roger Detels, an epidemiologist.

"There may be irreversible changes in people who are chronically exposed," he said. Poor lung function can leave people vulnerable to respiratory disease, such as emphysema, and can affect stamina. Some of those studied suffered as much as 75% loss of lung capacity.

Detels was particularly disturbed, he said, by the damage discovered in children. Lung capacity generally increases until age 20 and then begins to decrease slowly, but researchers found a slower rate of growth among children in polluted areas.

filter. A sticky substance, mucus, lines the body's air passages. It traps germs and larger particles before they can enter the lungs. Then cells with tiny, waving hairs, called cilia, push the mucus up and out of the body. But the tiny particulates cause several problems.

- While the larger particles can be trapped in the nose and upper lungs and are more easily expelled, the PM_{10} are so tiny they escape the body's defenses and go deep into the lung. This lengthens the ''clearance time'' it takes for the body to expel chemicals. Because many of these particles are carrying toxic chemicals that have adsorbed to them, it also lengthens the time these chemicals have to desorb (separate) from, the particulates and enter into other chemical processes in the body that lead to illness.
- Particles contribute to activating organic compounds in the lungs. Studies have indicated that "many

of the airborne particle-associated compounds of toxicological concern are not directly toxic but produce adverse effects when activated metabolically." ²² That is, some carcinogens are not immediately cancer-causing, but go through a chemical process once in the body. A healthy respiratory and immune system attempts to expel the poisons before they begin to produce cancer cells, but the particulate matter, by lengthening the clearance time, makes the *potential* carcinogen more likely to become an actual carcinogen.

• Particles can paralyze or even destroy the cilia in the lungs, leaving our bodies more vulnerable to disease. ²³

It is no wonder that particulate matter alone, according to a study by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, causes 1,600 deaths per year in the Los Angeles air basin. ²⁴

Toxic Air Pollution

Toxic air contaminants, also known as "air toxins," are chemicals in the air that can cause cancer, birth defects, diseases of the nervous system and organs, and other irreversible health damage. The National Academy of Sciences reported in 1984 that the lack of health information made it impossible to prepare a complete health hazard assessment for any of the more than 48,000 industrial chemicals in commercial use, and that partial toxicity data was available for only 25 percent of those chemicals. ²⁵

Thus, estimates of the health impacts of chemicals in the air tend to grossly *understate* the severity of the problem. More than 40 air toxins are known to cause cancer. 26 Recent studies estimate that over a 70 year period, at least 20,000 people in the Los Angeles air basin will contract cancer because of exposure to hazardous chemicals in the air. ²⁷ The everyday average exposure to airborne carcinogens (cancer causing substances), are as much as 5,000 times greater than the level at which the risk of cancer is considered "acceptable" by many health scientists. 28

While the public health dangers of specific chemicals must be based on exposure levels for individuals, the same chemicals are monitored in ways to estimate "average" exposure levels for a "general population." Such assessments ignore the fact that there are many people who live near hot spots (such as factories that use and produce these chemicals and traffic-congested streets and freeway exits), where the intensity of exposure is far greater than average. Besides the increased risk of cancer, the state of California now recognizes seven air toxins that

are known to cause birth defects and/or damage the reproductive systems of men and women. ²⁹ Still others, such as lead, mercury, and chlorinated solvents are known neurotoxins — poisons that damage the nervous system. ³⁰

In our present age of "deregulation," in which business opposes any government or public interference, environmental regulatory agencies have been slow to test most of the chemicals in the air, and have paid even less attention to testing their synergistic effects, that is, their health impact in combination. As we have already learned, combining particulate matter with carcinogens in the air facilitates their entry into our lungs, and nitrogen oxide, while not causing cancer, increases its rate of metastasis, or spread. Thus, in the following discussion of ten toxic chemicals in our air, we are explaining their individual properties and not focusing on their potentially lethal combination — a subject to which we hope environmental scientists will pay greater attention in the future.

Benzene has been proven to cause leukemia, a cancer of the blood, in humans. Repeated low levels of exposure to benzene can cause blood abnormalities, including reduced red or white blood cell counts (aplastic anemia), while a sudden exposure to high levels can depress the central nervous system causing staggering, vomiting, sleepiness, and shallow rapid pulse. 31

Benzene, which is derived from crude oil, making up one to two percent of gasoline, also contributes to the formation of smog. More than 90 percent of the benzene in the air results from the use of gasoline in motor vehicles.

The primary producers of gasoline containing benzene are the oil refineries, including Golden West, Chevron, Shell, Arco, Paramount, Unocal, Fletcher, and Mobil. ³² By far the largest single industrial source of benzene is the Monsanto Company chemical plant in Carson. The plant uses benzene as a raw material for making detergent and reported releasing 167,000 pounds of benzene into the air in 1989. ³³

1,3-Butadiene, while not in the air in nearly as large a quantity as benzene, is ten times more potent

as a carcinogen. About 90 percent of the air emissions of 1,3-butadiene come from motor-vehicle emissions and from wear on rubber tires. (Butadiene is used in tire manufacture.)

About 10 percent of 1,3-butadiene emissions are from factory sources and are more concentrated and dangerous to surrounding communities. The **Shell Oil** refinery in Wilmington reported 1,000 pounds of 1,3-butadiene emissions in 1989, the largest industrial source in Los Angeles County followed by the **Ultramar, Mobil, Chevron,** and **Arco** refineries.

Los Angeles Metropolitan and San Bernardino Valley

What you don't know about smog could hurt you

- 1 Smog-forming hydrocarbons released in the air each month equal the amount released by the Exxon Valdez oil spill.
- **2** Paints and solvents produce 19 times as much hydrocarbon pollution as all the oil refineries in the Los Angeles basin.
- **3** Consumer products, including underarm deodorants, aerosol sprays, and floor wax, are responsible for 4.5 times as much hydrocarbon pollution as all the oil refineries in the Los Angeles basin.
- 4 Trees and vegetation release 90 tons of smog-forming hydrocarbons a day, as much as that from all consumer products.
- **5** Barbecue lighter fluid fumes add up to four tons a day of hydrocarbon pollution, equal to the emissions from a typical oil refinery.
- 6 Motor vehicles, not industry, are the largest polluters, responsible for twothirds of all air pollution.
- 7 Starting car engines when they are cold, on summer mornings and during winter, causes as much pollution as driving a car 10 to 12 miles on the freeway.
- 8 Smog is not just a summer problem. The worst particle pollution occurs during fall and winter. Particle pollution, most concentrated in the San Bernardino-Riverside area, is blamed for more than 1,600 premature deaths a year.
- **9** Particle pollution and ozone smog are estimated to cost \$9.4 billion a year in human health in the region.
- 10 Particle pollution places healthy non-smokers in the San Bernardino area at a 28 percent greater risk of developing chronic lung diseases than residents of low-smog areas.

Source: South Coast Air Quality Management District, Loma Linda University SUN STAFF

16 SMOG AND AIR TOXINS

Formaldehyde is a carcinogen and a potent irritant that makes people more sensitive to the harmful effects of exposure to other chemicals. Formaldehyde is a by-product of combustion, and about 60 percent of the formaldehyde directly emitted into the air comes from motor-vehicle exhaust. 34 Forty percent of direct emissions come from industrial fuel combustion in power plants, refineries, and factories, and from the use of formaldehyde directly in chemical resin production. 35 (Formaldehyde-based resins are used in particle board, plywood, and permanent press clothing, which then generate emissions of formaldehyde indoors.) Formaldehyde is also a constituent of smog, and like ozone, is formed through the chemical reaction of nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons in the air. Pacific Anchor Chemical Corporation near Vernon is the largest L.A. County industrial source of formaldehyde emissions, having released 3,360 pounds during 1989.

Chromium, especially in its "hexavalent" state, is one of the most potent substances proven to cause cancer in humans. Chrome platers are the major source of hexavalent chromium air emissions in the greater Los Angeles area, while the chemical and steel industries are also major chromium users. The use of hexavalent chromium compounds in industrial and office cooling towers was recently banned by the State of California, but it is still used in most chrome plating shops, thus posing significant "hot spot" cancer risks to people who live, work, or play nearby.

The largest plating shop sources of chromium air emissions in L.A. County are **Dixon Hard Chrome** in Sun Valley and **Crown City Plating** in El Monte, both of which reported releasing 500 pounds in 1989. Also included among the many chrome platers in the area are H and A Processing in El Segundo, Sigma Plating in La Puente, and Standard Nickel-Chromium Plating in South Central Los Angeles.

Health impacts of toxic chemicals tend to be grossly underestimated.

Perchloroethylene (also known as Tetrachloroethylene), commonly referred to as "perc" or PCE, is one of several widely used cancer-causing chemicals known as "chlorinated solvents." It has become the chemical of choice for the dry cleaning of clothes, which accounts for nearly two-thirds of perc air emissions. Another 17 percent of PCE air emissions come from the many factories that use it to degrease or clean metal parts. Other manufacturing industries using PCE include carbon products, textiles, electronics, metal products, metal plating, furniture, plastics, and semiconductors. PCE is also released during the production and use of many paints and coatings, adhesives, aerosol sprays, inks, cleaners, polishes, and lubricants. ³⁶

One of the world's largest producers of PCE and other chlorinated solvents is **Dow Chemical Company**. The largest manufacturing source of PCE air emissions in L.A. County is **Northrop Aircraft**, with two aerospace plants in Torrance and Hawthorne that reported releasing 381,000 pounds in 1989, followed by **Polycarbon**, Inc. in Valencia with 241,000 pounds.

Dioxins and **Furans** are cancercausing chemicals generated in chemical manufacturing, incineration, and combustion. Included in

this group of chemicals is TCDD, the most potent toxic and cancercausing substance ever known. Dioxin became notorious as a contaminant in **Dow Chemical**'s Agent Orange herbicide, which was sprayed on civilian populations and the entire countryside during the Vietnam War. These are the same chemicals that forced the evacuation of Times Beach, Missouri after tainted waste oil was sprayed on roads throughout the town. ³⁷

The air emissions of dioxins and furans in Los Angeles are small in volume, but given the extreme potency of these chemicals in causing cancer, they are very dangerous for people who are exposed to them at work or in their communities. Hot spots in L.A. include medical-waste incinerators (usually at hospitals), metal-wire recovery plants (where emissions are generated from burning off plastic coatings), garbage incinerators (one in Long Beach, one in Commerce), and hazardous-waste incinerators (such as the one proposed for Vernon that has been opposed by the Mothers of East L.A.).

Methylene Chloride (also known as dichloromethane), is another dangerous chlorinated solvent also produced by Dow Chemical and several other chemical companies outside California. The volume of methylene chloride emissions in Los Angeles is enormous — almost 24 million pounds per year. More than 90 percent of these emissions result from its use as a paint remover and industrial degreaser, in aerosol sprays, and in the production of polyurethane foam.

A study by the California Air Resources Board found that several thousand people living near three industrial sources — an automobile

Los Angeles County

Major Industrial Air Polluters for Ten Selected Toxic Chemicals

Chemical	Company	Location	Business Activity	1989 Air Emissions, Pounds		
Benzene	Monsanto	Carson	Chemicals	167,000		
	Golden West Refining	Santa Fe Springs	Oil Refining	15,937		
	Chevron	El Segundo	Oil Refining	14,895		
1,3-Butadiene	Shell Oil	Carson	Oil Refining	1,000		
	Ultramar	Wilmington	Oil Refining	831		
	Mobil Oil	Torrance	Oil Refining	500		
Formaldehyde	Pacific Anchor Chemical	Los Angeles	Chemicals	3,360		
Sales and	M.C. Gill	El Monte	Plastics	760		
	W.R. Grace	Los Angeles	Chemicals	500		
Chromium	Teledyne Picco	Industry	Steel Foundry	1,648		
	Morton International Bauer Coatings Division	Los Angeles	Paints	1,500		
	Arco Products	Carson	Oil Refining	1,500		
	NOTE: Industry reports do no less hazardous Trivalent form	ot distinguish between th		The second second		
Perchloroethylene	Polycarbon, Inc.	Valencia	Carbon Products	241,367		
•	Northrop Aircraft	Tomance	Aerospace	196,000		
	Northrop Aircraft	Hawthorne	Aerospace	185,200		
Methylene	Crain Industries	Compton	Foam Plastic	920,000		
Chloride	Douglas Aircraft	Long Beach	Aerospace	630,000		
	General Motors	Van Nuys	Automobiles	450,250		
Lead	Quemetco incorporated	Industry	Smelter	5,470		
	GNB Incorporated	Industry	Batteries	2,950		
1	Shell Oil	Carson	Oil Refining	1,300		
Glycol Ether	Reynolds Metal	Torrance	Metal Cans	450,000		
Compounds	American National Cam	Los Angeles	Metal Cans	212,483		
1	Continental Can	Van Nuys	Metal Cans	175,250		
	NOTE: The companies listed above did not indicate which Glycol Ether compounds were emitted into the air. Fortin industries reported air emission of EGME, one of the most hazardous off Glycol Ethers, of 59,800 pounds from their North Hollywood plant and 36,400 pounds from their Sylmar plant.					
Methyl Chloroform	General Motors	Van Nuys	Automobiles	1,612,260		
(TCA)	Chase Packaging	Los Angeles	Plastic Bags	619,386		
	Hi-Shear Corporation	Torrance	Nuts & Bolts	431,000		



Courtesy ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD

MELA: Mothers of East Los Angeles.

MOTHERS OF EAST L.A. Making the Environment a Community Issue

In 1984 the State of California announced plans to build a prison in East L.A., and Mothers of East Los Angeles was born. They organized a powerful coalition and so far have stopped the prison's construction. They have also stopped plans for an oil pipeline near schools in their community. Since 1987 they've fought state plans to build a hazardous waste incinerator in Vernon, and one in East L.A. Aurora Castillo of MELA explained, "Because we are a poor and Hispanic community they think we will accept destructive projects if they promise us jobs. But we don't want our children working as prison guards or in incinerators. We need constructive jobs - nurses, doctors, computer specialists, skilled workers, who can make a contribution to our community."

Juana Gutierrez of MELA added, "The state wants to place all of society's problems in our community — a prison, a pipeline, and an incinerator. But if we keep up the pressure, they will have to solve those problems, not just dump them from one place to another."

assembler, a urethane foam manufacturer, and a motor home manufacturer — in the Los Angeles area faced cancer risks from methylene chloride that were about two to five times greater than from average exposures. Three manufacturers stand out as major sources of methylene chloride air emissions in L.A. County — Crain Industries in Compton, a foam plastics maker (920,000 pounds in 1989), **Douglas** Aircraft in Long Beach, an aerospace plant (630,000 pounds), and the General Motors auto assembly plant in Van Nuys (450,000 pounds).

Lead is perhaps the oldest and most pernicious toxic substance ever known. Lead poisoning from water pipes and drinking vessels reportedly contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. Lead is very toxic to the blood system, impairing the production of hemoglobin which carries oxygen throughout the body, including to brain tissue. Lead attacks the central nervous system, leading to reduced mental capacity and eventually to mental retardation. Lead causes fetal toxicity and damages reproductive systems in both women and men. And despite industry talk about "reduced levels" of lead emissions, neurological studies do not indicate the existence of any "safe" level of lead exposure. 38

Despite its widely documented toxicity, lead is still in unacceptably high use, primarily in gasoline and fuel additives, in battery manufacturing, in smelting and in leadbased paints that are still on the walls of many homes and apartments. Ninety percent of lead emissions into the air are from motor-vehicle exhausts, with smelting, battery manufacturing, oil refining, and waste incineration producing most

of the remainder. ³⁹ In Los Angeles County, major manufacturing sources of lead emissions include **Quemetco**, a metal foundry (5,470 pounds), and **GNB**, a battery maker (2,950 pounds), both located in the City of Industry.

Glycol Ethers have been shown to cause birth defects, as well as sperm damage and testicular atrophy in men. 40 High emissions of glycol ethers result from the production and use of paints and coatings. They are used as additives to fuels, especially military and jet fuels, and in industrial and consumer solvents. Other sources include the production and use of printing inks, leather dyes, insecticides, detergents, cosmetics, adhesives, and liquid household cleaners. One plastics company in L.A. County, Fortin Industries, with plants in North Hollywood and Sylmar, reported air emissions of 96,000 pounds of a particularly potent glycol ether.

1,1,1-Trichloroethane (TCA, also known as methyl chloroform), is widely used in industry, commerce, and consumer products. The testing of the direct cancer-causing effects of TCA has been inadequate, but it is known that TCA is extremely destructive of the ozone layer that shields the earth from harmful ultraviolet rays. Ultraviolet (UV), radiation also increases smog formation and acid deposition, creating a vicious cycle in which the ecological balance of our society becomes more and more precarious.

The greater Los Angeles area accounts for about 2 percent of the world's emissions of chemicals that destroy the ozone layer. About 15 percent of the global destruction of the ozone layer results from the use of trichloroethane. But unlike the

emerging consensus that chloro-fluorocarbons (CFCs), should be eliminated from use (a consensus which was developed despite active opposition from the chemical industry), there is not a strong enough movement yet to phase out TCA as well. ⁴¹ If TCA, chloro-fluorocarbons (CFCs), and other ozone-destroying chemicals are not phased out rapidly, millions of cases of skin cancers (including the often fatal melanoma), eye cataracts, and immune system damage will result worldwide. ⁴²

Uses of TCA include metal degreasing, paints and coatings, adhesives, aerosol sprays, and printed circuit board cleaning. Large industrial sources include aerospace, electronics, plastics, furniture, printing, and chemical companies. The **General Motors** assembly plant in Van Nuys, with a release of more

than 1,600,000 pounds in 1989, is the largest single emitter of TCA not only in Los Angeles, but in all of California. GM is followed by the **Chase Packaging Corporation**, a plastic bag manufacturer in Los Angeles (619,000 pounds), and **Hi-Shear Corporation**, a nuts and bolts manufacturer in Torrance (431,000 pounds).

There are literally dozens of other extremely toxic chemicals in the air that we and many other animals are breathing each day. Thus, it is a dead-end strategy to accept the industry argument that each chemical is "innocent until proven guilty," and to attempt to regulate one chemical at a time. To solve a problem of this magnitude far more radical measures are required.

WATCHDOG



PATRICK RAMSEY

The Quemetco Foundry in the City of Industry:
A major source of lead emissions.

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MARY ANN STUERHMANN

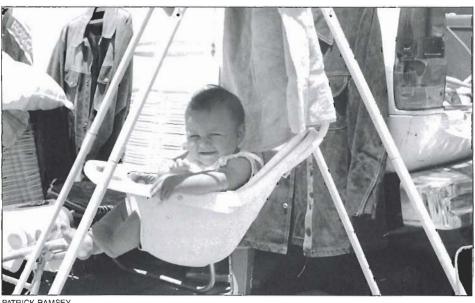
Juana and Ricardo Gutierrez with their grandson. Family life in East L.A. must co-exist with body shops and metal plating factories.

CHAPTER 3 21

The Human Toll: People at Risk

The lung is part of a system. If the lungs are damaged, it affects the heart, it affects the immune system, it affects the entire body. Many a death certificate that says "heart attack" should be saying "lung attack."

Dr. Russell Sherwin, USC Pathologist



A baby breathing "unhealthful air" at the Saugus Swap Meet on a smoggy summer day.

In our study of many of the popular materials on air pollution and public health we have found that they consistently understate the extent of the problem. The seemingly drier, more scientific studies, while cautiously worded, point toward more frightening conclusions.

Clean, non-polluted air is essential for our physical and mental health. The lungs are the vehicle for bringing oxygen into the blood stream and expelling carbon dioxide and other waste products from the blood. How can we determine the actual fatality figures of air pollution when our bodies depend upon the complex, interrelated functioning of our respiratory, cardiovascular,

and immune systems to fend off cancer, emphysema, heart attacks, strokes, pneumonia, and virtually every other disease? As air pollution changes the chemical properties of the air that our lungs bring into our bodies, every single person in Los Angeles is put at risk, with some of us even more susceptible to smog and air toxins.

Children. Young children are very vulnerable to the medical impacts of air pollution because from birth until they reach the age of 10 their lung tissue is in the process of developing. Because children consume three times as much air per body weight as adults, they are 22 THE HUMAN TOLL

Children and Smog

- 1 Children are at risk from smog because they frequently play outdoors during the afternoon and early evening, when smog levels reach their peak.
- **2** Children tend to be more active than adults, so they breathe in large amounts of polluted air.
- **3** Children receive a higher dose of smog than adults because they weigh less and the surface area of their lungs is smaller.
- 4 A 1984 study showed that children living in the South Coast basin had 10 to 15 percent less lung function than those living in Houston.
- In some studies, children have lost lung function while breathing smog, but felt no symptoms. A lack of symptoms could keep children from avoiding exercise during smoggy periods.

also receiving three times as much pollution per pound of body weight. Many children play vigorously out-of-doors, which increases their intake of air pollution. "Second grade children raised in the South Coast Air Basin suffer a 10 to 15 percent loss of lung function compared to Houston children [the most polluted city in Texas]," according to Dr. Kaye Kilburne, USC Professor of Medicine. They suffer even more if compared to children from relatively clean air environments. 43

In any given year, 94 percent of the children in the South Coast air basin are exposed to a first-stage smog alert. (A first stage smog alert occurs when the concentration of ozone in the air reaches 0.2 parts per million.) But even at 0.12 parts per million, the current federal "air quality standard," the American Lung Association points out that children exercising at those socalled "healthy" levels exhibit "a decrease in the normal functions of the lungs," as well as "inflammation of the lung lining and more

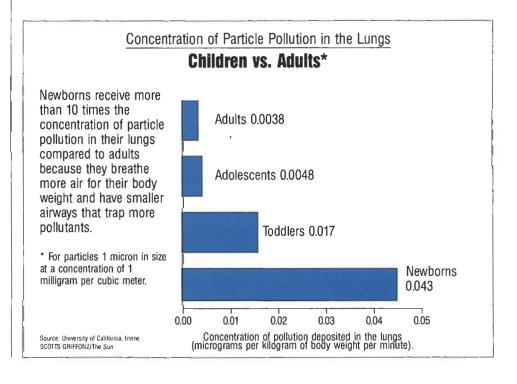
frequent and severe respiratory discomfort." They also point out that "in studies of animals, ozone exposure has been found to increase susceptibility to bacterial pneumonia infection." ⁴⁴ Some experts, such as Robert Phalen, director of the Air Pollution Health Effects Laboratory at UC Irvine, believe that "air

pollution will trigger excess asthma attacks," especially among children who exercise during smog alerts. 45

Many parents who see apparently healthy and even athletic children developing chronic lung and respiratory problems often respond by saying, "There must be a lot of colds going around." Often, it would be more accurate to say, "There's a lot of poison in our air going around" — poison which, either by itself or in combination with bacteria or viruses, is attacking the health of our children.

The Elderly. As Dr. Russell Sherwin pointed out, "Of course everyone loses some lung with time. Once full growth is achieved, lung function and lung reserve steadily decline. The question is, How long do you want your lungs to last? Our concern is that air pollution is greatly amplifying injury to the lung and accelerating the depletion of lung reserve." 46

For many older people, "retirement" is already a frightening



situation, with reduced income and, at times, growing dependency. The economic and social insecurities of old age are made far worse by declining health, and air pollution is a major factor here. For many working people, a lifetime in factories or outdoor work, compounded by simply breathing the air every day, brings an old age marked by shortness of breath and a wide range of illnesses from bronchitis to emphysema to cancer caused by (or exacerbated by), air pollution. As our federal and state governments are restricting and reducing Medicare and Medi-Cal benefits, older people who have had a lifetime of exposure to debilitating air and other environmentally caused health problems are being denied urgently needed medical treatment.

Pregnant Women. A report to the AQMD of groups "at risk" in the Los Angeles air basin included 142,000 women who are pregnant and who are adversely affected by the present levels of ozone and carbon monoxide in the air. 47 "Carbon monoxide has been related to low birth weights and sudden infant deaths." 48 There is a growing public education campaign to warn pregnant women of the dangers to their unborn children produced by smoking, drinking, and drug use during pregnancy. But we need many more studies examining the impact of toxic air emissions from factories, and high-density traffic areas on pregnant women and their fetuses.

(In our literature search for studies about the health impacts of air pollution on women in general, and pregnant women in particular, it appeared that little priority had been given to these concerns. For example, of the 22 major studies on the health effects of ozone published in the "Effects on Human Health of Pollutants in the South Coast Air Basin," 14 of the studies were exclusively of males (even with samples as high as 41 subjects); three involved both men and women with men making up at least 70 percent of the total sample; and the only study that involved more women than men employed a tiny sample (five women and three men.) 49

People with Respiratory Problems.

The American Lung Association reports that "people with preexisting respiratory disease, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, or asthma already suffer from reduced lung function and therefore cannot tolerate an additional reduction in lung function due to ozone exposure." 50 In July 1990 the national



Pregnant women are particularly at risk from air pollution.

Gray Panthers health care.



march for

24 THE HUMAN TOLL



ACT UP LA demands greater AIDS funding.

Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta reported that the asthma death rate has increased by more than 30 percent in just seven years and that nearly 10 million Americans are now affected by the disease. The report pointed to factors such as the absence of health care and "air quality" as possibly contributing to the increase. 51

People with AIDS. The immune system of people with AIDS is attacked and steadily weakened by the HIV virus. When the protective defenses that make up the immune system are impaired, serious and often fatal infections set in. Air pollution, (especially nitrogen oxides), just makes the problem worse, 52

When a person becomes infected with the AIDS virus, the primary factor in delaying the length of time from being HIV positive to having an active case of AIDS is the overall vitality of the immune system. The human body produces, among other immunological mechanisms, "T cells" (lymphocytes produced by the Thymus gland), which normally surround and kill viruses that enter the body. But the AIDS virus is able to attack and destroy those T-cells, leaving the body vulnerable to opportunistic infections such as Pneumocystis carcinii pneumonia (PCP), and unusual neoplasms such as Kaposi's sarcoma.

In a recent study by Arnis Richters and Karim Damji at the USC School of Medicine, when lab animals were exposed to levels of nitrogen dioxide comparable to that in L.A.'s ambient air, there were "lower percentages of T-lymphocytes' compared to the control animals. The investigators urged further tests on humans, since "there is widespread exposure of people to NO2." Even before such studies are concluded, it seems apparent that the pollutants in L.A.'s air weaken people's immune systems, leaving people who later become exposed to the AIDS virus even more vulnerable to the ravages of the disease. 53

People with AIDS often develop upper respiratory ailments such as PCP that are made worse by air pollution. Christine Chandler, a registered nurse with AIDS Project Los Angeles observed, "Because L.A.'s air contributes both to weakening the immune system and exacerbating respiratory problems, it's doubly dangerous to people with AIDS."

Athletes. The growing concern about personal health has focused, for good reason, on diet and exercise. Aerobic exercise expands lung capacity and increases cardio-



DEBRA DIPOALO

Workers in a Los Angeles garment shop.

vascular efficiency. But in a sea of polluted air, expanded lung capacity translates into expanded capability for breathing in poison.

According to the American Lung Association, "People who exercise or otherwise participate in activities that raise their respiration rate respond much more severely to ozone exposure than people at rest. Thus, adults exercising outdoors can be considered at considerable risk." ⁵⁴

In research at the University of California, Davis, highly trained distance runners showed a reduced ability to breathe efficiently when exercising during exposure to ozone. ⁵⁵ Researchers at the University of California, Irvine studied the effects of ozone on

laboratory rats exercising on a treadmill and found that ''exercise combined with ozone dramatically increases severe lung injury, which can lead to the filling of the lungs with liquid.'' ⁵⁶

When told that the expanded lung capacity from running also means an expanded capacity to inhale toxic pollution, an adult jogger at the Los Angeles High School track countered, "The risk is worth it. My weight is down, my pulse is strong, and my heart pumps like a man half my age, so I'll just keep expanding my lung capacity to make up for all this garbage I'm breathing in." But after listening to himself talk, he added, "Come to think of it, why am I acting so calm about breathing in garbage?" ⁵⁷

L.A.'S GARMENT WORKERS Economically and Chemically Vulnerable

Ta Bounyong and Jit Lao, natives of Thailand, work at a sewing factory in the heart of Koreatown. They make about \$30 a day, hunched over a sewing machine for close to 15 hours, six days a week.

Ta and Jit both complain of breathing difficulties. Nongyao Varanond of the Asian Health Project in L.A.'s Crenshaw district says that garment workers often suffer from headaches, sleeplessness, shortness of breath, and severe chest pains — symptoms she attributes to dust and chemicals left on the fabrics from dyeing and finishing.

Many Asian garment workers have no health care, often pass up meals because of the pressure of piecework, and suffer from ulcers and hypertension. When they go home, their work-induced medical problems are compounded by the air pollution in their neighborhoods. Ta and Jit at least know about the Asian Health Project. Thousands of other garment workers, Nongyao says, protect themselves as best they can by tying scarves around their noses and mouths.

26 THE HUMAN TOLL

People Who Smoke. After decades of effective lobbying by the tobacco industry to convince the public that the relationship between smoking and lung cancer was a "scare tactic," there is now widespread public understanding of the grave health dangers of smoking. The California Department of Health Services has initiated an exemplary public health education campaign that not only targets the smoker, but the tobacco industry itself. Recent billboard ads proclaim: "Warning, the Tobacco Industry is Not Your Friend" and "The Tobacco Industry is Not In Business for Its Health."

But now the pendulum has swung so heavily against the individual smoker that any worker who dies of heart disease, stroke, emphysema, or cancer, and who also smokes is essentially blamed for self-destruction. "What do you expect? He (she) smoked two packs a day." But there is growing evidence that air pollution (especially particulate matter and airborne chemicals from factories), works in combination with smoking to create a lethal mix.

A study of 417 white male lungcancer patients in Erie County, New York (a heavy industrial area that includes Buffalo), attempted to see if particulate matter had any causal effect on cancer development. The study did not show that levels of particulate matter alone correlated with the development of cancer, but suggested "a synergistic mechanism involving smoking and air pollution, and smoking and occupational exposures." 58 Thus, workers who labored in heavy industry where they were exposed to air toxins, who lived in a heavily polluted part of the country, and who smoked, were especially vulnerable to lung

cancer. So, while we need to continue political pressure on the tobacco industry and peer pressure on individual smokers, we can't let the auto, oil, and chemical industries off the hook for their role in the many diseases and premature deaths that smokers suffer.

Persons Living in Los Angeles County Known to Be at Risk from Exposure to Ozone and Carbon Monoxide

(All figures from 1989, rounded to thousands) 59

Pre-Adolescent Children	1,700,000
Elderly (65+)	879,000
Coronary Heart Disease	162,000
Pediatric Asthma	77,000
Adult Asthma	231,000
COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease)	389,000
Pregnant Women	142,000
Athletes	495,000
HIV Positive Individuals	112,000

The Balance Sheet

When we add up the young, the elderly, pregnant women, athletes, people with respiratory problems, people who are HIV positive, smokers, people who work out of doors, and those with environmentally generated diseases (and then reduce the figures because some individuals will fall in more than one of these categories), it's safe to say that at least half of the people in Los Angeles County are "at risk from exposure to ozone and carbon monoxide." 60

And remember, this list is just based on exposure to *smog*. It does not include those people who are exposed to industrially-generated airborne toxins from lead to perchloroethylene to benzene to 1,3-butadiene. Thus, we can see that it is an *understatement* for us to estimate that more than half of L.A.'s population is at risk from the poisons in our air.

CHAPTER 4 27

Class, Race, and Gender: The Unspoken Categories of Public Health

The environmental crisis impacts us all, but not equally. Workers exposed to toxics on their jobs, people of color in those workplaces and in communities marked by industrial emissions and high-density traffic, and women in dangerous workplaces and vulnerable communities will pay the highest social cost. Thus, it is workers, women, and people of color who must generate new strategies and organizations for the environmental movement.

Labor/Community WATCHDOG Organizing Committee



Young boys in
Wilmington playing ball
as the Unocal refinery
looms on their horizon.

MARY ANN STUEHRMANN

Many of the most lethal air toxins are a result of industrial production in aerospace, furniture, metal plating, electronics, chemical, oil, auto, and battery plants. But before these lethal chemicals are dumped into the air, ground, and water, the first people to have contact with them are the workers in those plants.

For example, hexavalent chromium is a known carcinogen that endangers the health of chrome platers and workers in waste incineration and cement production plants; perchloroethylene, a "chlorinated solvent" known to cause cancer, is hazardous

to those at work in dry cleaning establishments; glycol ethers, which cause birth defects, and testicular atrophy in men, are widely used in the electronics and auto industry; methylene chloride, which also causes cancer, is a severe hazard to workers who use paint strippers (such as in auto assembly and aerospace). Many of the worst volatile organic compounds (VOCs), hydrocarbons that are essential precursors to ozone formation, are found in the paints, varnishes, and other compounds used in the furniture manufacturing industry.

Often, the same corporations simultaneously poison their workers and poison the community. For example, during the late 1980s the Lockheed plant in Burbank, California was cited by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), for unsafe use of chemicals and, according to Mark Gillaspie, a worker at the plant, for denying workers accurate information about the chemicals with which they were working. Lockheed was also the subject of

It is the working class that works with toxic chemicals and whose members are on the front line of the battle.

investigation by community groups and the E.P.A. for groundwater contamination. Similarly, the General Motors plant in Van Nuys, California is known to spew out huge quantities of trichloroethane (TCA), which destroys the ozone layer. Not surprisingly, GM is also the subject of charges by a workers group in Lordstown, Ohio (Workers Against Toxic Chemical Hazards or WATCH), that the industrial processes in that plant have led to a morbidity rate far above the national average — conditions that are most likely being replicated in the Van Nuys plant as well.

Thus, it is the working class that, by its very definition, works with toxic chemicals and whose members are on the front line of the battle. It is a rare situation when an industrial plant is poisoning the general population with chemical emissions and the workers in the plant are not being impacted, usually even worse than the general population, by those same chemicals.

Workers of Color: The Most Vulnerable Members of the Working Class

While some frequently talk about "workers" and "people of color" as completely separate categories, in Los Angeles far more than half of the working class is composed of Latino, Black, and Asian workers many of whom are immigrants who suffer because of their class position in society and because of their race. In 1980, there were an estimated 579,000 persons in L.A. who had been in the United States for five years or less, but this figure is an underestimate because a large number of undocumented immigrants were not counted. 61 In fact, 55 percent of all the low-wage workers in Los Angeles are Latinos, primarily from Mexico and Central America, and another nine percent are Chicanos (U.S.-born workers of Mexican descent).

Irresponsible management not only exploits low-wage workers, but exposes them to unsafe conditions. In the often-toxic furniture industry, for example, of the 40,000 workers in Los Angeles County, the vast majority are Latino, and more than half of them are immigrants. 62 Again, in the very dangerous metal plating industry the vast majority of workers are Latino and Black. In East Los Angeles, one of the centers of the metal plating industry, 88 percent of the production work force is Latino, and 10 percent are Black and Chinese; 63 in the electronics industry the work force is significantly Latino and Asian.

An illuminating UCLA study, by Paul Ong and Evelyn Blumenberg entitled "Race and Environment," shows the relationship between dangerous work and minority workers.

According to the National Safe Workplace Institute, the deadliest jobs in America are in agriculture, construction, mining, transportation and manufacturing. In California, 31 percent of whites and 42 percent of minorities are in these same five industries . . . In addition, minorities are disproportionately exposed to industrial lead poisoning. An analysis of California's lead-poisoning registry shows that persons with Spanish surnames are overrepresented, accounting for 44 percent of the registrants. 64

The problem of lead exposure, which many people thought was a thing of the past, is under reported and very serious. More than 81 percent of all the workers in the state who are exposed to lead are employed in Los Angeles county where low-wage labor and irresponsible management form a lethal combination. Of the workers who tested positive for lead exposure, most of them worked for ''lead smelters, battery manufacturers and brass foundries. Construction, radiator repair, pottery and ceramics manufacturing and firing ranges accounted for the remainder.'' 65 Of the workers tested, more than 5,000 had blood levels of lead that were near toxic.

The conduct of the employers towards a largely Latino and African American work force is criminal. Despite an abundance of statistics showing the potentially lethal nature of lead exposure, only 2.6 percent of the lead-using industries in the state reported having done environmental monitoring for lead and only 1.4 percent of these firms have established routine biological monitoring programs. ⁶⁶



ATRICK RAMSEY

The Quemetco Plant in the City of Industry: one of many Los Angeles factories where workers are exposed to lead.

The toxic danger to workers of color continues even in the service sector, where work is safer overall, but again where the most dangerous work is reserved for low-paid, minority, and often immigrant, laborers. In Los Angeles County there are 17,500 janitors in non-manufacturing workplaces such as downtown highrise office buildings, of whom 95 percent are Latino and 45 percent are women. Custodial workers in the category of "bathroom cleaner" and "waxer" use strong cleaning compounds for scrubbing and for removing and applying floor wax — chemicals which contribute to polluting the atmosphere, indoors and out, and cause chronic respiratory conditions for the workers.

Mario Mejia has worked for five years as a janitor in Los Angeles, four of which were spent as a bathroom cleaner where he used products such as ammonia and acid compounds. The acid cleaner used for cleaning toilet bowls would result in a thick, overpowering vapor when it came into contact

with urine residues. This, along with diluted ammonia mixture, porcelain polish, and bleach caused Mario to develop a chronic cough. Now, at the age of 32, despite having been transfered to a vacuum-operator position, Mario cannot run or exert himself without triggering his respiratory condition. Mario is not alone. The chronic coughing of many workers, in both industrial and service jobs, is chemically induced.

Small Business: A Dangerous Enterprise

In many communities of color, the dream of operating one's own business has a special significance - escaping from factory life. But in actuality, when Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans establish small businesses they will most likely become both "boss" and "worker" and are often at risk from toxic chemicals. According to Ong and Blumenberg, based on 1982 figures, "only a small fraction of minorityowned firms in California were large enough to have employees: nine percent of African American firms, 16 percent of Latino firms, and 21 percent of Asian firms." 67 Thus, dry cleaners, for example, many of whom are Asian, Latino, and Black, and virtually all of whom work in their own stores, are exposed all day to the deadly solvent perchloroethylene (PCE), made by Dow Chemical and others. Often these businesspeople supplement their labor with that of their children, who come to the cleaners after school and combine work and homework in the back of the store. Thus, the environmental assault jeopardizes even the "mom and pop" businesspeople who are, in fact, also workers at risk.

Working Class Neighborhoods and Communities of Color: The Assault Continues

In the neighborhoods, the burdens of class and race continue — for employed workers who return to their homes, for those working people, usually women, who work at home raising families, for children, and for the unemployed. A recent scientific study concluded, "the concentration of man-made airborne particles is highest near industrialized areas and areas where the density of motor vehicle traffic is high It has been suggested that the high incidence of human cancers in urban areas near industry and high-density traffic may be associated with inhaling organic pollutants." 68

Who lives next to industry and in the midst of high-density traffic? The median home price in Los Angles is now more than \$200,000 with rents skyrocketing to \$1,000 per month for a small apartment in even moderate income neighborhoods. The affluent are willing to pay far more than that to avoid as much air pollution as possible. Generally, it is the wealthy in Los Angeles who live in neighborhoods far away from factories and as close to the ocean as they can afford, and who talk about the "breathability" of "their" air. As a real estate agent explained, "Good air quality is one of the primary determinants of property values in Los Angeles."

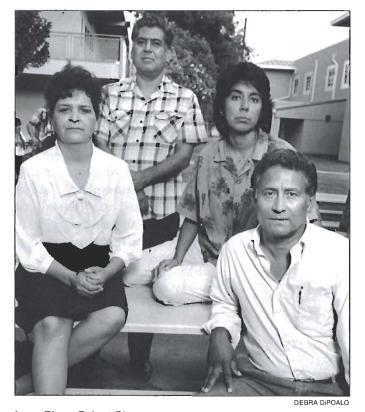
But while the affluent residents near the coast can at least mitigate the impacts of air pollution, it is working class and minority neighborhoods in which homes, factories, and traffic-congested streets become toxic neighbors.

Wilmington and San Pedro, two port cities 22 miles south of L.A.'s downtown, but part of incorporated Los Angeles, are the home of four of the county's top 20 air polluters — Texaco, Shell, Ultramar, and Unocal. ⁶⁹ Both cities are notable for the large quantity of poisons created by industrial facilities that located there to be close to the harbor and the large number of low and moderate income families who live there because housing costs were relatively low. ⁷⁰

Irene Rivas, an outspoken community activist, awakens in her Wilmington neighborhood to air clouded by oil refineries, chemical plants, a fertilizer plant, and a solid waste treatment facility. She arrives for work as a teacher's aide at Wilmington Park school — a mile from the Texaco oil refinery —

where fumes sicken students, teachers, and administrators almost daily. Peter Mendoza, outspoken president of the Wilmington Homeowners Association, has a frank assessment of the cause of the problem. "Because 90 percent of the kids at the school are Latino and many of their parents are immigrants, these companies think they can get away with murder."

And just as Wilmington resident Celia Long is sure that her son Luis' nausea and chest pains are directly attributable to toxic air pollution, parents in nearby Carson also fear for their children's health after a recent report showed that 37 percent of all businesses in that city "handle significant quantities of hazardous material."



Irene Rivas, Robert Rivas, teacher Rebecca Escobar and Peter Mendoza (left to right) at the Wilmington Park Elementary School.

East Los Angeles, which begins directly east of L.A.'s downtown, is the center of the city's Latino population. The area is commended by some AQMD officials for having a better than average 'jobs/housing balance" — that is, many residents live near their work, which cuts down on automobile transportation for commuting and thereby reduces air pollution. But at a recent AQMD sponsored meeting held to discuss "The Clean Air Plan and the Latino Community," Juana Gutierrez of Mothers of East L.A. told a different story. "Obviously we need jobs for our people. But it's easy for you to say it is good that our factories are near our houses, when our neighborhoods are filled with furniture and metal plating factories and body

shops, and our children in the community are getting sick from these fumes. We need jobs, but we need our health as well." 71

Ong and Blumenfeld observed, "Minorities live in areas where land values are low, and thus are financially attractive to firms and public agencies looking for sites for disposing of hazardous materials, and minorities have fewer opportunities to move away from the location because of limited economic resources and housing discrimination." 72 "According to one estimate for the South Coast air basin, 71 percent of African Americans and 50 percent of Latinos reside in areas with the most polluted air, while only 34 percent of whites do." 73



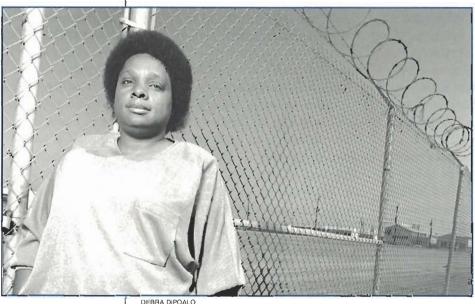
Mothers of
East Los Angeles
marching against
the Vernon incinerator.

HENK FRIEZE

Moreover, the placement of the most toxic facilities in minority communities is not an accidental phenomenon. In 1987, the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ conducted a survey of untreated toxic-waste locations in the United States and showed that by an overwhelming margin they were located in areas in which the population was predominantly Black, Latino, or Native American. ⁷⁴

As one example, in the early 1980s the city of Los Angeles began a plan to locate the LANCER trash incineration project, with the risk of substantial community damage from resultant air pollution, in an area of South Central Los Angeles whose population was 52 percent Black and 44 percent Latino, and whose residents had a median income of \$7,500 and an unemployment rate of 33 percent. 75 A consulting firm, Cerrell Associates, in a remarkably candid analysis of "Political Difficulties Facing Wasteto-Energy Conversion Plant Siting" (that is, incinerators), argued that politicians should attempt to unload these facilities in "neighborhoods least likely to express opposition — older and lower socioeconomic neighborhoods." 76

As if working people do not have enough risks from both workplace hazards and industrial emissions, there is the ever-present danger of toxic releases from spills, leaks, fires, and explosions. The most horrifying example to date occured in Bhopal, India when a Union Carbide facility released methyl isocyanate into the air, immediately killing 2,800 people and permanently and painfully crippling more than 100,000 others. In October 1989, a Phillips 66 Chemical Complex in Pasadena, Texas exploded, killing 23 workers and injuring more than 130.



CONCERNED CITIZENS OF SOUTH CENTRAL L.A. Refusing the City's Garbage

In August 1985, Robin Cannon discovered the City of Los Angeles' plan to build a trash-burning incinerator in her neighborhood. She, Charlotte Bullock, and other community residents formed Concerned Citizens of South Central L.A. Their studies confirmed that the incinerator would emit lead, zinc, and mercury, and garbage-filled trucks would crowd residential streets.

The city offered \$10 million if the community accepted the incinerator. "This was money we badly needed, for housing and daycare," Robin explained, "but many people felt it was a bribe. Our health was worth a whole lot more." In 1987, after Concerned Citizens' door-to-door organizing and demonstrations at City Hall, Mayor Tom Bradley abandoned plans to build the incinerator and later began a recycling program he had long opposed.

On the fight against air pollution, Robin remarked, "The AQMD talks about how working people should change our lifestyle, cut down on driving and barbeque lighters, but they aren't forcing these large corporations to change their lifestyles. Until they do, they'll never clean the air."

Robin Cannon in front of the proposed LANCER site.

Closer to home, 12,000 people were evacuated from Simi Valley, California in 1989 when a cloud of potentially lethal chlorine gas leaked from a tank at a textile manufacturing plant. In East Los Angeles 15,000 people were evacuated when a cloud of hydrochloric acid escaped from Grow Group Inc., a metal plating shop. 77 And while federal law requires that "Local Emergency Planning Committees' develop "community hazard assessments," Dr. Fred Millar of the Friends of the Earth in Washington D.C. explains, "Companies have done millions of dollars in hazard assessments, but they are scared to death to provide that information to the public." ⁷⁸

Women: In the **Community and At Work**

In many of the most visible campaigns in Los Angeles to fight toxic waste dumping, incineration, ground water contamination, and air pollution, it has been women who have been the outspoken leaders and strategists. There has been a marked increase in the participation of women in the fulltime, full-year workforce (from 34 percent in 1969 to 58 percent by 1987); but even when women and men both work it is most often women who assume a disproportionate responsibility for home, family, and community.

As the toxic crisis impacts the children first, and most severely, it is often women who have come forth to lead the fight. Penny Newman, who fought the groundwater contamination in the

Stringfellow Acid Pits near Riverside, Aurora Castillo and Juana Gutierrez of Mothers of East L.A., who have opposed the placement of a hazardous waste incinerator in Vernon, and Robin Cannon and Charlotte Bullock of Concerned Citizens of South Central L.A., who led the successful movement to prevent the city administration from siting the LANCER incinerator in their community, have been role models for a new grassroots militancy that has directly challenged corporate profits and the despoliation of communities.

In the workplace, women are often given three choices: accept exposure to toxic chemicals, even when you are pregnant; accept a transfer to a lower-paying "safer" position; or exercise your "right" to quit. The recent decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in the Johnson Controls "fetal protection" case, overturned the policy of the nation's largest manufacturer of auto batteries that had excluded "all women capable of bearing children" from its factories. The company had claimed that it was protecting women, on the grounds that they would be exposed to lead, a known danger to a developing fetus. The court argued, however, that the choice as to whether such work posed a sufficient enough health risk to warrant giving up one's job was the prerogative of female employees.

On balance the court decision is a victory. Rather than driving women out of industry, it creates the necessity for women and men to work together to attack workplace hazards. Nonetheless, it is a tragic reflection of our times that the Supreme Court is upholding the "equal right" of women and men to be exposed to lead poisoning,

rather than mandating the elimination of lead exposure for both women and men.

Women who face the chemical hazards of electronics factories and the fibers of garment sweatshops return from work to sit on the steps of their apartments only to breathe toxic emissions from nearby factories and have idling cars pump exhaust fumes directly into their lungs. Women in those same neighborhoods who work at home all day in unpaid, full-time jobs raising children and maintaining the household, are exposed to a 24 hour dose of chemical emissions.

It is a tragic reflection of our times that the Supreme Court is upholding the "equal right" of women and men to suffer lead poisoning, rather than mandating the elimination of lead exposure for both women and men.

A Latina cleaning her home next to a lead battery plant, a young Asian woman shopping across the way from an electronics plant, an African American woman reading to her children in a park near a metal plating shop in South Central L.A., and a white housewife preparing dinner in her apartment across the street from an oil refinery are working in a toxic industry, whether they know it or not. All four women, technically categorized as ''out of the work force,'' are at far greater risk in their work than, for example, a corporate executive who lives in Beverly Hills and works in Century City.

The Children Revisited

We end this discussion of the human toll as we began it, with the vulnerability of children. For many of the children in Los Angeles there is a grave public-health crisis created by an uncaring government that cuts and cuts again medical care for families, slashes and eliminates prenatal care programs, takes away food stamps and school lunches, and reduces public assistance to unliveable levels.

Annual, seemingly inexorable cutbacks in County services during the 1980s . . . have severely limited the Department of Health Services' ability to provide health services to the county poor . . . One public health nurse, who recently worked at the County, remembers seeing pregnant women who did not have Medi-Cal being "harassed and embarassed" to pay. When she would visit pregnant women to find out why they did not come back for their follow up appointments, they responded that, "they didn't have any money." 80

As prenatal care, early-childhood medical care, and even minimal nutrition are reduced to commodities to be bought by those who can afford them and denied to those who can't, many of L.A.'s children are at risk before they have taken their first breath.

Because many of the chemicals we have described are particularly dangerous for pregnant women and the fetuses which they carry, and the air in Los Angeles is particularly offensive to barely formed lungs, the intersection between toxic poisoning and the injuries of class

and race strike their most debilitating blows at the very young. Living near factories, living near crowded freeway intersections, living in working-class neighborhoods: for many young people in Los Angeles just living and breathing is hazardous to their health. Oftentimes from toxic landfills to water pollution to air toxins — it is the children who are affected most and who first exhibit environmentally caused symptoms. As Margo Derry of the L.A. County Department of Health Services observed, "It is like the canary and the mine situation. We use the children like canaries. We let them get poisoned, and when they get sick we go in and clean it up." 81

While we have already talked of the dangers that lead exposure poses to workers, a recent study by the California Department of Health Services found that at least 2,500 California children have potentially toxic levels of lead in their blood, which could produce severe neurological damage including mental retardation. "Among children," according to State Health Director Dr. Kenneth Kizer, "most lead exposure comes from living near industries using lead or from lead-based paint in their homes." 82

While we have already explained that asthma deaths are dramatically on the rise for all members of society, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that "Black people, particularly urban boys, are nearly three times more likely to die of asthma than are whites." 83

In describing the 100 inner-city youth in his study, Dr. Russell Sherwin observed:

The majority of the youths had lived in central Los Angeles, a lower socioeconomic area that

might present other factors contributing to lung lesions. The factors probably include poor hygiene and poor nutrition, which predispose the youths to the harmful effects of frequent viral infections, smoking, air pollution and other noxious agents. 84

From the point of view of a medical researcher, it is necessary to "isolate" chemical factors from socio-economic factors. But in the real world they can't be separated. From an organizer's point of view, it is precisely the interconnectedness of poor hygiene, poor nutrition, smoking, frequent viral infections, smog, and air toxins that creates the lethal living conditions for so many low-income, minority, and working class people. And it is precisely this interconnectedness that creates the potential for a potent movement to change those unbearable conditions.

The factors that combine to produce the public health crisis in workplaces, working class neighborhoods, and communities of color are complex. Even with the built-in potential for such a movement, it takes a comprehensive political strategy to even have a chance to confront the enormity of the air pollution problem.

- In order to develop a solution you have to understand the causes of the problem;
- In order to develop a strategy you have to understand your adversaries and your allies;
- In order to build an organization, like the Labor/Community WATCHDOG, you have to have a long-range plan of action based on a clear set of targets.

We've discussed the chemicals in our air and the human toll they take. Now, before we discuss our strategy and plan of action, let's look at the corporate sources of the problem.



MARY ANN STUEHRMANT

The children of Los Angeles: can we promise them a healthy future?

CHAPTER 5 35

The Corporate Source of the Problem

There is no way to organize society along ecologically sound lines without challenging head-on the powerful, politically conservative forces — more plainly speaking, the corporations that now control the system of production.

Barry Commoner, Making Peace With the Planet



Chevron drills for oil in the Baldwin Hills section of Los Angeles.

LIAN HURST MANN

There is a widespread view, encouraged by corporate propagandists, that "all of us" are responsible for the environmental crisis, and thus, "all of us" should work together to clean it up. But while each one of us must take responsibilty for our individual actions, it is a handful of powerful, corporate executives who presently determine the life choices of the vast majority, and who must assume the lion's share of responsibility for the environmental dangers to public health and the threat to the planet's long-term viability.

Smog and air toxins are primarily a result of 1) our dependence on an automobile centered, fossil-fuelburning transportation system dominated by the auto, oil, and rubber-tire industries; 2) factories using and emitting dangerous chemicals; and 3) consumer goods produced by the petrochemical industry that pollute our environment. After decades of failed efforts to regulate these industries more fundamental change is needed.

There is a need for a new social movement, one that demands democratic control over basic corporate production decisions to stop the pollution from these industries, and that demands the production of non-polluting alternatives.

In this chapter we shall analyze the responsibility of these industries for L.A.'s lethal air in order to explain how we arrived at a strategy that targets corporate production and corporate decision-making.

The Auto, Oil, and Tire Colossus: Defiling Politics, Culture and the Air

Every day in Los Angeles County 8 million autos, trucks, and buses play bumper cars on crowded streets and gridlocked freeways while "a cloud of whisky-colored, eyeirritating, vegetation-killing fumes settles over the land of sunshine." 85

In the realm of ideas the solution is relatively simple: dramatically reduce the number of cars on the road, develop smaller, more fuel-efficient cars, create new non-polluting energy sources (such as solar-power packs for electric cars), and create a network of buses, jitneys, and light rail to give Los Angeles an effective, affordable public transportation system that we can be proud of.

But right now, these environmentally sound proposals, while perhaps technically possible, remain a fantasy. There are powerful institutional obstacles standing in their way. L.A.'s present transportation system — based on the singlepassenger, fossil-fuel-driven automobile — while a disaster for the average resident, is highly profitable for the powerful auto, oil, and rubber-tire industries. These companies will resist with all their might any efforts to change the rules of the game. To use just one prominent example, a look at General Motors' multifaceted strategy to maintain its profits will indicate the extent of the corporate source of the problem.

Destroying L.A.'s Public Transportation System. The well-documented story of how GM, along with oil and tire manufacturers, formed a coalition to destroy this region's Red Line — a trolley

and light rail urban transportation system — and replace it with an automobile/highway/oil/tire system is the subject of popular folklore (most recently in the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*). As Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt explain in their book, *Thinking Big:*

A conspiracy of General Motors (GM) and several other companies provided the coup de grace for the transit system's deterioration. In 1936, a consortium of corporations, including General Motors, Standard Oil of California [now Chevronl, Firestone Tire and Rubber, B.F. Phillips Petroleum, and Mack Manufacturing company, organized a company called National City Lines (NCL). NCL was in the business of converting existing electric rail systems - trolley and streetcars — to motorized buses. Each of the companies bought substantial amounts of NCL stock, and in turn, NCL purchased buses from GM, tires from Firestone, and oil from Standard and Phillips. 86

In 1947, the Justice Department brought conspiracy charges against this consortium for violating antitrust laws by buying up its competition, the electric rail lines. Although the executives were eventually convicted, their sentence was a one-dollar fine and no jail time. While GM had broken the anti-trust laws (which give corporations enormous latitude to begin with), it paid no penalty — on the contrary, it realized enormous profits for its wrongdoing. The end result is that, despite having been convicted, these corporate industries have transformed Los Angeles

into a monument to their products
— with 59 percent of the land in
central L.A. reserved for freeways,
streets and parking lots. 87

Misleading the Public as to the Health Effects of Their Products. As late as 1959, C.A. Chayne, vice president of General Motors, was telling the California Legislature that "smog cannot be produced by a normally tuned automobile." 88 Even as late as 1990 GM was still attempting to deny the facts. Dr. Christopher Green of GM Research Labs told Congress that the health risks of ozone smog are the subject of "considerable overstatement" and attempted to argue that exposure to ozone produces only temporary "adaptive physiological effects," rather than irreversible "adverse health effects." Not surprisingly, virtually all the other scientists not on the GM payroll testified that exposure to ozone over time produces irreversible health damage. 89

Opposing Even the Most Minimum Changes in Their Products. After World War II, U.S. firms dominated the domestic automobile market, with GM's market share alone at almost 50 percent of all the cars sold in the U.S. With such control over popular taste, GM made the gas-guzzler the centerpiece of its product design and marketing. (By the 1970s GM's contempt for the small cars produced by Japan and Germany at the time was expressed in the industry slogan, "Mini-cars mean mini-profits.") As Barry Commoner points out in his book, Making Peace with the Planet, these larger cars demanded highcompression engines that burn fuel at far higher temperatures than their less polluting predecessors, and that combine oxygen and

Sources of L.A.'s Air Pollution



nitrogen to generate nitrogen oxides, a key component of ozone and smog. Thus, most of the smog in the air has been produced since World War II, and GM, as the industry leader at the time (followed dutifully by Ford and Chrysler), was one of the main culprits in the corporate design changes that caused the problem. ⁹⁰

Finally, in 1975, the U.S.

Congress — primarily due to rising

OPEC oil prices and fears of energy
dependency, rather than any
environmental concerns — passed
the Corporate Average Fuel Economy

Program (CAFE), which required
that by certain dates each automaker increase the average miles
per gallon obtained by all of its cars.

After opposing the rules and

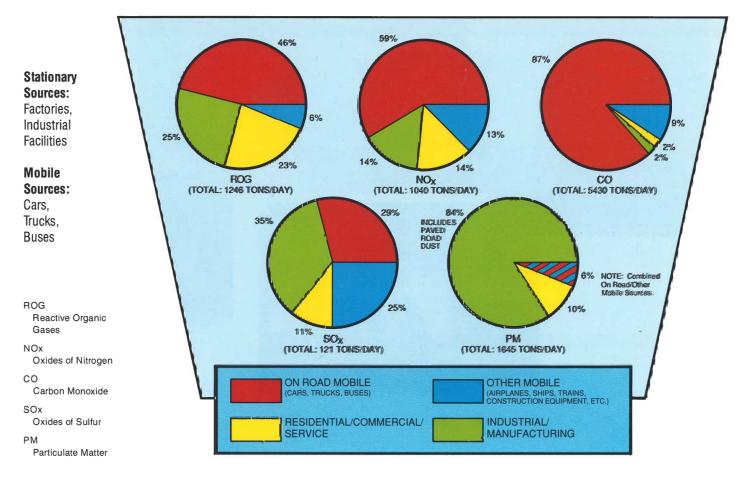
claiming there was no way they could meet those requirements, the U.S. auto companies, forced to do so by Japanese competition, developed lighter and smaller cars, whereby the average fuel economy of new cars increased from 14 miles per gallon in 1974 to 28 miles per gallon in 1988.

However, during more than a decade of Reagan-Bush social policy, in which destructive corporate behavior has been allowed to operate unchecked, the auto companies have received extension after extension on deadlines for mileage requirements and have gone back to making larger, more profitable, cars. By now the technology exists for each company's fleet to average at least 40 miles per

gallon comfortably, but as GM President Robert Stempel has explained, "I don't want our people spending time trying to think how we can tinker with our products and competitive plans . . . just to meet a CAFE standard that creates an advantage for foreign producers without increased energy efficiency." 91

Dominating the Legislative Process Through Contributions and Political Muscle. Corporations like GM become powerful players in the political arena in order to guarantee their power in the marketplace. As Alexandra Allen, an attorney with Greenpeace's Washington office, explains: "In a 1989 vote, an amendment to regulate toxic air pollutants emitted by cars and

Relative Contributions to 1985 Emissions



trucks was defeated in the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment. The committee members who sided with the automakers in opposing this amendment received nearly four times as much in total industry PAC contributions as the amendment's supporters.' 92

The Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, John Dingell (D-Michigan), serves as the protector of the auto companies' interests and has blocked or weakened virtually every clean air bill or amendment for a decade. No wonder. GM's own PAC contributed over \$700,000 to congressional candidates between 1981 and 1988, while Chrysler contributed \$630,000, and Ford another \$470,000. 93

Subsidizing Themselves with Taxpayers Money. The auto industry is one of the most subsidized special-interest groups in our country. We buy cars individually, but then our collective taxes are used for road expansion, autoinsurance liability, and the destruction of communities to build more freeways — which are far from "free."

Even as the auto, oil, and tire companies are destroying public transportation, forcing up the cost for working people to get to work, generating a "private" culture of the automobile that demands the bulldozing of public space in people's communities, and forcing more gasoline taxes on the working people to pay for new highway construction, they are lobbying in Washington and Sacramento to make sure that *their* taxes are cut to the bone.

Manipulating Popular Culture and People's "Individual Tastes." For many people in L.A., asking them to cut down on auto use is like asking an addict to go cold turkey. Their car is their haven, their showpiece, their cultural symbol. Since the early 1900s, GM and other auto manufacturers, along with the oil and tire companies, have generated a massive advertising blitz to transform the auto from a vehicle to a symbol of personal freedom, sexual prowess, and cultural identity. For many minorities who have faced discrimination, buying a luxury car has been the most powerful symbol of "making it," for even when the real-estate agent wouldn't take your money, the car dealer would. Cal State Northridge Chicano Studies professor Rudy Acuña notes the historical affinity of the Chicano and the "Chevy," while many upper-class WASPS prefer Mercedes as a way of distinguishing themselves from the traditionally more "ethnic" Lincoln and Cadillac buyers. For many teenagers the backseat of their parents' car provided the first private space they could find with the opposite sex. From low-riders, to drag racers, to corporate sedans, to older-couple "clean as the day we bought it 10 years ago" four-doors, to suburban station wagons, to chauffeur-driven stretch limousines, to dilapidated cars that serve as shelter for the homeless, the auto-as-symbol conveys a deep psychological and social power.

Cadillac assures us they build "excellence," Olds appeals to the young by reassuring them "this is not your father's Oldsmobile," and Pontiac, apparently, has stopped building cars in order to claim "we build excitement." So, despite the feeling that our attachments and preferences are our own, and "freely arrived at," they are really a socially conditioned product of the auto and advertising industries.

Expanding the Total Number of Cars Sold. The auto and oil industries want us to believe that "growth" is in all of our interests. and yet without a dramatic reduction in the number of cars on the road any progress on fuel economy or less polluting fuels will be subverted. For example, while auto and oil companies say that they have reduced hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide emissions by more than 75 percent, even with catalytic converters, cars and trucks continue to generate 50 percent of the smog emissions in the country. This has occurred because of the dramatic increase in the number of cars on the road. In 1970 there were 98 million cars and trucks in use in the United States, by 1988 that number had increased to 170 million and the number of miles traveled on motor vehicles rose to 1.9 trillion, a 72 percent increase from 1970. 94

In Los Angeles, the number of cars on the road is expected to increase from 8 million to 10 million by the year 2010, with a 35 percent increase in vehicle miles. So, the auto companies continue to sell, sell, and we continue to buy, buy, buy, as the air becomes increasingly toxic.

The case of General Motors is just one example. A similar case study could be developed for Ford and Chrysler; Arco, Chevron, Unocal, and Texaco; Firestone, Goodyear, and Uniroyal — each one fascinating in its specificity, each one similar in its pursuit of profits to the detriment of the vast majority. Thus, one element of a proactive environmental strategy in Los Angeles must involve confronting the politics and policies of the auto, oil, and tire companies.

Penny Newman



Courtesy PENNY NEWMAN

CONCERNED NEIGHBORS IN ACTION Little League, PTA, and More

Penny Newman's work in a rural community near Riverside, began in 1979, when the Stringfellow Acid Pits, an open pond of liquid waste from the aerospace and metal plating industries, flooded the fields, contaminated the water supply, and exposed residents to poisons.

Government officials insisted that there were no serious risks. "But when mothers saw their kids' tennis shoes and Levis disintegrate after playing in contaminated puddles," Penny says, "we quickly learned not to trust the experts. The chemicals had produced high levels of skin rashes, respiratory problems, angina, urinary tract infections, birth defects, and skin cancer." Glenavon residents formed Concerned Neighbors in Action "to give the community a voice in decisions that impacted their lives."

After years of organizing, legislation was passed to finance a new water supply and the Acid Pits have been covered to prevent future air emissions. Penny's advice? "'How much pollution is OK?,' is the wrong question. The right question is, 'How can we get the power to develop safe jobs for workers, and industries that don't poison our communities?'"

(right) with other Concerned Neighbors In Action.

Industrial Emissions: Factory Direct Pollution

L.A.'s Lethal Air contains four tables of industrial polluters: 1) L.A. County companies that emit the greatest amount of nitrogen oxides; 2) L.A. County companies that emit the greatest amount of reactive organic gases (nitrogen oxides and reactive organic gases combine to form ozone, the most dangerous constituent of smog); 3) L.A. County's Worst Industrial Toxic Air Polluters by total volume; and 4) L.A. County companies that emitted the highest volume of the ten dangerous air toxins that were discussed earlier. In all of these categories, the list of perpetrators reads like a Who's Who of the Corporate World.

Vital information is now provided by agencies such as the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), and federal "right to know" laws such as the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA) of 1986. But how do we move from having the "right to know" to having an effective right to act? The very corporations that use, produce, and emit toxins are the leaders in advancing private industry's "management rights." In defiance of the public's growing knowledge of the adverse health effects of their toxic production, these companies insist on their "right to produce."

Parents and students at the Wilmington Park Elementary School now "know" that their children are getting sick, and that four of the largest air polluters — Texaco, Shell, Unocal, and Ultramar — are all located in Wilmington, with Texaco in clear sight of the playground. They also know that the AQMD has sent, at their request, an inspector

to the site 12 times, but he has been unable to find a smoking gun — that is, prove that company A produced chemical B that made child C extremely ill.

But if the parents and teachers and children of Wilmington, for example, demanded a temporary shutdown of some of these oil refineries pending a full investigation of the causes of the childrens' illnesses, they would find themselves on a collision course with the government's commitment to protect "private property" above public health. Corporate power, in this case the corporate "right to pollute," is supported by a codified arrangement of values, laws, and contracts that perpetuates the fiction that a billion-dollar corporation (whose products and processes threaten worker and community health), is a "private" entity, and therefore only subject to minimal public control.

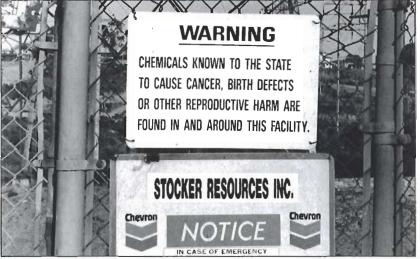
Thus, in public-interest law the corporations have many protections against consumer action, including the essential premise that all chemicals are innocent until proven guilty. While the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has been dominated by the pharmaceutical industry just as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has been dominated by corporate polluters, at least the premise in regulating medicines and drugs is that there must be a testing process for negative health impacts before they can be released onto the market. But with industrial chemicals, corporations are allowed to produce anything they want. Only when the health impacts reach disaster levels is there a popular outcry, followed by a lengthy debate as to whether the chemicals really produced

emphysemas, or cancers, or deaths. This debate is then followed by a lengthy legislative battle in which, at best, a weak law is finally passed only to have its provisions further gutted in the enforcement process, as regulatory agencies from the EPA to the AQMD bend to corporate pressure. 95

The same problem of corporate prerogatives blocks health and safety reform in the workplace. For example, when workers at the Lordstown, Ohio GM plant attempted to challenge the corporation's use of paints and solvents that are killing them at an alarming rate, they were confronted with the "management rights" clause in their GM/UAW contract:

The right to hire, promote, discharge or discipline for cause and to maintain discipline and efficiency of employees is the sole responsibility of the corporation . . . In addition, the products to be manufactured, the location of plants, the schedule of production, the methods, processes and means of manufacturing are solely and exclusively the responsibility of the corporation. ⁹⁶

Thus, it is not enough to "get involved" or to "take action." The WATCHDOG is working to develop new strategies and new organizing models to create more direct worker and community power over corporate toxic polluters.



LIAN HURST MANN

Chevron oil drilling facility at the intersection of Stocker and La Cienega in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles County

1989 Top 25 Industrial Toxic Air Polluters

Rank	Company / Location	Industry	Total Pounds Air Emissions	Major Chemicals
1	General Motors, CPC Group, Van Nuys	automobiles	4,279,188	Methyl chloroform, Xylene, Acetone
2	Douglas Aircraft Company, Long Beach	aerospace	1,139,514	Methylene chloride, Methyl chloroform, CFC-113
3	Reynolds Metals Company, Torrance Can Plant, Torrance	metal cans	1,009,000	Glycol alcohol, n-Butyl alcohol, Methyl chloroform
4	Crain Industries, Incorporated, Compton Division, Compton	plastics, foam	994,750	Methylene chloride, Methyl chloroform
5	Hughes Aircraft Company, El Segundo	electronic components	816,264	CFC-113, Acetone, Nitric Acid
6	Chase Packaging Corporation, Los Angeles	plastic bags	619,386	Methyl chloroform
7	Chevron U.S.A., Incorporated, El Segundo	oil refining	549,384	Ammonia, Toluene, m-Xylene
8	Dougla s Aircraft Com pany, Torran ce	aerospace	518,326	Methyl chloroform, Perchloroethylene, Methylene chloride
9	Northr op Aircraft D ivision, Hawth orne	aerospace	507,455	Methyl chloroform, Perchloroethylene
10	Allied-Signal Aerospace Airesearch, Los Angeles Division, Torrance	aerospace	, 493,860	CFC-113, Methyl chloroform
11	Hi-Shear Corporation, Torrance	nuts & bolts	485,100	Methyl chloroform, Methyl ethyl ketone
12	Dow Chemical, Torrance Plant, Torrance	plastic resins	481,393	Chloroethane, Methylene chloride
13	Rockwell International, Rocketdyne Division, Canoga Park	aerospace	460,405	Methyl chloroform, CFC-113

Rank	Company / Location	Industry	Total Pounds Air Emissions	Major Chemicals
14	ARCO Products Company, Los Angeles Refinery, Carson	oil refining	447,924	Ammonia, Xylene, Toluene
15	Mobil Oil Corporation, Torrance Refinery, Torrance	oil refining	435,100	Ammonia, Toluene, Xylene
16	Shell Oil Company, Carson	oil refining	429,352	Ammonia, Toluene, Propylene
17	CMC Printed Bag Company, Whittier	plastic bags	389,250	Methyl chloroform
18	Polycarbon, Incorporated, Valencia	carbon products	387,223	Perchloroethylene, Methyl chloroform
19	American National Can Company, Los Angeles	metal cans	370,640	Glycol ether, n-Butyl Alcohol
20	General Dynamics, Pomona Division, Pomona	aerospace	301,850	CFC-113, Methyl chloroform
21	Continental Can Company, Van Nuys	metal cans	297,811	Glycol ethers, n-Butyl Alcohol
22	Allied Signal Aerospace Co., Airesearch, Los Angeles Division, Los Angeles	aerospace	296,200	Methyl chloroform, CFC-113
23	Filtrol Corporation, Vernon	chemicals	295,800	Ammonia
24	Crown City Plating Company, El Monte	metal plating	292,626	Methyl chloroform, Toluene, Methyl isobutyl ketone
25	McDonnell Douglas Helicopter Company, Culver City	aerospace	290,452	Methyl chloroform, Methyl ethyl ketone, Methylene chloride

NOTE: This table was prepared by **CITIZENS FOR A BETTER ENVIRONMENT** from self-reported industry data obtained from the California Environmental Affairs Agency, Office of Hazardous Materials Data Management, Sacramento. The data are the latest available and represent reported air emissions for 1989. The data are part of the federal Toxics Release Inventory which only includes mid-sized to large manufacturing operations. Other important air emission sources not recorded in this database include military and government installations, automobiles, small businesses, consumer products, and non-manufacturing industrial operations (e.g. bulk chemical storage and loading terminals).

South Coast Air Quality Management District

Top Twenty Emitters for 1989 Oxides of Nitrogen — NOx

198 9 Rank	Company	1988 Rank	1988 Tons Emitted	1989 Tons Emitted
1	Chevron USA, El Segundo	1	3,753	3,251
2	Los Angeles City Department of Water & Power — Haynes, Long Beach	5	2,263	3,032
3	Southern California Gas Co., Blythe*	4	2,412	2,672
4	ARCO Refinery, Carson	3	2,563	2,574
5	Southern California Edison, Long Beach	2	2,598	2,391
6	California Portland Cement, Colton	6	2,137	2,372
7	Mobil Oil Refinery, Torrance	10	1,618	1,969
8	Texaco Oil Refinery, Wilmington	8	1,787	1,862
9	Shell Oil Refinery, Wilmington	9	1,695	1,765
10	UNOCAL Oil Refinery, Wilmington	7	1,874	1,445
11	Southern California Edison, Redondo Beach	11	1,342	1,325
12	Southern California Edison, El Segundo	13	998	1,092
13	Los Angeles City Department of Water & Power — Scattergood, Los Angeles	14	882	993
14	Southern California Edison, Huntington Beach	15	836	888
15	Southern California Edison, Etiwanda	16	816	855
16	Owens-Illinois, Vernon	17	752	726
17	Los Angeles City Department of Water & Power, Sun Valley	20	580	718
18	Golden West Refinery, Santa Fe Springs	_	·	694
19	Shell Western E&P, Huntington Beach	12	1,001	646
20	Glendale City Power Plant	_	-	534
* 0001	ad in the Southeast Desart Air Rasin			

^{*} Located in the Southeast Desert Air Basin

South Coast Air Quality Management District

Top Twenty Emitters for 1989 Reactive Hydrocarbons — RHC

1989 Rank	Company	1988 Rank	1988 Tons Emitted	1989 Tons Emitted
1	Texaco Oil Refinery, Wilmington	5	1,033	2,203
2	Chevron USA Refinery, El Segundo	1	1,426	2,089
3	ARCO Refinery, Carson	2	1,215	1,989
4	Shell Oil Refinery, Wilmington	3	1,213	1,739
5	UNOCAL Refinery, Wilmington	7	686	1,049
6	Douglas Aircraft, Long Beach		_	743
7	Avery Label Systems, Monrovia	4	1,076	637
8	Shell Western E&P, Huntington Beach	13	336	626
9	Mobil Oil Refinery, Torrance	9	522	626
10	Catalina Yachts, Woodland Hills	15	316	485
11	Golden West Refinery, Santa Fe Springs	17	280	481
12	March Air Force Base	_	_	461
13	Ultramar Refinery, Wilmington	20	276	457
14	General Motors, Van Nuys	6	763	443
15	Northrop Aircraft, Hawthorne	16	289	395
16	Chase Bag Co., Los Angeles		_	389
17	Rohr Industries, Riverside	_	_	381
18	Reynolds Metals, Torrance	10	451	363
19	Trendwest Furniture Manufacturing, Carson	8	606	351
20	Christian Heywood Inc., Santa Ana Formerly B.P. John Furniture	11	449	349

Toxic Products: Our Role As Consumers

In Los Angeles about one-third of all smog-producing hydrocarbons, along with large quantities of air toxins, come from chemicals in products used by individual consumers; small businesses such as dry cleaners, auto body shops, and painters; office buildings (chemicals in office supplies and cleaners); and public institutions (schools, government agencies). In response to the current view that we ''all'' are part of the problem and we ''all'' must change our consumer patterns to utilize environmentally friendly products, we at the WATCHDOG agree and disagree.

We agree that individuals must take responsibility for making environmentally sound choices. But, for the most part, it is large corporations that manufacture the consumer products we purchase and that determine our choices through advertising, market share, pricing, and other forms of power in the marketplace. For example, for most dry cleaners, which are small, laborintensive businesses, the use of cancer-causing perchloroethylene is not really a "choice." Dow Chemical, one of the main producers of this carcinogen, has aggressively marketed PCE and opposed any efforts to regulate "perc" in favor of safe alternatives. 97

According to the California Air Resources Board, many different consumer products add to the smog crisis (see chart).

Proposals to reduce smog-producing air emissions from consumer products are being fought vigorously by some corporations. For example, Lehn and Fink, a subsidiary of Eastman Kodak and maker of Lysol

Top 10 Smog-Producing Consumer Products

Estimated statewide air emissions of hydrocarbons 98

Pounds per day
92,000
58,000
48,000
28,000
28,000
28,000
20,000
20,000
18,000
17,000

disinfectant, sought to delay a public hearing by the Air Resources Board at which proposed regulations on disinfectants, air fresheners, and other consumer products were scheduled to be considered. The company sued in an attempt to delay the proceedings. ⁹⁹

Of course, it is important for our life choices to be consistent with our broader strategies, and each of us should discontinue the use of as many toxic and environmentally-destructive products as possible. But it is misleading for us to talk about making environmentally sound "choices" based on our individual consumption when it is Corporate America that must change its products in order for us to have any real options.

For example, it has been documented that certain aerosol sprays are damaging the ozone layer and contributing to skin cancers, and yet, while they are being "phased out" in limited circumstances, they are still on the market. Even if half the consumers in Los Angeles, each through an individual act of consumer choice,

voluntarily stopped using aerosol spray products, the ozone layer would still continue to be depleted, and *all* of us — not just those who chose to use aerosols — would still be exposed to ultraviolet light and cancer risk. When products are environmentally destructive we have to combine the personal choice to stop using them with the collective action of demanding they be taken off the shelf.

Auto manufacturers, oil companies, tire and rubber companies; industrial polluters from aerospace industries to oil refineries, from auto assembly to chemical manufacture to electronics; manufacturers of consumer products that are dumped wholesale on the shelves of supermarkets, drugstores, and hardware stores — these are the corporate sources of the public-health problem of air pollution in Los Angeles. If we have any hope of constructing a society that is based on industrial democracy and environmental safety, we need a strategy that targets corporate production.

WATCHDOG

CHAPTER 6 47

The Strategy of the Labor/Community WATCHDOG

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess freedom, yet deprecate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground, who want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

Frederick Douglass, Speech to West India Emancipation Celebration
August 4, 1857



MARY ANN STUERHMANN

WATCHDOG members Gloria Gonzales, Sara Molina, Maribel Vargas, Carlos Molina and Carl Gunther march to the Texaco Refinery in Wilmington, California to launch the Strategy Center's Texaco Boycott for Corporate Accountability. October 9, 1993.

The environmental crisis, and its resolution, hinges on production and who controls it. Air pollution in Los Angeles is primarily caused by the auto, oil, aerospace, chemical, and other industries. Yet the vast majority of the people who are directly impacted by auto emissions and industrially-generated poisons have no voice in what is produced or in the methods of production.

In order to clean up the environment and to democratize society as a whole, the strategy of the Labor/Community WATCHDOG is to confront and reduce corporate power. The WATCHDOG is working to

build a powerful long-term social movement in Los Angeles — with particular emphasis on the needs and participation of low-income people, workers, and communities of color — capable of radically transforming economic rules and economic power relationships.

In this chapter we will focus on the long-term vision, analysis, and organizing plan, that is, the strategy of the Labor/Community WATCHDOG. In the final chapter we will lay out some of our main programmatic demands that are derived from this strategy, demands that will shape our organizing work.

The Vision of Economic Democracy

During the 1930s in this country there was a powerful labor movement that demanded "industrial democracy" - the idea that workers and communities could have some say in the economic life of our society. Today, many labor unions and even the idea of industrial democracy have been suppressed and replaced with new schemes of "labormanagement cooperation" and "non-adversarial labor relations" in which the workers' unions are transformed into adjuncts of the company and the workers are only afforded a voice when management asks them whether they would like to work faster or harder, or both. In today's political climate in the United States, the dominant economic philosophy is called deregulation, the central doctrine of which is that corporations should be allowed to do whatever they want in pursuit of profit, without government regulation or the demands of social movements. Harry Merlo, the president of Louisiana-Pacific Lumber Company, explaining why he opposes any restraints on corporate logging in California, eloquently captured the spirit of deregulation. "We log to infinity. Because we need it all. It's ours. It's out there, and we need it all. Now.'' 100

However, in many European countries today, while powerful corporate interests are also in the driver's seat, there is the counterforce of substantial social movements and political parties that are advocating democratic control of industrial production. Ingvar Carlsson, the social-democratic prime minister of Sweden, observed:

People are not free to form their own destiny when such important parts of their everyday life as their working environment and the manner in which it is organized is decided by others We seek to place citizen's rights over the right of ownership; to make the workers' rights superior to those of capital; and to set consumers' rights above those of the producers. 101

In the United States today there are Native American thinkers advocating concepts of recriprocal democracy. Winona LaDuke, director of the White Earth Land Recovery Project and a member of the Anishinabe tribe from White Earth Reservation, argues:

The Anishinabe culture, the Algonquin culture, is based on an economic system, a value system that includes a concept called reciprocity. When we go out hunting, whether it is for wapsch or atuk (rabbit or deer), or go out to harvest wild rice up on our lakes in Northern Minnesota, we give something in order to get something back from the creation. Reciprocity is an essential part of our value system, which is very contrary to the industrial system based on capitalism where you put labor and capital and resources together for the purpose of accumulation — you take more than you need. We all need to change how people think in this society, and re-establish the concept of reciprocity. ¹⁰²

Today, in many Third World countries, environmental activists are discussing new forms of democratic development that are responsive to oppressed peoples and their environment. Chee Yoke Ling, director of the Friends of the Earth

in Malaysia, remarked:

How do you build a movement in Kuala Lumpur — or in Los Angeles — to restrict corporate "development" when poor people and Third World people have always been told that "development," "expansion" and "economic growth" are their best hope to arise from poverty? We answer that we are not anti-development, but we ask, "What type of development?" We need development that meets the basic needs of the majority, that is socially and culturally just, and that does not violate basic ecological rules. 103

The worldview of the Labor/
Community WATCHDOG is shaped
by these varied and interrelated
themes — genuine economic and
political democracy, redistribution
of wealth, meeting the basic needs
of the majority, and cooperative,
environmentally sound, community
based models of economic development. The WATCHDOG's organizing
strategy focuses on defending the
health and safety of workers and
communities and initiating grassroots campaigns against large
corporate polluters.

The Labor/Community WATCHDOG was formed precisely because it is only through collective and organized action that any of us can have an impact. As we explain both the strategy and initial program of the Labor/Community WATCHDOG, we hope you will consider becoming an active member of our organization. It will only be through building a large organization with members rooted in workplaces, unions, churches, synagogues, and communities — members who are ready to directly confront corporate polluters — that the following strategy will have any chance of success.

Sunday April 28, 1991 Los Angeles Times

COLUMN ONE

Smog War Faces Hazy Prospects

■The Southland is unlikely to meet its clean-air goals by 2010, the target date. Observers point fingers at the AQMD, the agency overseeing the effort, for being too optimistic and too willing to compromise.

By LARRY B. STAMMER TIMES ENVIRONMENTAL WRITER

Two years ago after approval of a far-reaching strategy to restore blue skies to the smoggy South Coast Air Basin by the year 2010, there is a growing consensus among environmentalists, business executives, government officials and air quality regulators themselves that the goal cannot be met.

Despite some early successes, they say it will be highly unlikely that federal clean air standards can be achieved by the deadline because of the South Coast Air Quality Management District's uneven performance since 1989 and the formidable political pressures and technological challenges the district still faces.

In just the second year of its 20 year plan, many predict that the AQMD will not meet its goal of cleaning up L.A.'s air by the year 2010.

Rejecting the Regulatory Strategy: The AQMD is Caught Between a Rock and a Soft Place

With a name like the Labor/ Community WATCHDOG, some might think our strategy is to monitor and pressure the existing regulatory agencies - such as the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the state Air Resources Board (ARB), and the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), that is specifically charged with cleaning up L.A. County's toxic air. While serving as a "watchdog" over those agencies is certainly part of our overall plan, our main strategy is to build a permanent membership organization to directly confront corporate polluters. We propose this approach precisely because we have no confidence that government regulatory agencies will be able to convince or compel large corporations to do business based on environmental ethics.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), the regional agency charged with cleaning the air in the four-county Los Angeles air basin (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernadino counties), was organized in 1977, has almost 1,000 employees, and operates an annual budget of \$80 million. It has the authority to promulgate "control measures" that range from restricting the use of certain smog-producing chemicals in industry to banning the use of lighter fluids for backyard cookouts, which its opponents have labeled "Use a barbeque, go to jail." Because its 20 year plan to reduce air pollution in Los Angeles ("The Path to Clean Air 1989-2009"), does involve some regulation of corporate

practices, it has been labeled 'a government agency out of control' by conservative County Supervisor Mike Antonovich, who also happens to be a member of the AQMD board. 104 Reinforcing this image of the agency as a mighty challenger to polluters is Forbes magazine's portrayal of AQMD director James Lents as 'the most powerful man in Southern California.' 105

In our direct experience with the AQMD we have found their research and documentation of the problems of air pollution in the L.A. basin to be first-rate and many of their staff to be unusually energetic in their efforts to solve the air pollution problem. But, as we shall explain, the WATCHDOG's main work must go far beyond monitoring the AQMD's plan, because we find it fundamentally flawed in its conception.

The AQMD is caught in a political contradiction: the powerful economic and political forces that it must "regulate" are the same ones that dominate the governmental structures that regulate it. In virtually every instance when AQMD staff attempt to regulate corporate behavior, they become caught in a political crossfire with big business doing most of the firing.

• No sooner had the agency announced its 20 year plan in July 1989 than the state Air Resources Board, under pressure from then Governor George Deukmejian, placed a 60 day hold on the plan, saying it, "created great mistrust between the AQMD and the business community." ¹⁰⁶ During that "cooling off period" the AQMD gave the giant utility Southern California Edison a six year extension (from the original deadline of 1993 to 1999), to comply with air-quality goals.

- The AQMD, without any statutory power to intervene in land use decisions, has made some efforts to comment on the conflict between unchecked development and air quality. But when director James Lents attempted to challenge the size of the 1,300 acre Porter Ranch development project in the San Fernando Valley on the grounds that it would generate more traffic and pollution, he was attacked by the developers for "declaring war on local decision-making" and warned by pro-business politicians to stay out of such matters. On this issue, Lents' intervention was wellintentioned, but his agency has no authority to counter the powerful developers and their legions of paid political supporters.
- In June 1990, the AQMD told the state Air Resources Board that "smog in Los Angeles will get much worse if Southern California Edison merges with the San Diego Gas and Electric Company." ¹⁰⁷ But by September 1990, the AQMD, under intense lobbying from Southern California Edison, reversed itself and approved the plan despite testimony from many environmental organizations that the merger would create even greater ecological damage.

On February 1, 1991, two state administrative law judges ruled that the merger should be stopped because it would violate anti-trust principles and result in increased emissions, creating significant negative environmental impact — that is, they took a tougher stand on the environment than the AQMD. ¹⁰⁸

• In August 1990, the AQMD voted to contribute \$100,000 to Unocal's efforts to buy up gas-guzzling cars for \$700 each in order to get some

of the worst polluting vehicles off the road. WATCHDOG representative Eric Mann testified at the AQMD's monthly board meeting that Unocal's campaign was simply a public-relations stunt to place the blame on "old cars" rather than on their own oil refineries and gasoline products. "While this campaign is a brilliant ploy by Unocal," he said, "it is shocking that the AQMD would even consider giving away taxpayers money to the Unocal public-relations department when the money could, for example, fund clinics in low-income communities for a year of public health education on air pollution." Several members of the AQMD Board admitted that there was some merit to the WATCHDOG's analysis, but then the board voted unanimously to give the \$100,000 to Unocal.

It is shocking that the AQMD would even consider giving away taxpayers money to the Unocal public relations department.

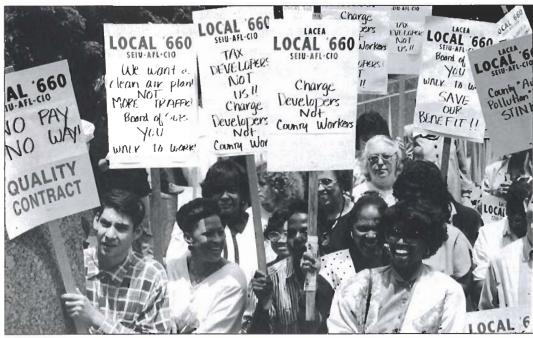
• Recently, the press announced that the 1990. "smog season" from May through October was the best on record, with a 24 percent decrease in first-stage smog levels as compared to 1989. AQMD officials argued that their regulations, which lowered emissions from cars and industry, deserve credit for the dramatic improvement in the ozone levels. But several factors mitigate against premature celebration.

First, several state officials argue that the AQMD moved too fast to claim that their regulatory measures were the primary reason for the decline in ozone levels. "We would credit the weather with this decline more than the [AQMD] is," said Bill Sessa, spokesman for the state Air Resources Board. "The weather is a dominating factor in any dramatic change in smog. Improvements from [smog control] programs are more slow and steady." ¹⁰⁹ If the ARB's assessment is correct, then the AQMD has taken undue credit for temporary improvements that might well be reversed in future years.

Second, the reduced levels only measure ozone, a significant but nonetheless partial element of L.A.'s air pollution, and have nothing to do with air toxins. If, in fact, the levels of ozone in our air are being reduced, while levels of TCA and methylene chloride are on the rise, it is hardly accurate to boast that we have had the "cleanest air on record."

Third, by all accounts, there has not been an improvement in visibility. The brownish-yellow haze that makes downtown highrise buildings only a few blocks away barely visible is a product of moisture, soot, and oxides of nitrogen. Thus, when the AQMD (and oil companies like ARCO), boast that "we're beginning to see the light," it contradicts the first-hand experience of millions of Angelenos who see the same dirty smog-filled air with their own irritated and runny eyes.

Nonetheless, any reductions in ozone levels are an important contribution to public health, and any role that the AQMD played in that process is to be commended. But if the AQMD wants to maintain its credibility, and expects public participation based on a sober understanding of the long-term nature of this fight, it should avoid public relations exaggerations of its achievements.



SEIU workers demonstrating against parking charges.

- JOHNNY KNOX
- In practice, the AQMD has so far paid little attention to the many "non-smog" toxins in our air. The agency has focused almost all of its energies on the so-called "criteria pollutants" of ozone, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and particulates, while investing little time, energy, or staff in the battle against air toxins — the other chemicals in our air that produce birth defects, immunological damage, reproductive problems, respiratory suffering, and cancer. Jan Chatten-Brown, president of the L.A. Coalition for Clean Air, has called the performance of the AQMD on air toxins "dismal." 110
- In a more extensive example, the WATCHDOG has been involved in a year-long engagement with the AQMD that can shed some light on the possibilities and limits of the regulatory approach. The AQMD has promulgated a "regulation XV" that mandates employers with more than 100 employees to develop

plans to increase "average vehicle ridership" and thereby cut down on auto use and the resultant pollution. But throughout 1990, the AQMD supported a plan of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to comply with that rule by placing a parking tax of \$70 to \$120 per month on its employees — many of them clerical and secretarial workers making no more than \$1,500 per month — after free parking had been a negotiated union benefit for more than a decade. Researcher Kimberly Kyle, of Service Employees International Union Local 660, uncovered documents proving that the county's real intention was to drive county workers from those lots in order to deliver the lots as part of land packages to large developers (such as Maguire Thomas and SICO Broadway Developers), in return for ground rents that would go into the county treasury. The plans of these developers to construct hotels and highrises on the sites would, in fact, increase the number

of cars in the area by 400 percent and thereby dramatically increase the air pollution as well.

The AQMD had originally opposed the county's plan, but under continued pressure from the county it reversed itself and approved the plan before the union could negotiate with county management. Even when presented with evidence by SEIU, the Labor/Community WATCHDOG, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Coalition for Clean Air, that the county's plan would, in fact, increase pollution, place undue burden on low-income workers, and violate the AQMD's own policy of not approving plans "subject to collective bargaining," the AOMD staff refused to withdraw support for the county's taxthe-workers program. AQMD spokespeople explained in meetings and discussions with SEIU and WATCHDOG representatives that while they certainly felt badly that the workers were being punished, their mandate was to reduce average

The Sun

SATURDAY MARCH 2, 1991

Rideshare plan labeled racist, unfair to poor

By SAM ATWOOD Sun Staff Writer

EL MONTE—The region's ridesharing program is racist, antiunion and unfair to the poor, representatives of labor and minority groups said at an air quality meeting Friday.

About 60 members of the Labor/Community Watchdog, a group of Los Angeles area labor and minority activists, carried pickets, chanted slogans and testified at a workshop on the progress of the South Coast Air Quality Management District's rideshare

program-Regulation 15.

"As Regulation 15 stands right now, it does not allow for equity for people of color," said Patrick Ramsey, a member of the Watchdog's board of directors. "Basically, what Regulation 15 does is allow employers to push the cost on to those who can afford it the least."

Activists agreed with the objectives of the program but object to the use of parking charges to discourage workers from driving alone.

"For those who can just barely make it, it increases the cost of trying to make a living," Ramsey said.

"The plan is very racist because

of the way the workforce is divided," said Ron Wilkins of the Black Employees Association.

Air quality board members denied that the program is racist, but agreed to consider changes.

The labor group asked for an amendment that would guarantee the rights of unions to negotiate incentive plans to avoid economic hardships on the poor and to prohibit discrimination against women and minorities.

The group also called for creation of a hearing board to consider activists' appeals of plans they find unfair.

vehicle ridership regardless of questions of social equity. Finally, in December 1990, the County of Los Angeles, with the AQMD's full support, began imposing parking charges on its workers. The AQMD's behavior cannot be explained by mere callousness. The constant attacks on the agency by anti-union Supervisor Mike Antonovich (whose seat on both the County Board and the AQMD board raises serious issues of conflict of interest), have obviously taken their toll. On this issue, the AQMD capitulated to the power of conservative elected officials, to the detriment of both the county workers and L.A.'s air.

• The Labor/Community
WATCHDOG, after months of
involvement with the county
workers fight, realized that unless a
structural change was made in the
rules to incorporate issues of social
justice *every* employer plan could be

used to impose an unfair burden on the workers. Since the AQMD's own ''contingency plan'' to reduce the number of cars on the road (if its less stringent regulatory measures didn't work), included ''emission charges on gasoline,'' ''limits of vehicle registration,'' ''emission charges on vehicle uses,'' and even ''highway user fees,'' the parking charges were clearly just the first act of a ''tax the poor until they are driven off the road'' air quality strategy.

Because of the great conflict over how the AQMD dealt with the L.A. County workers, and concerns expressed by board members Larry Berg and Sabrina Schiller, the agency agreed to hold an informational hearing to consider amending Regulation XV, on March 1, 1991. The WATCHDOG spent months organizing a broad coalition in support of its proposed amendment to the rule.

"Any employer plans to comply with Regulation XV and to increase average vehicle ridership: 1) Cannot interfere with workers' rights to bargain collectively; 2) Cannot impose undue economic hardship on workers; and 3) Cannot have racially or gender-based discriminatory impacts."

On March 1, 1991, the WATCHDOG and its coalition allies demonstrated in front of AQMD headquarters chanting "Tax the boss, not the workers," "Bust polluters not unions," and "Clean Air and Social Justice Must Go Hand in Hand." For two hours, WATCHDOG coalition members from Hotel and Restaurant Employees, Service Employees, Mothers of East L.A., Concerned Citizens of South Central Los

Angeles, Black Employees
Association, Sierra Club, Coalition
for Clean Air, California Association of Persons with Handicaps,
Jobs with Peace, Union of American
Physicians and Dentists, and
Women in the Trades testified in
favor of the social equity
amendment.

In response to that movement, the AQMD board agreed to hold a *public hearing* in September 1991, to allow legal amendments to the rule, at which time the WATCHDOG amendment will be voted upon.

Will the AQMD actually adopt the WATCHDOG's social justice amendment? Will employer groups counterattack, and how will the board vote? Will the AQMD staff continue their interest in passing a non-discrimination amendment to their rule, as they have indicated so far? These questions can only be answered through the organizing process.

So far, the WATCHDOG's work has confirmed both the potential of interracting with regulatory agencies as a secondary, but important element of environmental organizing, and the limits of a primarily regulatory strategy. The WATCHDOG is attempting to walk a fine line — testifying at public hearings, working with AQMD board members and staff, and drafting specific language, while simultaneously maintaining its coalition, program, and political initiative independent of cooptive forces, as the best strategy to fight for real changes in policy.

After a year of seeing the AQMD function first-hand, we know that some of the board members and staff respond positively to initiatives from the community, and realize that without a grass-roots movement their efforts to

regulate powerful corporate polluters will be fatally compromised. But we cannot expect the AQMD, limited by its primarily technical world view and the pressures of conservative corporate and political forces, to take the lead on either social justice or corporate regulation. The WATCHDOG will utilize the excellent research and information facilities of the AOMD. and we will work with their staff and board members when our interests coincide. But we will also provide an alternative center of analysis, policy, and action for clean air in Los Angeles, thereby defending the interests of those most impacted by air pollution.

Right now, the AQMD is caught between a rock (the corporations and their political retainers), and a soft place (the environmental movement that so far has been no match for corporate influence) — which explains many of the limitations of the agency's regulatory strategy. The WATCHDOG strategy can strengthen the environmental coalition in the city by creating a new organized counterforce that is better equipped to stand up to corporate power.

Maria Elena Durazo (left)
President of Local 11, Hotel and
Restaurant Employees, with
Eric Mann, WATCHDOG Director,
at planning meeting
for AQMD strategies.





PAUL FUSCO/Magnum Photos

Cesar Chavez in early days of United Farm Workers Organizing Committee.

Directly Confronting Corporate Polluters: The Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open as a Model for Environmental Organizing

How do you get a corporate polluter to change its policies? Given the enormous economic and social power of Chevron, Arco, Unocal, McDonnell Douglas, Hughes Aircraft, Dow Chemical, and the rest of their corporate allies, and given the weak state of the progressive movement, it's difficult to imagine where to begin.

During the height of the labor movement in the 1930s, it was the courageous and creative actions of autoworkers, such as the sit-downs in GM's Flint, Michigan plants, that sparked the growth of industrial unionism and the C.I.O. During the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, it was highly visible direct-action campaigns

such as the Montgomery bus boycott, the Freedom Rides, the lunch-counter sit-ins and the March on Washington that created the social climate and the organized muscle to win civil rights legislation. And during the 1960s and 1970s, it was the direct social action of the United Farm Workers in its boycotts of Gallo wine, grapes, and lettuce that finally forced the growers to the bargaining table and led to the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975.

These effective social movements, along with the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open (which several UAW members now active in the WATCHDOG helped to initiate), have provided us with first-hand social theory and practice that we are applying to new models of environmental organizing.

In 1982, General Motors management told its workers in Van Nuys, California that it was considering closing the assembly plant on the grounds that the factory's profit



BRUCE DAVIDSON/Magnum Photos

levels were not high enough. The UAW, under the leadership of a farsighted local union president, Pete Beltran, having seen GM already close its other L.A. plant in Southgate and Ford close its L.A. Pico Rivera plant, initiated the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open, a proactive effort to threaten GM with a consumer boycott of its products if the company ever closed the plant.

GM's management's initial position was that the plant was their private property and they had nothing to discuss, let alone negotiate. The Labor/Community Coalition responded by organizing substantial consumer support, primarily within L.A.'s Latino, Black, and labor communities, to directly confront GM in the largest new car market in the United States. College students (many of them'from Latino and Black student groups), unionists looking for a model to reverse the pattern of concessions and union-busting,

socially conscious artists such as Ed Asner and Jackson Browne, and the owners of small businesses near the plant held rallies, wrote letters, and demonstrated to demand that GM keep the plant open — attracting significant media coverage in the *L.A. Times, Business Week*, and in local and network television.

The campaign synthesized labor and civil rights concerns — the plant's workforce was 50 percent Latino, 15 percent African-American, and 15 percent female. The campaign's main slogan challenged GM's ''management right" to close the plant: "The future of GM Van Nuys, it's not just for management to decide. Workers and communities demand a voice!" The campaign became a highly publicized test-case to directly challenge the dominant ideology of what at the time was called "Reaganism," but in actuality consisted of both Democratic and Republican support for the corporate agenda.

Freedom riders, traveling from Alabama to Mississippi, 1961.

STRATE.GY OF THE WATCHDOG

Finally, in 1984, GM's president, F. James McDonald, agreed to meet with the Coalition in Los Angeles. The Coalition was represented by 25 community leaders, including Rev. Frank Higgins, Rev. Ignacio Castuera, Father Luis Olivares, Professor Rodolfo Acuña, Assemblywoman (now Congressperson) Maxine Waters, and UAW representatives Pete Beltran and Eric Mann.

McDonald repeated his threat that the plant would most likely be closed based on "sound business practices." The Coalition asked McDonald to look around the room and assess whether it would be a "sound business practice" to call its bluff on the boycott. Finally, McDonald agreed that the plant would be kept open for at least two more years, and that he would take the Coalition's demand for a ten year commitment back to the GM board of directors.

Maxine Waters observed, "Well isn't this a lesson. I introduce a bill in the Assembly asking for 90 days advance notice on plant closings, and my colleagues tell me it's too radical. But we organize a powerful coalition and boycott threat and we get at least two years advance notice from the president of General Motors." McDonald left the meeting visibly shaken, and admitted to the press, "I take boycotts very seriously, I just don't think they're very good for business." Indeed, for at the time of this writing the GM Van Nuys plant is still open.

In July 1991, however, GM announced its plans to close the plant in August 1992 — the final installment of its successful counter-attack. In 1987, GM imposed a "team concept" management system at Van Nuys that pitted worker against worker

and split the UAW local into promanagement and pro-worker camps. In 1988, GM management fired militant local union leaders Pete Beltran and Mike Velasquez, firings that were later converted to "retirements" but which shocked and demoralized the workers. Moreover, GM began a plant closing by attrition — reducing a workforce of 5,000 workers to less than 2,600 by 1991 through speed-ups and lay-offs.

In response, UAW and Strategy Center activists are trying to plan a last-ditch effort to keep the plant open — one that even its advocates know only has a long-shot chance of reversing GM's plans. But given the powerful forces concentrated against it, it is a small miracle that the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open was so successful. For it is undeniable that for almost a decade, GM, the world's largest industrial corporation, was deterred from carrying out its plan to close the plant, and thousands of workers kept their jobs because a labor/ community movement set the terms of the debate and the terrain of the battle. 111 The job of the WATCHDOG is to learn from the achievements and setbacks of that Campaign, and, if possible, to advance its legacy.

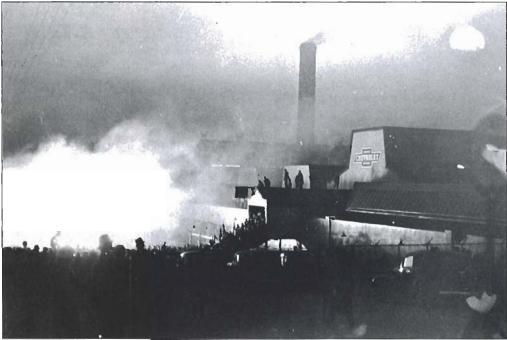
Applying this model to environmental organizing, we intend to fight corporate polluters on terrain most favorable to workers and communities — not primarily in the courts, the legislatures, or the regulatory agencies, but in the workplace, the communities, the media, the marketplace, and the streets.

Another lesson from the Van Nuys experience is that environmental groups don't have to show they can ''communicate''

with big business by sitting on corporate boards of directors or taking grants from corporate polluters. In fact, such tactics compromise their credibility and leverage. Conversely, the WATCHDOG's worker and community strategy does not preclude a dialogue, or even negotiations, with corporate executives. The early UAW negotiated with GM, but from the leverage point of occupying the Flint plants; the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee negotiated with corporations, and even presidents Kennedy and Johnson, but from an independent grassroots base; and the Labor/Community Coalition negotiated with GM after demonstrating its potential to mobilize tens of thousands of consumers. The issue, therefore, isn't "communication" in the abstract, but rather, communication with corporations towards particular objectives.

We welcome face-to-face negotiations with executives of polluting companies, based on concrete environmental demands. But for those conversations to generate any changes in corporate policy, we will have to: 1) organize a powerful constituency-based movement, and 2) set the terms of the debate so that concepts of public health, worker and community rights, corporate responsibility, and restricted profitability create the parameters for the discussion.

We need a model of community action that forces companies to stop producing toxins *right on the spot*, even if that means temporarily shutting down production. But before we initiate such a campaign, we need to identify a company that



Courtesy LARRY JONES

- produces and/or utilizes a highly toxic product that is acknowledged to present a clear and present public-health danger both to its own workers and to surrounding communities:
- has substantial economic ties to Los Angeles and has a product line that would be vulnerable to an L.A. area boycott:
- engages in production for which far safer and less-polluting alternatives are available — even, or especially if, transforming the production technology would involve significant corporate expense.

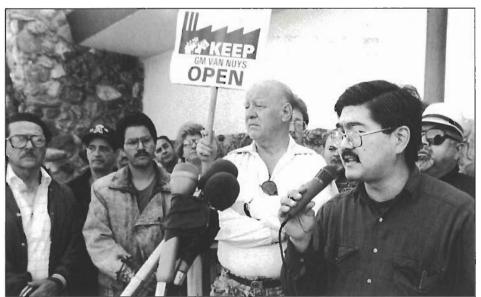
It is precisely the conflict between community health and ''corporate expense'' that we want to raise in the public arena. In the Van Nuys campaign, for example, GM, at least temporarily, was forced to accept a lower rate of profit at the plant rather than risk a boycott of its products in Los Angeles. Based

on our observations of decades of unsuccessful regulatory efforts, we expect within our model of a future environmental campaign, that the targeted corporation, at least initially, would strenuously oppose public demands that they invest large sums of money in cleaner technology. But if the movement was strong enough, top management might eventually make the decision that a capital investment is better than continued economic and political losses. That precedent, if we are strong enough to succeed, could begin to change market practices by other companies in the field.

While we are anxious to move toward a corporate accountability campaign, the WATCHDOG is not ready for such a confrontation at this early stage in its development. It will take several years of membership development, public education, and the initiation of smaller-scale campaigns before we will be strong enough to consider a

UAW Sitdowners leave GM Plant to join victory parade as twilight falls, (Flint Michigan, February 11, 1937).

county-wide campaign against a major polluter. But we will carry out our educational, outreach, and initial organizing work with an eye on our longer-term goal: to initiate a highly visible test-case campaign to confront a major corporate polluter, and to win major changes in production technologies and processes that will, in turn, improve the health and safety of workers and communities in L.A.



SCOTT GARRITY/L.A. Daily News

Mark Masaoka (microphone), UAW Local 645
Unit Chairman and WATCHDOG member,
and Paul Goldener (holding sign), former local president,
at rally to keep GM Van Nuys open, March 1991.

Involving Workers and Communities of Color in the Leadership of a New Environmentalism

There is a growing awareness among environmental activists that the regulatory strategy is not working. But new strategies must also involve new constituencies. Since our strategy demands that corporations stop producing toxic chemicals, we have to shift the center of gravity away from environmental lobbyists who debate "acceptable parts per million" with corporate lobbyists allowing a procorporate Congress to arbitrate the debate. Since we believe that workplace and community organizing, direct action, and popular control of corporate production must set the terms of the debate. there is a need to change the social composition not only of the troops,

but of the leaders. Factory and office workers, high school and college students, women, Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, white working people, farmworkers working with pesticides in the field, and innercity residents facing air pollution, waste incineration, and groundwater contamination must become the leaders of the new environmentalism.

In this expanded context, environmental scientists, socially progressive attorneys, and professional lobbyists can play constructive roles as participants in a broader social movement.

Nonetheless, the WATCHDOG's main orientation is to combine direct organizing with broad policy demands. Therefore, the WATCHDOG is going into workplaces, churches, and communities to develop new leaders and a new grassroots movement.

Reaching Out To Small Business

To the surprise of many, the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open received significant support from the Van Nuys and Greater San Fernando Valley chambers of commerce, and its organizers developed close relationships with several business people in the area. After GM publicized its threat to close the plant, one businessinitiated study indicated that a closure of the Van Nuvs facility would lead to the closure of more than 500 small firms in the area through the ripple effect. 112 Thus, many business people petitioned GM to keep the plant open out of an urgent and immediate self-interest.

The organizers also learned that while many of those business people were conservative and antiunion, they had a great deal of anger towards GM because of its long history of squeezing its dealers and suppliers, and its national reputation for using and abusing the communities in which its plants were located — such as refusing to reduce toxic emissions and demanding exemptions from local taxes. Thus, some of these local merchants came to ally with the union, its coalition, and even the boycott threat out of both selfdefense and a grudging respect for a movement that was standing up to a corporate bully. This political development played an important role in keeping the plant open.

Similarly, we see many small business owners as valuable members of a broad environmental coalition in the city, but as in the Van Nuys campaign, a coalition in which the interests of workers and people of color shape the political agenda.

For example, there are some business owners who are willing to comply with stricter standards for industrial emissions under AQMD rules, but operate on such small profit margins that they don't have the capital to purchase cleaner technologies. This real-world problem can lead to a variety of solutions, depending upon political values and strategy. One proposed solution being discussed is a "market incentives plan" under which large corporate polluters would be given "pollution credits" in return for contributing a fixed number of dollars into a "bank" (perhaps run by the AQMD). According to this plan, the bank would distribute these funds as loans and grants to small businesses located in Latino, Black, and Asian American communities to allow them to transform their industrial processes. We strongly disagree with this approach.

Under such a "market incentives" plan, for example, if Oil Refinery A in Wilmington is mandated to reduce benzene emissions 10 percent per year, it could instead, reduce its benzene emissions by only three percent, and pay funds to a "bank" in order to purchase "pollution credits" for the seven percent it "owed." The bank would, in turn, give money to the management of Metal Plating shop B in East Los Angeles to buy less-polluting technologies. But these cash transfers mask an unacceptable human "trade off." For while the kids in East L.A. might be exposed to less hexavalent chromium if the metal plating shop reduced emissions, the kids in Wilmington would be exposed to more benzene because a giant oil refinery that was fully capable of reducing its emissions by 10 percent (or more),

per year found it far more profitable (hence the "market incentive"), to simply pay some money into the "development bank." We support loans and grants to small business. But we oppose having them financed by multi-national corporate polluters who can use them to "offset" their own pollution.

Similarly, there are some members of communities of color who, out of a legitimate concern about preserving jobs in their communities, have consistently argued for extensions, variances, and even exemptions for polluting firms on the grounds that enforcement of the rules would drive them out of business or "force" them to runaway to Mexico. We might agree to support a short-term extension for a particular small firm if the chemicals and timelines involved were

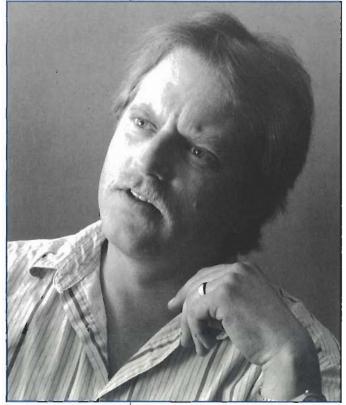
not posing a clear and present public health danger; but as a general strategy we think it's a serious mistake to portray these firms simply as victimized job providers in the community, with no plans to bring them into compliance.

Residents of these very same communities understand that while each individual firm may be relatively small, the *cumulative* impact of many small businesses on the public health of their children creates unacceptable risks and suffering. The WATCHDOG is having conversations with environmental firms that specialize in technical assistance to small businesses to help develop new approaches, such as labor/community/small business alliances demanding federal



LIAN HURST MANN

U.S. firm (Kodak) in
Parque Internacional Tijuana,
a maquiladora zone,
Tijuana, Mexico.



MARY ANN STUERHMANN

Mark Gillaspie at "Workers, Communities, and Toxics" meeting.

MARK GILLASPIE The Best Defense Is a Good Offense

When Mark Gillaspie began working at Lockheed Aircraft in 1979 he thought he had it all — the security of "defense" contracts and good pay. But soon he was assigned to the "Skunkworks", a top secret department that some speculated produced the Stealth Bomber. It also meant working with "exotic chemicals" such as phenol epoxies, methylene chloride, and trichloroethane. Soon, he and his coworkers suffered skin rashes, dizziness, nausea, and headaches. When they demanded Material Safety Data Sheets to investigate the chemicals with which they were working and their potential hazards, Mark explained, "We were fold it was a military secret. I began to see the downside of working on military contracts."

The workers sued Lockheed for their chemically-induced filnesses, and Mark is now an advocate of workers' right to know about toxics. Mark advises, "Do not trust the company or your own complacency. If you feel you are being poisoned, organize your fellow workers. Sure, it's frightening to protest. But is it better to get permanently ill or even die on the job?"

and state funds, (perhaps supplemented by major *fines* on large polluters), for the development of less polluting technologies in the metal plating, furniture, foam manufacturing, and other highly polluting industries that employ significant numbers of minority workers.

Similarly, we are aware that most of L.A.'s dry cleaners, many of which are owned by members of the Asian American, Black, and Latino communities, use the dangerous chemical perchloroethylene. Despite the cumulative danger of these enterprises, the WATCHDOG would not be involved in, for example, a march to close down a neighborhood dry cleaner on environmental grounds. Rather, we might in the future seek to involve both the dry cleaning owners and other community residents as allies in an environmental coalition to demand that chemical companies

such as DOW discontinue the use of perchloroethylene and produce a safe alternative.

Within our first year of public visibility we have been approached by Latino environmental consultants, Asian American firms producing environmentally safe products, and independent engineers and manufacturers attempting to produce electric cars in California. While we have little interest in working with ruthless small entrepreneurs who hide behind a "mom and pop" facade while they poison the real moms and pops and kids in the community, and while our involvement with low-income people and workers is the strategic centerpiece of our work, the development of a program for socially responsible small businesses, especially those run by people of color, is a new and challenging component of our overall strategy.

Addressing Economic Fear and Racial Conflict Through the Organizing Process

While the WATCHDOG strategy involves constructing a multi-racial coalition of community groups, unions, and individuals, we are well aware of the difficulties of bringing together diverse constituencies based on a common vision. The November 1990 electoral defeat in California of the "Big Green" initiative is a case in point.

When its initiators first gathered the necessary signatures to place Big Green on the ballot, voter approval was estimated at 75 percent. This bold effort to ban harmful pesticides, off-shore oil drilling, and known carcinogenic chemicals was a great idea whose time appeared to have come. But then the chemical industry counterattacked. They were far too clever to claim their products were good for the public. Rather, they argued that the phasing out of pesticides would make a bag of groceries twice as expensive, the ban on off-shore oil drilling would double the price of gas at the pump, and the phasing out of carcinogens would drive industry, and jobs, out of California.

The proponents of Big Green made a good case against the chemical industry, but expended little effort to address those hard economic questions. First, they attempted to dismiss the company claims as fabrications (many of them were), without understanding the direct experience of many working people, that is, in the absence of a strong social movement, corporations do raise the prices of their products in response to regulation. Then, they used arguments like "no price is too high when it comes to our

childrens' health," that were hardly convincing coming from people who appeared to be able to afford doubling the price of gas and groceries.

The Big Green Initiative was defeated because the mainstream environmental movement had no strategy to address the realities of class and race.

When the votes were counted, unable to address the chemical industry's economic blackmail tactics in a state where the majority of voters are economically insecure low-income, working class, and middle-class people, almost half of whom are people of color, Big Green went down to a crushing defeat — 39 percent in favor, 61 percent against.

The Evolution of the WATCHDOG

When we first began the WATCHDOG in 1989, already critical of what we felt were the class and race insensitivities of some of the more etablished environmental organizations, we decided that finding new ways to address conflicts among potential allies would be central to our strategic plan. We organized an instructive meeting — "Workers, Communities, and Toxics: A Two Day Conversation," at which 55 organizers from the Latino, Black, labor, environmental, and peace movements discussed the possibilities of, and obstacles to, developing new coalitions for the environment. Out of that dialogue, thanks to the candor of the participants, we were able to identify many conflicts among the affected groups that would have to be resolved in the organizing process.

Penny Newman, from Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste (West), explained:

The only time we seem to see labor unions is when we are fighting against a toxic corporate polluter and the company buses in frightened workers who attack us for threatening their jobs, with little apparent concern that our children are being poisoned.

Jono Schaeffer, from Justice for Janitors, said:

When I tell environmental groups I'm from Justice for Janitors they are all sympathetic, but when I explain I'm from SEIU Local 399, I hear them registering 'union,' and the phone goes dead. Some of this is because these people don't do their homework, they don't know a progressive union from a conservative one, they think we're all the same. There are more than 13 million people in this country in unions, and in Los Angeles, most of the unions doing any organizing are reaching out to low-income immigrant workers. I wonder how these environmentalists think they're going to accomplish anything by writing off unions?

Anthony Thigpenn, from Jobs With Peace, pointed out:

At a time when the demographics of Los Angeles are changing, and Latinos are fighting for greater electoral representation that they completely deserve, if we don't develop better communication and coalitions between people of color in L.A., the traditional politicans will pit Blacks and Latinos against each other to

advance their own careers, while the people at the bottom will be left out.

Robin Cannon, from Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles, said:

When we first started going to the city council meetings opposing the placement of the LANCER trash-burning incinerator in our community, every time we showed up the city also scheduled on the agenda a group from the San Fernando Valley that was opposing plans to expand garbage-dumping landfills in their community. At first it was a little antagonistic here was this predominantly white group from the Valley seeing a predominantly Black group fighting against incinerators and being told by city officials that if they didn't support incineration the city would have no alternative but to dump more garbage in their landfills. But we began to caucus with the Valley group and explained that while incineration reduces the volume of garbage, the ash would be more toxic and hazardous to all of our health. After a lot of phone calls and discussions, both groups united to demand that the city focus on the recycling of garbage - not landfill expansion and not trash burning incineration.

Chris Mathis, from the WATCHDOG, concluded:

I hope that some of you from the environmental movement have come to see the strategic importance of unions, and some of the union and community activists have learned that 'the environment' is not just a 'white

people's issue' or a 'middleclass' issue, but is our issue as well. We have a symbiotic relationship — we will either learn to work together or we will die apart.

As the economic conditions in the country and in Los Angeles continue to deteriorate for the majority of people, fear and desperation are becoming more prevalent in people's lives. With proper leadership and organization, people can become politically motivated to seek structural solutions that benefit the majority. or, in the absence of such progressive leadership, they can become more vulnerable to demagogic and racist appeals based on a Social Darwinist "survival of the fittest" mentality.

The environmental crisis has the potential to be a great unifier: while we have emphasized the unequal impacts of the crisis based on class and race, we believe that the vast majority of Angelenos have an urgent and shared need to stop the poisoning of L.A.'s air. The WATCHDOG begins with a multiracial organizing committee of women and men, and a commitment to bring Latinos, Blacks, Asians, and whites, workers and community members, unions and environmentalists to confront our many real differences and even conflicts of interests. Through the careful construction of organizing campaigns and demands that can unify diverse constituencies in a common battle against corporate power, we hope to challenge the destructive ideologies of racial prejudice, anti-working class sentiment, and inter-ethnic competitions.

Public Health Education as a Building Block in Organizing

The report you are reading, *L.A.'s Lethal Air*, is the first building block of our organizing plan — to use public-health analysis as a way of helping people to become informed, and then angry and motivated to take action.

Toxic-chemical poisoning is primarily a phenomenon of the 20th century, but long before this current public health threat entire populations were wiped out by bacteria and viruses that were invisible to the eye. The first bacteria were seen under a microscope by the Dutch scientist Anton van Leewenhoek in 1676; it was not until the late 1800's that the German physician, Robert Koch, discovered that specific bacteria cause specific diseases.

Public-health professionals today still lament how difficult it is to convince people to take proper precautions against disease, even with viruses as deadly as AIDS, because on some level people cannot grasp the idea that things that you can't see can hurt or even kill you. Educating people about the health effects of air toxins is even more difficult. Down deep we simultaneously suspect that the chemicals in our air and water are making us sick, and wonder if we aren't crying wolf. Mark Gillaspie, an outspoken Lockheed Aircraft worker, vividly describes the dilemma.

I started a new job in Lockheed's "Skunkworks" and within two months I began to get headaches. This was followed by skin rashes, extreme fatigue, numbness and tingling in my hands and feet and a great deal of irritability. As several months

passed I also began to have memory lapses. But I kept thinking it was just "stress" and didn't want to tell my fellow workers because I was afraid they'd think I was trying to get out of work or I was some kind of hypochondriac. Finally, after about two months, I got the courage to talk to one of my fellow workers, and she said that she had been having the same symptoms but also didn't want to mention it. Within a few hours we found out that virtually everyone in our department had been very sick but that each person thought it was just their individual self who had the symptoms, so no one had wanted to talk about it. 113

Gillaspie and his fellow workers, after demanding more information and protection from Lockheed and receiving no satisfaction, took their case to ABC TV's Nightline program and to a U.S. Senate hearing, and now have a class action suit pending against Lockheed. If people who work with toxic chemicals and who have access to each other every day are having trouble deciding whether their ailments are "their fault" or industrially caused, imagine the difficulty of determining whether every cold, lung infection, shortness of breath, headache, and incidence of fatigue is directly attributable to the air we breathe.

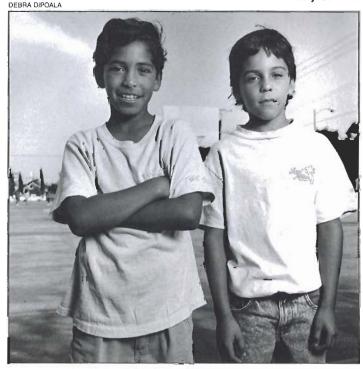
The WATCHDOG organizing committee has spent more than a year researching and writing LA's Lethal Air, because we felt that unless we made our own independent assessment of the health dangers of air pollution, we would be unable to involve others in the fight to clean up our air. Our conclusion that the air in Los

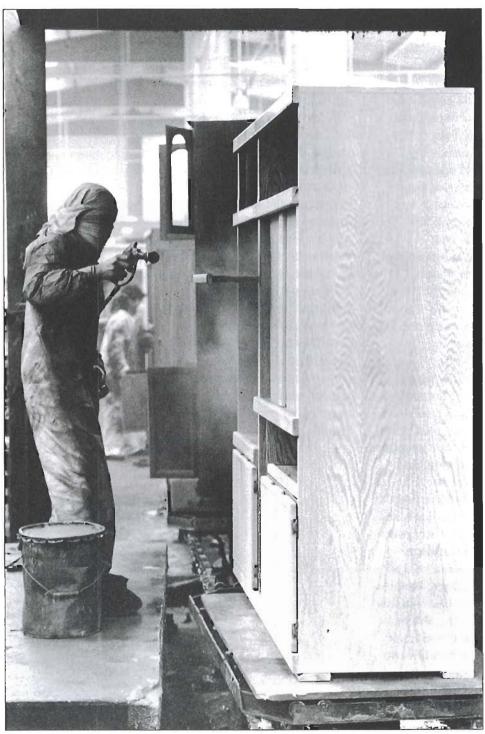
Angeles is dangerous to children, pregnant women, the elderly, athletes, workers, low-income people, and people of color has convinced us that this issue demands action and can generate a powerful movement.

A LA Times reporter, Linda Roach Monroe, appropriately characterized the situation: "Residents of polluted areas are participants in an unintentional experiment to determine the long-term effects of modern air pollution." 114 Based on our own study, we believe that it's time to move from being victims of an "unintentional experiment" to becoming historical actors. Information is power, and we base our organizing theory on the premise that once you discover the dangers of air pollution and the corporate source of the problem, and are presented with a viable strategy, you will want to take action.

WATCHDOG

Children at the Wilmington Park Elementary School.





DAVE GATLEY/L.A. Times

Furniture worker at Eric Morgan Factory in Tijuana, Mexico.

CHAPTER 7 65

The Program of the Labor/Community WATCHDOG or "What Is It You People Want?"

Today, corporate chieftains and their intellectual retainers are promoting the illusion that there is worldwide unanimity that "market forces" should govern human relations. We think, rather, that a large, untapped constituency, not only in Los Angeles but in the entire country, is well aware of the threat that concentrated corporate power poses to any hopes for economic and political democracy, and that this constituency is searching for some way to stand up and fight back.

Eric Mann, "L.A.'s Smogbusters" The Nation, September 17, 1990



MARY ANN STUEHRMANN

Air quality and social justice must go hand in hand: WATCHDOG members Patrick Ramsey (microphone), Marta Russell (left), and Gilbert Aviles (right), at March 1, 1991 demonstration.

As we publicize *L.A.'s Lethal Air* and give presentations to churches, synagogues, community organizations, labor unions, high schools, and college classes, we fully expect to learn about additional environmental problems that people are facing, and that may require the involvement of WATCHDOG activists. What follows, therefore, is not an exhaustive list, but the types of demands that will distinguish our approach to the air pollution problem.

Superfund for Workers. Today, as environmental protests grow, the

management of companies using or producing toxins is often able to convince many workers that they share the corporate interest and that community demands against the company are demands against the workers as well. This situation has pitted communities against workers, letting management off the hook and preventing a potentially powerful environmental coalition of communities and workers who are most impacted by toxic poisoning.

The resolution of the problem is difficult. On the one hand, working people need to be more independent in how they view their companies.

You cannot simply say, "I know the company is polluting but my job is at stake." For it is your own health and safety and that of your family (in addition to the community's), that is also at stake. Often, it is the workers, on the front lines of toxic exposure, who are most at risk. Also, in today's labor market, even without environmental pressure, the company is apt to run away, or lay workers off, or introduce "laborsaving technology" - or the worker may be laid-off because of health problems created by his or her work. There is no job security in going along with company pollution practices.

On the other hand, in a highly insecure job market, where, often, destitution and homelessness are only months away from a lay-off slip, we understand that demands to shut down a corporation, even temporarily, will threaten the workers' livelihoods — unless additional demands are made. Thus, a Superfund for Workers strategy is needed to protect the income of workers who are laid off because of environmentally mandated changes, including the shutting down of production.

The Labor/Community WATCHDOG advocates municipal, county, state, and federal laws, as well as union contracts that would guarantee income maintenance, high-school and college education funds, and long-term retraining for any workers temporarily or permanently laid-off because of the cessation of production due to company-caused environmental hazards. From our strategic perspective, we are most interested in raising this demand in conjunction with a campaign to temporarily shut down a toxic corporate polluter, during which time the

workers would be paid while the company was compelled to bring in non-polluting technology. 115

Restrict Capital Flight. As even the most minimal environmental regulations become law, some companies are running away to nonunion, "deregulated" states or to Mexico, with many others threatening to do so. We have to find ways to stop companies from running away from Los Angeles to evade environmental regulation and union organization — such as the flight of many furniture manufacturers to the maquiladora zone of Mexico right near the U.S. border, where U.S. firms exploit Mexican workers and poison the environment even worse than in Los Angeles.

For example, by all standards, the AQMD regulations on furniture manufacturing in Los Angeles are

very fair, and represent a significant compromise with the furniture manufacturers. And yet, the Eric Morgan company, which opened a 140,000 square foot plant in Tijuana in December 1989, closed down its entire Los Angeles operation and now employs more than 300 workers in Mexico. Morgan Chairman Carl Schulman acted the martyr in explaining why he abandoned L.A., claiming environmental rules and the high cost of real estate. "L.A. wants one huge Century City up there, nothing but offices." Schulman said. "They're out to chase industry out." 116 The real reasons for Schulman, and businesspeople like him, are that maquiladora wages are at most, 25 percent of U.S. furniture workers' wages, employers are not required to pay workers compensation benefits in this hazardous industry, and

> The hills of Tijuana: target for U.S. toxic dumping.



LIAN HURST MANN

Mexican regulation of the toxic furniture industry, according to activists with whom we spoke, is virtually non-existent. 117

Similarly, when told that the State Air Resources Board was moving to ban aerosol sprays in California because of their damage to the ozone layer, George P. Dietrich, president of Diversified CPC International, the largest producer of aerosol propellants in the world, argued, "Should that market shift to any degree, we very well could remove that plant [in Anaheim, Californial and its employees. This is not to be taken as a threat. It is a business decision." Without greater restrictions on capital flight, corporate polluters will continue to have enormous leverage in making "business decisions" that in fact threaten us all.

As a long-term goal, the WATCHDOG will fight for "Stay in L.A.'' agreements, in which companies would be compelled to sign at least ten year commitments to remain in the community as part of any loans, tax incentives, or other government programs to help business. For example, in August 1989, the L.A. city administration announced \$82 million in loans to small business to help them comply with AQMD regulations in industries such as furniture, bakeries, and dry cleaning. But those loans had no provisions to prevent those same firms from taking the city's money, staying in L.A. for several years, and then running away, as environmental and union pressures mounted. Since Los Angeles is a large consumer market, there will be organizing opportunities to effectively boycott firms that run away from Los Angeles, but attempt to export a substantial part of their production back to the city.

Oppose U.S. Firms Dumping Toxics in the Third World. At the 1989 "Workers, Communities and Toxics" meeting, sponsored by the Labor/Community Strategy Center, Chicano Studies Professor Rudy Acuña said, "I don't want the environmental movement to talk about making the United States a paradise if the solution is simply dumping toxic waste in the Third World, and in particular over the border in Mexico."

The crisis of air pollution in Los Angeles must combine a regional organizing plan with an international perspective. The L.A. Times reports, "A growing number of Southern California businesses are clandestinely trucking their hazardous wastes to Mexico to dodge increasingly stringent and costly environmental laws." 120 This criminal behavior is leading to a public health crisis of monumental proportions. For example, about 12 million gallons of raw sewage flow daily into the Tijuana River before it empties into the Pacific Ocean off San Diego. Mexican environmental activists tell of U.S. firms trucking toxics into the hills of Tijuana. When the rains come the toxics are washed down the hills where children play in the puddles. The American Medical Association has observed that "the pollution is so severe and infectious disease so ' rampant along the U.S.-Mexico border" that emergency measures are needed immediately. 121

There are also appalling stories of U.S. firms, whose products have been banned for sale in this country, exporting them to the Third World for sale despite known lethal health impacts. For example, while the banning of DDT in the U.S. is an example of how prevention rather than control is the best way to solve

environmental problems, Chee Yoke Ling of the Friends of the Earth in Malaysia points out that DDT is still sold in large quantities in the Third World, including in her country. Moreover, Diana Johnstone of *In These Times* magazine reports that large corporations in the United States are paying middlemen to collect their toxic waste, companies that, in turn, sell the poisons to currency-starved governments on the West Coast of Africa for permanent storage. Thus, only a few centuries after Western nations ravaged the social structure of Africa with their slave trade, they return to visit additional suffering on the region through the dumping of industrial waste. 122

The Labor/Community
WATCHDOG focuses most of its
energies on building a movement in
Los Angeles County, but we want to
make connections and alliances
with activists in Latin America,
Asia, and Africa to discuss longterm, international strategies. We
disagree with the "stage theory of
organizing" that states, "Only
when we're finished on the home
front will we address the role of
U.S. corporations in the Third
World."

For, inasmuch as multi-national corporations have international strategies and allies, "grassroots organizing" that does not have an international strategy and allies in the Third World will be no match for corporate polluters. As our work develops, we would welcome participating in international campaigns that unite working people and communities of color throughout the world in support of specific environmental demands — such as the banning of a particular toxic substance worldwide.



MARY ANN STUEHRMANN

Chris Mathis (in cap), along with fellow GM workers.

CHRIS MATHIS Keeping His Plant and His Mind Open

Chris Mathis, a leader of the Keep GM Van Nuys Open movement, shocked some of his co-workers when he wrote in the Spark, their shop-floor newsletter, "Auto emissions are the main contributor to smog, and our plant is the largest air polluter in the San Fernando Valley."

Chris acknowledged, "GM could use the costs of complying with tougher emission standards for its products and processes as an excuse to close the plant."

"But," he added, "GM has a social responsibility to keep the plant open and produce in an environmentally sound manner, even if it means accepting a lower rate of profit. If we can pressure GM to use non-toxic chemicals and to manufacture alternative-fuel cars, and buses for mass transit, we could clean the air and save the plant."

"It's hard to get unions to see the relationship between protecting our jobs and protecting the environment. But as unions face extinction, new alliances with the community on the environment could be part of labor's strategic salvation," Chris concluded.

Develop Less Polluting Auto

Transportation. There must be alternative, non-polluting sources of energy to drive engines to replace the burning of fossil fuels such as gasoline. Barry Commoner proposes, for example, a transitional program to replace gasoline with lesspolluting natural gas, and then replacing natural gas with widespread use of solar power. We at the Labor/Community WATCHDOG aren't experts on energy efficiency or fuel use, but we do know that, for both the United States and Third World nations, it is critical to develop renewable sources of nonpolluting energy. We also know that the efforts of companies like Chevron to argue that "reformulated fuel" allows us to have "the best of both worlds," that is, unlimited auto use and clean air, is a gross deception. There must be a movement away from the burning of fossil fuels and toward the development of solar-driven engines for both motor vehicles and industry. ¹²³

Many autoworkers have been convinced by the managements of the Big Three automakers that they should protect existing technologies in the transportation industry against clean-air acts and other regulations while, in fact, GM's, Ford's, and Chrysler's research and development departments are furiously studying new technologies to comply with environmental regulations and consumer demands that are right over the horizon. Why don't workers and their unions develop their own research and development departments to study electric cars, non-polluting buses and trolleys, and new engines running on alternative fuels? Why don't they take the leadership to demand that corporations produce socially responsible products?

Initiating such demands to change corporate production decisions in the auto industry would provide far greater job security for their members and new alliances with community forces.

The Labor/Community
WATCHDOG is developing its own
research department, and will pay
particular attention to studying the
auto industry. We are anxious to
work with UAW and other union
activists who want to initiate
demands for new jobs in new, nonpolluting industries.

Organize for Low-fare, Convenient, Safe Public Transportation. One of the highest priorities for reducing air pollution in Los Angeles is the development of a public transportation system based on buses and light rail that moves toward very low-fare service. In order for public transportation to attract those who can presently afford to drive, bus schedules must allow ease of transfers and frequent service, not the present underfunded system in which buses are scheduled based on when they can be filled to overcapacity. Given the deterioration of public life in the city, and in particular, the continued violence against women, this must be accompanied by secure, well-lit, and frequently patrolled buses and terminals. For low-income communities and communities of color, replacing the congestion and pollution of auto traffic with a public transportation system that is organized around indigenous needs can become an exciting element of an overall plan for community revitalization.

The WATCHDOG is studying the most environmentally benign bus and engine designs and proposes that such buses be built in Los



PATRICK RAMSEY

Passengers waiting to board a crowded bus at rush hour, corner of Western and Pico in Los Angeles.

Angeles' own ''rust-belt'' by workers from the closed-down Ford Pico Rivera, Bethlehem Steel, Goodyear, Firestone, and General Motors Southgate plants, and the threatened GM Van Nuys plant.

Reduce the Total Number of Cars on the Road: Make the Employers Pay. At present there are eight million autos on LA's highways, with projections of ten million by the year 2010. This must be dramatically reversed, not just by reducing the total number of vehicles, but also by reducing the total number of miles driven. Unlike the AQMD, which has based its strategy on employer sanctions against individual drivers, our primary strategy on auto emissions focuses on demands for a quality

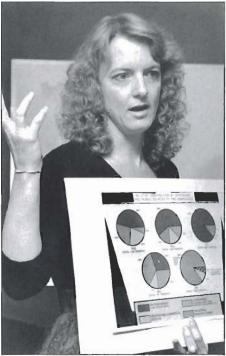
public-transportation system. In the absence of a viable alternative, it is unrealistic to expect most people in L.A. to give up the single-passenger, single-vehicle, auto-based system.

But we understand that simultaneous to demanding better public transportation, there must be effective plans to encourage people to ride share, car pool, van pool, and, when feasible, to use existing public transportation. The central political question here is "Who Will Pay?" We strongly oppose any plans to drive low-income and working people off the roads through road-use taxes, revocation of employee free parking, or increased parking fees while the more affluent drivers can afford the additional expense, and even get a write off on their taxes.



MARY ANN STUERHMANN

Somini Sengupta (above), and Kate Kinkade (right), present material at WATCHDOG School for Organizers.



MARY ANN STUEHRMANN

The WATCHDOG will work with unions and employee groups to support demands for employer-paid plans that include on-site childcare (so that parents who use public transportation don't have to worry about being late to pick up their kids), van pools, and cash incentives for car pooling - accompanied by union-initiated employeeeducation plans to encourage people to use those services. We will continue to demand changes in AQMD regulations so that working people are not penalized for a transportation system that was established by forces far more powerful than themselves.

Initiate Community Economic Development Programs. In the South Central Los Angeles Black community there is a frightening decimation of the industrial base and infrastructure and a shocking level of unemployment. In East Los Angeles and other areas of Latino concentration there are higher rates of employment, but with a large concentration of exploited, lowwage workers, often engaged in very toxic production. These communities need new models of nonpolluting, non-exploitative community economic development initiated by indigenous activists.

While it is early in our organizing work, the WATCHDOG is interested in learning about labor-intensive, non-polluting industries, such as recycling centers and plants that manufacture solar energy products, that can provide alternative models of community development to employment-starved, toxic-saturated, low-income communities of color. ¹²⁴

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Institute Progressive and Corporate Taxation. The average U.S. taxpayer is working until May of each year just to pay federal and state taxes and receives poor schools, decaying neighborhoods, dangerous parks, and disintegrating public health care in return. Some environmentalists have attempted to argue that the public is willing to pay more taxes in return for environmental safety, but we oppose any further taxation of working-class and lowincome people. Most middle-class and working class people are already terribly overtaxed. Finding government funds for environmental transformation must involve a massive redistribution of wealth through taxation of higher-income people, primarily those making \$100,000 or more, and even more significantly, far higher corporate taxes. Moreover, there should be far greater tax penalties for companies found guilty of polluting the environment, so that a significant percentage of the cost of toxic-clean up is paid for by toxic polluters.

Superfund for Workers, solarelectric cars, low-fare public transportation, loans to small businesses to install non-polluting technology, funds to communities of color to develop non-polluting industries — who will pay for them? Unless we can begin to redistribute some of society's wealth from rich to poor, and from corporations to working people and oppressed communities through a genuinely progressive tax structure, these encouraging proposals will wind up covered by a cloud of fiscal smoke.

Take Consumer Action to Demand Environmentally Safe Consumer Products. The WATCHDOG supports campaigns to demand that certain corporations phase out toxic consumer products and develop safe substitutes on firm timelines. We want to change the terms of the debate from individually purchasing environmentally safe products to collectively demanding a ban on those products that harm the environment.

Some of the most dangerous products, e.g. indoor pesticides, aerosols, hair sprays, paints, are purchased in bulk by institutional consumers. The WATCHDOG is looking for new members who are rooted in unions, workplaces, churches, synagogues, community organizations, high schools, and universities, members who will participate in institutional consumer campaigns. For example, if the WATCHDOG is able to target a series of destructive consumer products manufactured by the petrochemical industry, we can ask individuals to organize their employers, schools, churches, unions, and community groups to stop purchasing those products. Similarly, because government itself is a large purchaser of products, we will be able to combine campaigns to get our own institutions to stop purchasing products with demands that city councils, state governments and other government agencies join our boycott and purchase non-polluting alternatives.

These programmatic ideas are' steps toward addressing the health impacts of air pollution and the overall environmental deterioration of our society. As with all experienced activists, the specific issues we select will depend upon our organizational capability, the advice of our other allies in the city, and historical events that sometimes create new organizing challenges and opportunities outside our carefully laid plans.



MARY ANN STUEHRMANN

UAW and WATCHDOG member Richard Potter at AQMD rally.

Your Membership in the WATCHDOG Can Make A Difference

The main obstacle to resolving the environmental crisis is more political than chemical. There have been a few brief moments in U.S. history when progressive activists have had the power to shape the terms of the political debate and have successfully built a national grassroots movement to improve the conditions of peoples' lives.

During the 1930s, it was not Franklin D. Roosevelt as much as union organizers from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), along with other progressive and left activists, who provided leadership and organization to the unemployed, to dispossessed farmers, to southern black and white sharecroppers, and to World War I veterans who had been denied their benefits. This broad social movement from the bottom-up was the driving force behind what later came to be called the New Deal.

During the 1960s, three separate movements — the civil rights movements of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans; the Vietnam anti-war movement; and the women's movement — were able to convey a sense of a common agenda. For more than a decade, millions of people in the United States felt part of "the movement" and believed that through popular education, organizing, and confrontation they could transform the institutions of our society.

The vision of those social movements — rights for workers, people of color, and women, and non-intervention in the internal affairs of Third World countries — has been under systematic attack

for almost two decades. A rightwing counteroffensive has rolled back many of the hard-fought gains of what is often called "the sixties," and has left many gifted progressive organizers temporarily disunited, dispirited, and disorganized.

The Labor/Community WATCHDOG is part of the Labor/ Community Strategy Center, an effort to revitalize the progressive movement in Los Angeles, integrating issues of the environment, racial equality, union organizing, women's rights, community empowerment, world peace, and international solidarity into an overall movement for economic and political democracy. Toward this goal, we study the history of social movements and draw on their lessons in an effort to creatively apply them to our own work.

We no longer have the luxury of defining ourselves in isolation — as "labor," "community," "civil rights," "women's," and "environmental" movements. We have a symbiotic relationship. We will either learn to work together to change this society or we will die apart.

Our organizing work is driven by a vision of direct democracy. We are attempting to build a powerful and democratic organization, beginning with dozens and growing to hundreds and thousands, with the explicit goal of challenging the domination of our lives by the DuPonts, Dows, Chevrons, Unocals, and General Motors of this world.

In today's society, large corporations are operating with willful

disregard for our health, our safety, and even our opinions. Thus, the movement for "clean air" in Los Angeles is really a fight over whether the majority of the people can take control of economic decisions that are presently made by a tiny minority. It will involve new laws, new organizations, new concepts of worker and community rights, and a new social movement demanding a radical redefinition of how this country is owned and operated. That is the challenge, and the fight for clean air is just one critical point of entry.

We have no illusions about the difficulty of social change, especially in this period in world history in which the ideologues and practitioners of "free market" politics certainly hold the upper hand. The corporate polluters are organized, and they exert enormous power over our day-to-day lives. If you want to create a counterforce to their power, you need to join an organization, give of your time, and invest your creative efforts to transform our society. Given the documented public-health threat of air pollution in Los Angeles and the mandate to act that it requires, we hope you will decide to join the Labor/Community WATCHDOG and become involved in the Campaign for Clean Air in LA.

YES! I want to join the Labor/Community WATCHDOG and be a part of the Campaign for Clean Air in Los Angeles.

Active Member

Annual Active Membership: \$50 to \$10 based on ability to pay

• I can commit at least one evening/afternoon a month to the work of the WATCHDOG. In addition, I pledge to take the work of the WATCHDOG back to my community and/or workplace.

Sustainer

Annual Donation of \$100 to \$1000

- I live in Los Angeles and cannot commit as much time as an Active Member, but want to support the work of the WATCHDOG.
 Keep me informed.
- I don't live in Los Angeles but I want to support the efforts of the WATCHDOG.

Contributor

• I want to make an additional tax-deductible contribution of \$1000, \$500, \$100, \$50 or \$35 to advance the work of the WATCHDOG.

All WATCHDOG members and contributors will receive regular updates on the Campaign for Clean Air in Los Angeles. Members and contributors of \$50 or more will receive a complimentary copy of *L.A.'s Lethal Air*.

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Books, Films, and Articles from the Labor/Community Strategy Center

L.A.'s Lethal Air \$15

Additional copies of L.A.'s Lethal Air are available for individual purchase, as well as group sales to environmental and community organizations, unions, churches, and synagogues.

El Aire Mortal de Los Angeles

\$15

(90 pages, published by the Labor/Community Strategy Center)

In response to the marked success of L.A.'s Lethal Air as public health, worker and community organizing book on urban environmental strategies, this Spanish translation was published in October, 1993.

Reconstructing Los Angeles from the Bottom Up

\$10

(60 pages, published by the Labor/Community Strategy Center)

Written as a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of the L.A. Rebellion of '92, this report has generated one of the most intense and long overdue debates about urban policy and reconstructed social movements among activists in Los Angeles.

Taking On General Motors by Eric Mann

\$20

(408 pages, published by the UCLA Institute for Industrial Relations)

This book details the innovative campaign by autoworkers and their community allies to stop GM from closing the last auto plant in Southern California. A detailed analysis of one of the few successful labor struggles of the 1980's, it is also a strategic manual for organizers.

"If you are an environmental or peace activist, a labor community organizer, a high school teacher or a member of the Rainbow Coalition, I strongly urge you to read Taking On General Motors."

Reverend Jesse Jackson

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76 ENDNOTES

NOTES

- 1. Russell P. Sherwin M.D., "Findings," International Specialty Conference on Tropospheric Ozone and the Environment, Los Angeles, California, 21 March 1990. The study by Sherwin, professor of pathology at U.S.C. School of Medicine, was summarized in a four page release, "Air Pollution Study Shows Lung Damage in Los Angeles Youth," USC News and Features, 21 March 1990.
- 2. Shari Roan, "Air Sickness: Evidence Mounts of Dramatic, Permanent Damage to Lungs of Children," Los Angeles Times, 4 March 1990: Section E, p. 1.
- 3. Throughout L.A.'s Lethal Air we will cite many of these sources, both popular summaries in magazines and newspapers, as well as scholarly and scientific studies. Several of note are: Michael Kleinman, Steven D. Colome, and Donna E. Foliart, Effects on Human Health of Pollutants in the South Coast Air Basin, Final Report to South Coast Air Quality Management District (June 1989); James D. Sun, James A. Bond, and Alan R. Dahl, "Biological Disposition of Vehicular Airborne Emissions: Particle-Associated Organic Constituents," Air Pollution, the Automobile and Public Health (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1988): pp. 299-315; Sharon Begley, "Is Breathing Hazardous to Your Health?" Newsweek, 3 April 1989: p. 25; American Lung Association, "Air Pollution and Your Health" (1988); California Air Resources Board, How Air Pollution Damages Health (1983); and an excellent 8 part series by Sam Atwood, "Smog: The Silent Killer," San Bernadino Sun, 26 November 1989 - 3 December 1989.
- 4. The 125 million pounds per year of air toxins is an estimate of air emissions from all sources of ten toxic chemicals released into the air in the greater Los Angeles area as defined by the jurisdiction of the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). Information on each chemical was derived from the most recently available estimate from either the SCAQMD or the California Air Resources Board. Since many more than ten toxic chemicals are routinely released into the air, the emissions estimate is on the low side. See for example, California Air Resources Board, "Information on Substances for Review as Toxic Air Contaminants," ARB/SSD/89-01 (February 1989).
- 5. California Public Interest Research Group, ''Toxic Hazards in L.A. County'' (April 1989), as quoted in Michael Picker, ''Chemistry for a Worse World,' LA Weekly, 1 December 1989: p. 12.
- 6. These ideas are expressed throughout Barry Commoner's writings, most clearly in his seminal article, "The Environment," New Yorker, 15 June 1987, and in Making Peace with the Planet (New York: Pantheon, 1990): p. 29.
- 7. Bernice Eastman Johnson, "People of the Chaparral," in Los Angeles: Biography of a City, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): pp. 5-8. This article validates the fact that the first Native Americans in the Los Angeles basin

were the Shoshone Indians, called the "Gabrielinos" by their Spanish conquerors.

- 8. For a popular discussion of the geography of smog, see Raymond Buck, *Let's Clean Up Smog Alley* (Hemet, CA: Valley Books, 1989).
 - 9. Dr. Rick Baumgartner, as quoted in Atwood: p. 4.
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- 19. Dr. Russell Sherwin and John O'Neil, chief of the EPA's clinical research branch at Research Triangle Park North Carolina, as quoted in Linda Roach Monroe: p. 1.
- 20. Marlene Cimons, "Scientists Voice Concern About Pollution's Effects: Health Risk Data Prompts Action," Los Angeles Times, 13 June 1989: part I, p. 1.
- 21. Arnis Richters, Ph.D. "Common Air Pollutants and the Spread of Cancer," American Cancer Society News Service Report, 27 March 1990: p. 1., based on Arnis Richters Ph.D. and Valda Richters, Ph.D., "Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) Inhalation, Formation of Microthrombi in Lungs and Cancer Metastasis," University of Southern California, School of Medicine.
- 22. ''Among the four major classes of organic compounds found in automotive exhausts, the ones that have been studied most are the nitro PAHs, such as nitropyrene (NP) and dinitropyrene, and the unsubstituted PAH's such as BaP. These compounds and others of these classes command attention because so many of them are known to be mutagens and/or carcinogens. But organic compounds carried on inhaled particles can produce other toxic effects that can also be as important as cancer.'' Sun, et al., ''Biological Disposition.''
- 23. American Lung Association, "Air Pollution and Your Health," p. 5.

Books, Films, and Articles from the Labor/Community Strategy Center

Occupied America: A History of Chicanos by Rodolfo Acuña

\$20

(475 pages, published by Harper and Row)

This book, by noted Chicano Studies professor and Strategy Center member Rudy Acuña, is the acknowledged bible of insurgent Chicano politics.

Tiger By The Tail \$200

Directed by Michael Goldman, Narrated by Edward Asner (Video, 40 minutes, color, VHS)

This uplifting film documents the first five years of the GM Van Nuys Campaign. Voted Best Labor Film at the American Film Festival and Festival Selection at the Global Village Film Festival. One of the few contemporary films about a multiracial workforce; *Tiger* is an excellent companion to *Taking On General Motors* for classroom, union, or community education.

"Tiger By The Tail gives us first-hand news of what it means to be a worker in America. By the end of the film, it does not seem impossible that 5,000 workers just might stand up to GM and make a difference."

Ginger Varney, L.A. Weekly

Workers, Communities, and Toxics

\$50

(Video, 20 minutes, color, VHS)

This "two day conversation" of 55 key activists in L.A.'s environmental labor, peace, Latino, African American, and social justice movements, is a hard-hitting look at the obstacles to, and potential for, a powerful environmental justice movement. Particularly effective for organizer education and training.

Apartheid In An American City: The Case of Black Community in Los Angeles

\$3

by Cynthia Hamilton

This case study offers a window onto the cruelties of the redevelopment process in every major city in our nation. Hamilton's searing critique of corporate developers' destruction of the economic viability of L.A.'s Black community, and her demands for new concepts of community-based democracy makes this article essential for scholars and activists.

A Call to Reject the Federal Weed and Seed Program in Los Angeles

\$3

(16 pages, published by the Labor/Community Strategy Center)

This policy paper analyzes the Weed and Seed Program and argues that it criminalizes and militarizes communities of color and takes funds from existing social service agencies. The report was of critical importance in helping mobilize a coalition of community organizations that convinced the Los Angeles City Council to withdraw its application to the program and has been ordered by activists in other cities.

Environmentalism in the Corporate Climate/L.A.'s Smogbusters by Eric Mann

\$2

These articles, reprinted from Tikkun magazine and the Nation magazine respectively, critique corporate efforts to dominate the environmental discourse and offer an introduction to the work of the WATCHDOG.

- 24. Monroe, "Smog Chokes,": p. 3.
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Organizing Committee Members and Staff of the Labor/Community WATCHDOG

1993-1994

Charlotte Bullock, Tom Camarella, Robin Cannon, Lisa Durán, Cynthia Hamilton, Ted Hays, Martín Hernández, Kate Kinkade, Eric Mann, Gloria Mao, Chris Mathis, Laura Pulido, Kikanza Ramsey, Patrick Ramsey, Geoff Ray, Gary Scott, and Dean Toji.



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