

## **DUMP SITE IS TOXIC TO DEMOCRACY**

The Industrial Excess Landfill (IEL) in Uniontown, Ohio is a human, environmental and democratic tragedy. For 30 years, citizens around a community dump in a small town between Akron and Canton have attempted to expose the presence of radiation at this EPA-designated Superfund landfill.

Never debated during the past three decades was that the four main Akron-based rubber-producing corporations, Goodyear, Firestone (now Bridgestone-Firestone), BF Goodrich, and General (now GenCorp) dumped at least 780 thousand tons of toxic chemicals (30 times the volume of what was dumped at Love Canal) over the 30 acre landfill located just south of the center of town. Hotly debated over this time, however, was whether radiation was also dumped there. Eyewitness accounts of residents, access to private documents seen by technical experts, testimonials of EPA insiders, and acquisition of federal documents through the Freedom of Information Act all point to radiation being dumped at IEL by the US government (Army and possibly Department of Energy), several Akron-based aerospace corporations connected to the rubber corporations, and Westinghouse corporation.

The health effects of IEL's toxics and radiation is, of course, impossible to definitively prove. There have been, however, "coincidentally" large numbers of cancers, birth defects, unusual ailments, even deaths, to people within several miles and downgradient from the landfill. If radiation is present, the cost to clean up the site, settle lawsuits, and other expenses cost easily top \$1 billion.

As tragic and troubling as the environmental and health effects of the IEL has been, equally disturbing has been the toxic impact of IEL on democracy.

EPA has permitted the polluting corporations to "take the lead" in testing, analysis and implementation of cleanup at IEL for years. "Common practice",

EPA leadership calls it -- although it defies common sense given the blatant conflict of interest. The "fox guarding the henhouse" better describes it.

When EPA allowed the polluting corporations several years ago to go onsite to draw water samples and send to the corporations' own contracted labs, representatives of the Concerned Citizens of Lake Township (CCLT) demanded to have the same "rights" as the corporations to draw samples and send them to their own labs. They were denied. Elected officials, be they Democrats or Republicans, have been luke-warm at best and chilling at worst to the requests and demands of CCLT to literally and figuratively get to the bottom of what is in the IEL, force those responsible to pay the price, and protect the health and safety of citizens and the community. One wonders what role political campaign contributions and lobbying by the polluting corporations and local developers (not to mention pressure from the US military) has had on those whose job is to "represent" the citizens.

Despite the collective political, economic and media-access power of the politicians, corporations, highjacked regulatory agency (EPA), the local township, local developers, and US military, this issue has stayed alive thanks to the incredibly inspiring efforts of CCLT. With almost no help from anyone outside themselves, their simple truth-telling, assertiveness, persistence, power analysis of forces against them, and belief that good will eventually prevail has stymied the power elite.

While inspiring, there are simply not enough CCLTs, nor enough time to turn our country around.

Ultimately, educational and organizing energies must be directed to fundamentally reshaping the defining rules, laws and constitutions which protect corporations and their agents behind the shield of “personhood”, “free speech”, “due process”, “unreasonable search and seizure” and even “private property”. Corporate decisions should be public and subordinate to we the people for the word “democracy” to have any authentic meaning.

For more information about the IEL, visit [www.AFSC.net](http://www.AFSC.net)

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