2015 Annual Report

Organizing with Residents to Clean Up and Prevent Pollution in New England Since 1987
Dear Friends,

Twenty-nine years ago, Toxics Action Center was created to provide assistance, support and guidance to residents struggling to protect their homes and families from pollution. The high-profile tragedy in Woburn, Mass., made famous by the book and movie “A Civil Action,” led environmentalists to realize that to prevent environmental threats we need knowledge and experts, but mostly we need political power.

Today, our work to clean up legacy pollution from New England’s industrial past continues, yet we’re also spending more time working to help communities join together for positive and proactive change. When cities and towns across our region face similar problems, we help them raise their voices together to call for solutions. With our support, frontline leaders are increasingly going beyond the back yard issue that helped spark their activism to take on new campaigns and leadership roles, and connect with the broader environmental and social change movements.

In this annual report, you’ll read about a network of activists in Massachusetts who are fighting dirty energy and joining together to call for more solar and wind. You’ll get an update on leaders in South Portland, Maine, who defeated ExxonMobil and are now working to curb another threat to their health and Casco Bay: toxic pesticides and harmful fertilizers. You’ll learn of efforts to push back against incinerators and landfills and demand more recycling and zero waste.

These brave community leaders know personally why making change is so critical and urgent, and their stories are powerful tools for organizing in their communities and beyond. Change can be slow, but together we’re making progress. Every day we’re moving closer to our vision of a healthier and more just world. I am so grateful for your support of our work!

Yours,

Sylvia Broude
Toxics Action Center Executive Director

“Three years ago, little did we know that our concerned group of farmers, carpenters, students and retirees would have helped to stop Vermont’s largest expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure in 50 years. Every step of the way, Toxics Action Center has been with us.”

-Jason Kaye
Just Power
Middlebury, VT
For many community groups fighting toxic pollution, a boost of scientific knowledge or legal know-how can be critical to winning over their neighbors and decision makers. Your support allows us to cultivate a network of trained experts that community groups can call on for assistance. These legal, technical and environmental health professionals provide their assistance pro bono or at reduced cost, yet provide an invaluable service that complements our community organizing trainings, strategic expertise and leadership development.

**Pushing for Safe Cleanup for a Superfund Community**

The 18,000-acre New Bedford Harbor Superfund site is one of the nation’s most contaminated sites, polluted with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and heavy metals. The local community group, Hands Across the River Coalition (HARC), was concerned about the exposure to PCBs during the cleanup plan, which involved dredging up contaminated sediment from the river and disposing of it in open pits in the lower harbor. This would be yet another serious health hazard thrown at the City of New Bedford, Mass., an environmental justice community that is home to more than two dozen toxic waste sites awaiting cleanup. Toxics Action Center helped connect Karen Vilandry and other leaders from HARC with the staff and students from the Boston University School of Public Health Superfund Research Program to conduct air monitoring during the cleanup process to make sure that the community is protected from PCBs.

**Clean Air Wins Out In Court**

Graniteville, Vt., residents, including Lori and Marc Bernier, have been valiantly fighting a permit decision to put an asphalt plant adjacent to a residential neighborhood. Located in close proximity to many homes, the plant is permitted to release more than 10 tons of pollution per year into the air, risking families’ health. The community group Neighbors for Healthy Communities connected with Vermont Law School’s Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic, where students did research and assisted in fighting the permit all the way to trial in the Vermont Environmental Court. The clinic is also representing the group in challenging the related rock-crushing operation that was sited near their homes. After nearly five years of dogged community organizing and pro bono legal representation, we celebrated a win in the Vermont Supreme Court. This year, with your support, the group will continue to fight an appeal.

“We know our group would not have been as successful in our efforts without Toxics Action Center. I would highly recommend any group of residents coming up against an area of concern in their community to get them on board from square one.”

—Lori Bernier
Neighbors for Healthy Communities

New Bedford residents are monitoring the cleanup of one of the nation’s most PCB-contaminated sites.
Think Globally, Act Locally

From coal to fracked gas to nuclear power, our region has its share of polluting energy facilities. Bearing the brunt of the risk from these facilities, nearby communities become experts at fighting dirty energy, and these same frontline activists are also some of the most effective voices for addressing the threat of climate change. We know that it is not only possible, but also imperative that we make the shift to clean, local and healthy energy.

Closer to a Coal-Free New England
This year, the owners of a power plant in Bridgeport, Conn., proposed a new gas power plant next to their old, polluting coal plant—right in the middle of an environmental justice community. Toxics Action Center Organizer Sarah Lewis helped residents in the Healthy CT Alliance, including Jorge Cruz, watchdog the creation of a community benefits agreement that ultimately secured a closure date for the old coal plant.

Fighting New Fossil Fuel Infrastructure
As coal plants retire, fracking companies are trying to fill the void with even more fossil fuel infrastructure. One proposal, from the energy giant Spectra, includes a scheme to have ratepayers subsidize their pipeline’s expansion, and places giant storage tanks of explosive gas in the middle of a residential neighborhood in Acushnet, Mass. Community Organizer Claire Miller is working with Dana Sargent and other leaders from the newly formed South Coast Neighbors United to protect their community.

Residents in New Hampshire have also banded together with leaders in Massachusetts to stop new fossil fuel pipelines. This year, community leaders in New Hampshire collected more than 10,000 signatures urging Gov. Maggie Hassan to do everything in her power to stop the proposed Kinder Morgan pipeline along the state’s southern border. Pelham Pipeline Awareness’ Kaela Law and many others delivered the stack of petitions that helped push the governor to call for greater scrutiny of the pipeline.

Together, We’re Moving Forward
This year, in reaction to the groundswell of activism in Massachusetts against dirty energy, Toxics Action Center launched Mass Power Forward, a coalition that brings our powerful network of community groups together to ensure that the Commonwealth continues to lead the way on clean energy. Last fall, we launched the coalition with six simultaneous press conferences, and today it includes more than 150 supporting organizations.

“As a grassroots, all-volunteer organization made up of neighbors, we had no idea where to start. Toxics Action Center helped us find out who has the power and how to get things done. The help we received from them on organizing and keeping our group together and focused was immeasurable.”

–Pauline Rodrigues
Coalition for Clean Air South Coast
Moving Beyond The Backyard: Leadership

Bobbie Carnwath, People For Less Pollution and Just Power
Bobbie had not been an activist since 2005, when her group, People for Less Pollution, worked with Toxics Action Center to stop International Paper from burning tires for fuel upwind of her town. Almost a decade later, this community watchdog sprang into action again when a fracked gas pipeline was proposed for her town. With our help, she mobilized a group of concerned residents that sparked local organizing against the pipeline.

Rachel Burger, Protect South Portland and Bees, Bays And Backyards
Rachel Burger founded Protect South Portland in 2013 to stop ExxonMobil’s plans to transport tar sands through her community. After Protect South Portland’s historic victory, she decided to tackle pesticides. As a grandmother and gardener, she’s concerned about the impacts of pesticides on kids and bees. The South Portland City Council has responded to Rachel’s call for change, and is moving forward with an ordinance to restrict lawn chemicals.

Mary Lampert, Pilgrim Watch
When Mary Lampert moved to Duxbury, Mass., with her family, she didn’t realize she would be able to see the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Plant from her home office window. Mary founded Pilgrim Watch and became a nationally-recognized expert on nuclear safety. In 1996, she played an integral part in preventing a radioactive waste dump in Massachusetts. Her commitment played a major role in urging Pilgrim to announce retirement earlier this year.

Cathy Kristofferson, StopNED
Cathy is a queer-rights activist turned climate-chaos fighter. As the Conservation Commissioner for the town of Ashby, Mass., she became aware of Kinder Morgan’s proposed gas pipeline early on, and was a founding member of StopNED. Two years later, Cathy has become a regional leader and resource for the movement to stop fossil fuel infrastructure. This fall, she worked with our staff to help found Mass Power Forward, a coalition focused on expanding clean energy.
2015 Campaigns: Cleaning Up and Preventing

66 Marlborough, Mass.—Neighbors Fight for Funds for a Toxic Cleanup
Homeowners near a Citgo gas station were shocked to find that the station spilled 2,000 gallons of gasoline underground. Breathing in gasoline evaporating from soil can lead to serious health problems, and families were forced to tear up their yards. Toxics Action Center Campaigns staff helped residents engage in a budget process to raise the cleanup cap from $1.8 million to $2.8 million, reserving extra funds to help homeowners secure a full cleanup.

68 Medway, Mass.—Halting a New Fossil Fuel Power Plant
Burning fossil fuels not only contributes to global warming, but burdens nearby communities with air pollution. That’s why residents in Medway are standing up to Exelon’s plans for an oil- and gas-fired power plant in their community. New smokestacks, taller than the Statue of Liberty, would tower over town, releasing tons of toxic chemicals such as sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide. We will continue to work with Stop the Medway Power Plant to prevent this unnecessary and dangerous facility.

63 Holyoke, Mass.—Retiring and Redeveloping Coal
In 2014, Holyoke residents were able to breathe easier when the habitually-polluting, coal-fired power plant Mt. Tom Station was shut down. This year, we worked with residents to secure funding for a planner to investigate how the brownfield could be redeveloped, with an eye to bringing more jobs and clean business to the city—and making sure that the surrounding community had input on what came next. Activists from Action for a Healthy Holyoke and the site owners are rallying together around this vision for a healthier Holyoke, including a plan to transform the site into a solar farm.

89 Middletown, Conn.—Victory: Stopping Artificial Turf Fields
Rebecca MacLachlan cut her teeth on organizing for public health in the 2000s, working with Toxics Action Center on the Sooty Six campaign. Her work resulted in Connecticut’s six oldest and dirtiest power plants installing new technology that drastically reduced their pollution. This year, she used those same skills organizing alongside other concerned neighbors to convince the City of Middletown to reject artificial turf playing fields after showing the turf’s possible links to cancer and other health and safety issues. They are now strongly encouraging the city to further protect our children and the environment by building and maintaining our sports fields without the use of hazardous chemicals or pesticides.

93 Connecticut—Zero Waste Moves Forward
This year, Connecticut finally took steps to move away from burning trash. With the support of Toxics Action Center members, the governor’s recycling law went into effect, setting ambitious goals to increase recycling and a retirement date for the state’s largest trash-burner, the Hartford incinerator.

84 Burrillville, R.I.—Promoting Clean Air
In Burrillville, Kathy Martley and other members of Burrillville Against Spectra Expansion (BASE) are fighting the expansion of an existing compressor station near homes. The station spews toxic pollutants into the air and water and generates excessive noise. Even worse, the governor recently announced a new fossil fuel power plant on the same site. We continue to support the efforts of BASE to organize a winning campaign and guarantee the safety of local residents.

25 Bow and Portsmouth, N.H.—Retiring Dirty Coal Power Plants
Burning coal is one of the dirtiest ways to make electricity. In fact, the two coal-fired power plants in New Hampshire represented nearly 80 percent of air emissions for the entire state in recent years. Last year, we continued our work with members of Citizens for Clean and Fair Power to make the call for a coal-free New Hampshire and pressure state leaders to require the state utility to divest from coal.

44 Newbury, Vt.—Protecting Neighbors’ Health
In Newbury, neighbors noticed their tomatoes and tree leaves were bleached white, and some residents experienced unexplained and severe allergic reactions. Evidence pointed to a nearby farm that was spraying toxic pesticides. With your support, we helped neighbors organize to come up with a plan to reduce drift and protect public health.
Burlington, Vt.—Cleaning Up Lake Champlain

Last summer saw record beach closings on Lake Champlain as run-off fueled massive toxic algae blooms. Our members joined local community groups, farmers, businesses and environmental advocates to make the call for change. Together we’re working to make sure that we all do our part to reduce run-off and finally clean up the lake.

Portland, Maine—Protecting Residents and Casco Bay from Pesticides

The Portland Protectors are on the forefront of protecting public health, as well as bees, from toxic pesticides. And it’s a good thing too: Casco Bay suffers from lawn chemical run-off that threatens lobsters and causes algae blooms. The group is working with Toxics Action Center Campaigns to convince city officials to restrict the use of harmful lawn chemicals.

Rockland, Maine—Neighbors Say “No” to Fossil Fuels

New England should invest in clean, renewable energy, not more polluting fossil fuels. That’s why Toxics Action Center has been holding the line on new fossil fuel infrastructure across the region. Last year we worked with Renew Rockland to stand up to a new gas-burning power plant proposal in Maine that would pollute the air and contribute to climate change.
More Recycling, Less Waste

For years, Toxics Action Center has assisted communities standing up to leaking landfills and polluting incinerators. Now, we are linking these activists with waste experts and thousands of our members to make the call for Zero Waste. Cities and towns around the world are proving that it is possible to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost and shift away from burning and burying trash.

**Vermont Community Retires a Landfill and Shifts to Zero Waste**

Toxics Action Center members in Vermont are leading the way for New England and the rest of the country in reimagining waste as something valuable. Recently, Sally Burrell and other local leaders in Bristol, Vt., reminded us that with a little help and a lot of gumption, communities can end irresponsible landfilling practices and implement Zero Waste solutions. Toxics Action Center worked with Bristol residents to stop the massive expansion of a dangerous, unlined landfill. Now, Bristol is helping watchdog implementation of the state’s Universal Recycling Law to put their town on the path toward Zero Waste.

“**When voting day arrived, we had a record turnout and an overwhelming victory. Approximately 90 percent of the voters voted against the landfill. The company decided to move on, and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Toxics Action Center.”**

—Eric Knapp, Milton, N.H.

**Boston Gears Up for Zero Waste**

The majority of Boston’s trash gets sent to incinerators, polluting the air and wasting resources. With backing from our members, Toxics Action Center and the Boston Recycling Coalition successfully campaigned for Mayor Marty Walsh to commit to making a Zero Waste plan, then worked with allies on the City Council to win unanimous Council support for taking the first steps toward that plan. We’re now working with the City of Boston and community members to make sure that all Boston neighborhoods have the resources and incentives they need to increase recycling rates and that we create good local Zero Waste jobs that protect workers and the health of our communities.

**Local Leader Spotlight: Eric Knapp Halts a Landfill**

Last year, a resident of Milton, N.H., named Eric Knapp discovered that a multi-billion-dollar trash company wanted to build a new landfill beside his farm and on top of the Milton Three Ponds watershed.

A friend referred Eric to Toxics Action Center Campaigns, and together we made a plan to educate residents and prevent a zoning change that would have allowed the landfill to move forward. For several months, the trash company spent big money on paid mailers and full-page ads in the local paper, and Eric lost sleep worrying about losing the farm. But he never stopped working to rally Milton residents against the landfill. In the end, the community group’s hard work paid off and residents voted down the landfill proposal.
Reducing Toxic Pesticide Use

The modern pesticide industry began after World War II, when chemical companies that produced chemical and biological weapons for the military needed a new market for their products. Now, countless studies link pesticide exposure to a host of health problems, from cancer to ADHD. And humans aren’t the only ones harmed by pesticides. Scientists are increasingly raising alarms about the effects of toxic chemicals on bees and other pollinators, and on aquatic animals.

Movement Grows In Maine
Communities in Maine have led the way in moving away from toxic pesticides and toward natural lawn care approaches. Your support has allowed Toxics Action Center to bolster the efforts of community groups around the state to reduce the use of toxic pesticides. Scarborough, Ogunquit, Camden and many other communities have taken action to curb pesticides.

With communities up and down the coast working to restrict toxic lawn chemicals, there is a huge potential to reduce chemicals that run off into Casco Bay and harm sea animals like lobster. The same committed group of local activists that stood up to ExxonMobil’s plans to bring tar sands to Maine have continued their work to improve their town. Toxics Action Center Campaigns’ Andy Jones worked with Protect South Portland last year to launch Bees, Bays and Backyards, an effort to curb toxic pesticides. Last year, the South Portland City Council responded to concerns and is poised to pass a comprehensive ordinance.

Taking Action For Bees
Massachusetts and Vermont are also leading the way in reducing pesticide use. Toxics Action Center Campaigns is working in coalition with state beekeeper associations to restrict the use of pesticides linked to bee colony collapse. Bees help pollinate one in every three bites of food we eat, yet record bee die-offs are happening across the country.

In response, our members, beekeepers and a coalition of environmental groups helped introduce new bills in Massachusetts and Vermont this year that would restrict the use of bee-killing pesticides. In addition, successful campaigning nationwide by the coalition has resulted in stores like Lowe’s and Home Depot committing to label and phase out “bee-friendly” plants being treated with neonic pesticides.

“We are extremely grateful for Toxics Action Center’s ongoing support and direction in our efforts to stop this project as well as our shared efforts to move us all toward a clean, sustainable future!”

-Paula Terrasi and Cathy Kristofferson, StopNED Co-founders
Toxics Action Center
294 Washington St., Ste. 500
Boston, MA 02108

Address Service Requested

Our Offices

Eastern Massachusetts Office
294 Washington St., Ste. 500
Boston, MA 02108
Phone: (617) 292-4821

Western Massachusetts Office
150 Fearing St., #4A
Amherst, MA 01002
Phone: (413) 253-4458

Connecticut Office
2074 Park St., 210
Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: (860) 233-7623

Vermont Office
141 Main St., Ste. 6
Montpelier, VT 05602
Phone: (802) 223-4099

New Hampshire Office
30 S. Main St., Ste. 301B
Concord, NH 03301
Phone: (603) 229-1331

Rhode Island Office
9 S. Angell St., 2nd Fl.
Providence, RI 02906
Phone: (401) 421-0007

Maine Office
142 High St., Ste. 624
Portland, ME 04101
Phone: (207) 871-1810

All photos in this report are courtesy of Toxics Action Center.

Our Staff

Sylvia Broude
Executive Director

Megan Stokes
Development Director

Claire Miller
Lead Community Organizer

Katelyn Parady
Communications Director

Bess Beller-Levesque
Communications Coordinator

Jeff Butke
Community Organizer

Andy Jones
Community Organizer

Michelle Weiser
Community Organizer

Shaina Kasper
Community Organizer

Sarah Lewis
Community Organizer