2016 Annual Report
ORGANIZING WITH RESIDENTS TO CLEAN UP AND
PREVENT POLLUTION IN NEW ENGLAND SINCE 1987
To Our Members

Sylvia Broude
Executive Director

Dear friends,

It is hard to believe that 30 years have passed since Toxics Action Center first started organizing with communities to address local environmental threats. As we head into our fourth decade, the need for our work has never been stronger. Decades after water contamination led to a childhood cancer cluster in Woburn, Massachusetts, and more than 300 families were relocated from homes built on top of toxic waste in Love Canal, New York, we have made progress towards a healthier and more just world. Yet we still have so far to go, with powerful special interests, a Congress, and a President threatening to take us backwards. Whether it’s the poisoning of more than 6,000 children in Flint, Michigan, exposed to lead-contaminated water or the heroic standoff by the Standing Rock Sioux over the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota, 2016 proved that the stakes have never been higher across the country.

I find comfort in knowing that the grassroots environmental movement in New England is perhaps stronger than ever. Over the past year, we worked side by side with more than 100 communities across New England (and 2 in New York!) and won more than a dozen local victories. From transforming a major coal-fired power plant into a solar farm to winning clean drinking water for families experiencing a contamination crisis, this report shows what you made happen in 2016. This year, communities across our region joined together in a burgeoning movement for clean air and clean water, clean energy instead of more fossil fuels, fighting for the solutions we need and winning. Grassroots leaders stood up to big polluters, held government accountable, and strengthened the environmental movement. Together we will ensure that our New England states continue to push the envelope on what’s possible and lead the way for the rest of the country.

I couldn’t be more grateful for your support as we celebrate our 30th anniversary.

Thank you,

Sylvia Broude
Toxics Action Center Executive Director
Decades after contamination from a polluting facility in Woburn was linked to a childhood leukemia cluster, communities still face toxic threats. Your support allows our organizers to be on the ground in communities across New England, fighting for clean land and water.

PFOAs are a class of man-made chemicals, including Teflon, that have long gone unregulated, yet in recent years studies have linked PFOA exposure to cancer, thyroid disease and more. In North Bennington, Vt., Toxics Action Center was on the ground just hours after residents found out that their drinking water was polluted with these chemicals.

Thanks to your support, our Vermont State Director Shaina Kasper was able to help families navigate the logistics of life without safe tap water, win medical monitoring, and secure legal assistance. Since then, towns in N.H. and Mass. have learned that they face contamination from the same class of toxic chemicals. Your support allows us to continue helping contaminated communities advocate for their health, for clean drinking water, and access to the resources they need to build a path forward.

New Bedford, Mass. Harbor Superfund Cleanup
The 18,000-acre New Bedford Harbor is one of the nation’s most contaminated Superfund sites. Hands Across the River Coalition (HARC) was concerned about exposure to PCBs, a probable carcinogen, during the cleanup plan that involved dredging up contaminated sediment from the river and disposing it into open pits in the lower harbor. Toxics Action Center helped connect leaders from HARC, including Vice President Karen Vilandry, with the Boston University School of Public Health’s Superfund Research Program to conduct air monitoring during the cleanup process, and safeguard the community’s health.

A Long Deserved Cleanup for the Housatonic River in Mass. and Conn.
Communities along the Housatonic River are also dealing with toxic PCB contaminations. PCBs dumped by General Electric between the 1930s and 1970s continue to seep into the Housatonic River, flowing downstream through the Berkshires, Western Connecticut, and eventually discharging into Long Island Sound. Recently, Toxics Action Center joined the Housatonic River Citizens Coordinating Council, and is working with community leaders to call for a complete clean-up of the extensive pollution.

“My family and my community are not alone—too many towns are affected by these dangerous chemicals... That’s why I am involved in these efforts along with Toxics Action Center. I cannot sit back while these issues impact our beautiful state anymore!”

—Carol DiPirro
Merrimack Citizens for Clean Water

Carol Moore, whose family has been affected by PFOA contamination of their drinking water, explains how she remembers the black smoke belching from neighboring factories’ smokestacks.
A Better Energy Future

As our nation’s leadership continues to stymie efforts toward shifting our energy away from fossil fuels and toward clean, renewable sources, towns, cities and states in New England are leading the way. With your help, we’re working in communities affected by polluting power plants to envision healthier energy development, and to turn those visions into reality.

From Coal to Sol in Holyoke, Mass.
The Mount Tom coal-fired power plant in Western Massachusetts is one of the region’s most recent coal plants to retire, as a result of our efforts. For five years, we worked with the local group ¡Action for a Healthy Holyoke! to call for healthy redevelopment of the former coal plant site. This fall we celebrated with ¡Action for a Healthy Holyoke! members when the plant’s owners broke ground for a solar farm. As we transition away from dirty energy sources, it is vital that we also support efforts for healthier economic development and local, renewable energy.

Coal On It’s Way Out in N.H.
New England’s last two coal plants without a retirement date are in Portsmouth and Bow, N.H. These outdated plants emit more than half of all air pollution in the state. Keeping up with air pollution regulations has made staying profitable hard for the two plants, and this year the state legislature announced it would put the publicly owned plants up for auction. We helped amplify the voice of hundreds of activists and business owners in Portsmouth and Bow to weigh in: These communities want cleaner, healthier development to replace the coal plants. In 2017, we’ll work to make sure that happens.

Organizing for a Stronger, More Just Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative
All six New England states are currently participating in a review of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), the carbon cap-and-trade system used to curb global warming pollution from power plants in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. In the past, states have made decisions about RGGI without getting input from marginalized communities or communities living with coal and other fossil fuel plants, even though pollution trading often raises environmental justice concerns. Working with partner organizations, Toxics Action Center helped community leaders call on their states to host public meetings about RGGI. The point of these meetings was to ensure that low-income communities and communities of color experience less pollution and benefit from the money RGGI generates, and to tighten the cap RGGI sets on power plant pollution.

Report Highlight
Communities on the frontlines of gas infrastructure have been told that it is a low-carbon bridge to a clean energy future. In July, we released a report showing that this is clearly not the case. Our report emphasizes that methane is a very powerful greenhouse gas, and lays out evidence of methane leaks from gas infrastructure. This research provides a much needed boost to residents standing up to dirty energy projects in their towns.
Clean, Local, Renewable

Over 100 Towns Across New England Unite to Fight Pipelines
The largest of the gas pipeline expansions in New England, Kinder Morgan’s Northeast Energy Direct (NED) pipeline, would have stretched 175 miles through 57 towns in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. After massive turnout to public hearings, thousands of petitions signed, and numerous small business owners speaking out, Kinder Morgan canceled the project last spring. Your support bolstered the grassroots organizing efforts for groups like StopNED, NH Pipeline Awareness Network, Climate Action Now of Western Mass., and many more local community groups. These community efforts also helped win another victory: unraveling a pact by New England Governors to subsidize private pipelines with a public ratepayer tariff.

Together, We’re Making the Call for Clean, Local Renewable Energy
At the national level, we’re facing unprecedented attacks on critical laws that protect our climate and environment, making leadership at the state and local level more vital than ever. Over the last year, we’ve seen that Massachusetts is ready to move away from fossil fuels and toward an economy powered by clean energy. Two years ago, we co-founded a new coalition, Mass Power Forward, to do just that. The coalition is made up of more than 200 frontline and fenceline community groups, faith groups, professional environmental advocacy organizations, businesses and more who are calling for bold and historic commitments to clean energy and to support communities in the transition from dirty energy and toward clean power.

Your support combined with the thousands involved in the Mass Power Forward coalition, and work by Toxics Action Center Campaigns, successfully passed an omnibus energy bill this year that will make Massachusetts the national leader in offshore wind power and halted a plan to subsidize new fossil fuel pipelines.

In Vermont, Toxics Action Center Campaigns worked with coalition partners to bring together more than 150 activists for a summit focused on pushing for better energy policy in the state, including putting a price on carbon. In 2017, New England needs to be bolder than ever on climate and energy policy. Your support will make sure that our team of community organizers will be able to train hundreds more first-time activists to be involved in the political process and move our region forward.

The weekend after the election, over 150 activists gathered in Burlington for the Vermont Climate Solutions Summit to gain the skills and the knowledge to work for positive action for the climate in their state.
2016 Campaigns: Cleaning Up and Preventing

**9 Protecting Public Water Supplies: Rumford, Maine**
Maine, like the rest of New England, suffered through a serious drought this past summer. While wells ran dry and farmers sold their livestock, Nestle extracted 800 million gallons of water from Maine’s aquifers to sell under their Poland Spring brand of bottled water. Now Nestle is looking to expand its operations in Rumford, Maine. Residents have come together as the Western Maine Water Alliance to protect their water with help from Toxics Action Center.

**10 City Council Rejects Propane: South Portland, ME**
South Portland has had more than its share of fossil fuel threats. In 2015, a company unveiled plans to build a huge propane terminal on the south end of town. Residents expressed local concerns about noise, pollution, and safety and global concerns about what fossil fuel extraction is doing to our climate. Last year, the City Council took a hard line on this proposed development and the company decided to look for a safer place.

**24 Testing for Pease Wins Water Filtration: Portsmouth, NH**
Testing for Pease began as a resource for people who work at or send their children to daycare at the former Pease Air Force Base, where the water was found to be heavily contaminated with dangerous fluorinated compounds, PFAS. Today the group has quickly become a leading voice in the national fight for clean drinking water for communities impacted by PFAS water contaminations at military sites. They have successfully advocated for the installation of a water filtration system and blood testing for their impacted community, and their efforts are ongoing as Testing for Pease continues to advocate for education and long-term health monitoring.

**44 Partnering with Vermont Law School: Royalton, VT**
For many groups facing environmental threats, a boost of legal know-how can be critical to protecting public health. This year we deepened our partnership with the Vermont Law School’s Environment and Natural Resources Law Clinic to provide expert pro-bono legal and community organizing assistance to community groups in need. We worked together on more than half a dozen cases throughout New England and have plans to continue to grow our partnership in the future.

**30 Vermont Climate Solutions Summit Gathers 150+ Leaders: Burlington, Vt.**
After the election, our Vermont State Director, Shaina Kasper, took a leading role in the Energy Independent Vermont coalition to bring together friends, supporters, activists, and allies from across the state for a day-long Climate Solutions Summit in Burlington. The event, held by Toxics Action Center Campaigns, kicked off the next major stage of a campaign to convince our newly elected leaders in the Vermont State House to move forward on the most effective policy tool we have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create a clean, sustainable, local economy: a price on carbon pollution.

**12 Defeating a Zombie Incinerator: Claremont, N.H.**
Almost a decade ago, Toxics Action Center organizers worked with the community group CLEAR, Citizens Leading for Environmental Action & Responsibility, to retire a polluting incinerator in Claremont. Last year, the property went up for auction, and a company planned to reopen the trash burner. CLEAR, armed with skills learned from Toxics Action Center and on-the-ground assistance from our community organizers, quickly sprung back into action to prevent that proposal.

**24 Transitioning Away from Coal: Portsmouth, N.H.**
For too long, residents of Portsmouth have lived in the shadow of Schiller Station coal plant. As the coal plant finally goes up for auction, we’re working with Clean Air New Hampshire leaders to reaffirm Portsmouth’s designation as an eco-community, signaling to potential buyers that whatever replaces the old polluter must be a healthy development.

**95 Habitually Polluting Asphalt Plant Relocated: Coventry, RI**
Coventry families have suffered from the fumes of two asphalt plants located within close proximity to homes and schools for years. Residents describe air pollution that kept them inside all summer long and a sticky tar residue covering the neighborhood. After years of organizing, community leaders can celebrate: The asphalt plant has dismantled and moved their entire operation 14 miles south to a new location far away from homes.

**94 Residents Come Together Against Dirty Energy: Burrillville, RI**
Burrillville residents were shocked to learn about a proposed new gas-fired power plant that would bring smog, more than 3.6 million tons of global warming pollution, and other harmful impacts to their town. So far, Burrillville Against Spectra Expansion (BASE) and Keep Rhode Island Beautiful have helped convince 32 of Rhode Island’s 39 cities and towns to pass resolutions against this air-polluting, climate change-fueling project as they pressure Governor Raimondo to withdraw her support.
Neighbors Prevent Expansion of Leaking Landfill: Charlton, Sturbridge and Southbridge, MA

We have a long history of helping communities with landfills operated by Casella Waste Systems. This year, Charlton and Sturbridge residents in neighborhoods abutting Casella’s landfill in Southbridge learned their drinking water wells are contaminated with toxic chemicals and probable carcinogens. The neighborhood has banded together to form the community group Clean Wells and is working to stop the landfill expansion and fight for clean drinking water with help from our board member and community leader, Kirstie Pecci.

Three Towns Join to Fight Polluting Incinerator: Saugus, Lynn and Revere, MA

Saugus and Revere residents have been long been concerned about heavy metals, dioxins, and other pollutants coming out of the Wheelabrator incinerator’s smokestacks and leaking from the adjacent unlined landfill located in wetlands. The landfill should have closed in 1996, but the state has kept granting it waivers to expand and continue operating. This year, Toxics Action Center Campaigns worked with the Alliance for Health and Environment to pass zoning articles that limit landfill height, give the local government more control and protect residents from toxic pollution.
Moving Beyond The Backyard: Leadership

Jaysa Mellers, Alliance for a Healthy Connecticut

Five years ago, Jaysa’s mom got involved in the campaign to retire the polluting coal plant in their community in Bridgeport. Her mom was motivated to act because of Jaysa’s asthma. Since then, Jaysa has grown into an activist herself, following in her mother’s footsteps. This year she gave a speech about her work to retire the coal-fired power plant and oppose a new smokestack in her community, firing up the crowd to take action. Today, she is an active member of the social justice and environmental movement in Connecticut.

Pictured: Jaysa Mellers (left) and Toxics Action Center alum Sarah Lewis

Sandy Sumner, North Bennington Neighbors

“But I’m not an activist!” was Sandy’s response after the first community meeting where the state of Vermont explained that his neighborhood’s drinking water was contaminated by the carcinogen PFOA. Since then he’s continued to say it over and over, like when he was photographed by the New York Times, and when he was so moved by Water Protectors in Standing Rock that he collected a truckload of donations from friends and neighbors to send to North Dakota. “I’m not an activist,” he keeps saying, “I just do what’s right.”

Alice Arena, Fore River Residents Against the Compressor Station (FRAACS)

Alice Arena is the leader of Fore River Residents Against the Compressor Station (FRRACS) in Weymouth, Mass. Her activism is inspired by her Air Force veteran father, “He would never back down on what’s right.” This strong sense of right and wrong doesn’t end at the Weymouth town line. Alice and FRRACS joined the state-wide movement to reject the pipeline tax, which prevented guaranteed profits for gas pipelines across New England, and show up for other groups fighting similar health and climate threats.

Kaela Law, Pelham Pipeline Awareness Network

Kaela is a young mom in Pelham, N.H., whose family moved to a now-wooded 1770s farm to be closer to her husband’s family. The farm features a historic house and a barn with beautiful stone walls that has been in the family for generations. Kaela was a first-time homeowner when she found out her home was along the proposed route for the Northeast Energy Direct pipeline. Although she never considered herself an environmentalist, she wanted her daughter to be able to play outside without the fear of a massive pipeline development in their front yard. Alongside her neighbors, Kaela formed a powerful group in town, the Pelham Pipeline Awareness Network.
We here at Toxics Action Center firmly believe that change comes from the bottom up. Our model of winning locally creates a ripple effect that builds toward state and national change. Your support in 2016 allowed us to win big victories on the local level that have inspired others to take action.

**Maine Towns Tackle Pesticides**

Pesticides kill honeybees, pollute water, and threaten our health. Unfortunately, Maine has seen a seven-fold increase in toxic pesticide use over the past 20 years. To reverse that trend, Toxics Action Center has been working with community groups to transition away from toxic chemicals toward sustainable, organic land care practices.

In South Portland, Toxics Action Center Campaigns Community Organizer Andy Jones helped the very same activists who stood up to ExxonMobil’s tar sands pipeline launch a new project to protect water and human health from toxic exposures. The Bees, Bays, and Backyards campaign focused its efforts on curbing toxic pesticides in South Portland. The local activists faced stiff opposition from the lawn chemical industry who hired a lobbyist to spread misinformation at town council meetings. The industry even created a website for a fake citizen group called “Mainers for Greener Communities.” In the end, the local activists were victorious; South Portland passed a ground-breaking ordinance to restrict harmful pesticides on public and private lands, one of the first of its kind across the country. Bees, Bays, and Backyards is staying engaged to educate homeowners on the new ordinance and best practices for healthy lawn care.

Their successful campaign has inspired even more towns to take up the cause. Falmouth, Yarmouth and Portland have all launched their own campaigns to curb pesticides.

**Zero Waste Boston Wins Big**

Toxics Action Center and Zero Waste Boston, formerly the Boston Recycling Coalition, won commitment for a zero waste planning process earlier this year by Mayor Marty Walsh. Last spring, Toxics Action Center brought together city officials and businesses from over a dozen Boston-area cities to learn how to reduce waste at the Zero Waste Summit, featuring the nation’s top waste experts from Austin, Los Angeles, and Seattle.

Boston’s recycling rates have been stuck under 20 percent for years, but the zero waste vision holds enormous potential: ninety percent of Boston’s waste could be diverted from landfills and incinerators to small reuse and recycling businesses that provide healthy, quality jobs. As the zero waste planning process launches this year, we will keep pushing Boston to treasure its trash by turning it into goods and good jobs, and setting an example for other towns and cities across New England.

“I knew how important the bees were, we learned about that in kindergarten even. So imagine my surprise when I learned about the decline of bees. I knew something had to be done to help.”

-Zoe Hecht

12 year-old pesticide activist from Burlington, Vermont