Organizing with residents to clean up and prevent pollution since 1987.

At Toxics Action Center, we envision a world where everyone can breathe clean air, drink clean water, and live in healthy, sustainable communities. Since 1987, we have organized side-by-side with over 675 communities from across New England, helping them clean up and prevent toxic pollution in their neighborhoods. When dangerous industries are polluting our air and water, when toxic pesticides are threatening our children’s health, when unresponsive bureaucracies are slow to enforce our environmental laws, we are here to help citizens protect the health and safety of their communities.

Through our group consultations, conferences and events, expert referrals, networking opportunities, and information guides, Toxics Action Center will help you wage effective campaigns to protect the health and safety of your community.

Consultation sessions available for your group:

1. Campaign Planning
2. Group Building
3. Fundraising
4. Interpreting Test Results
5. Public Hearings
6. Message & Materials
7. Media Events
8. Community Votes
Media Events

Goal of Media Events Consultation: Plan a successful, newsworthy media event. Teach basic principles of using the media, and develop an effective message.

I. Principles of Media Events

II. Steps to Planning a Media Event
   1. Goals
   2. Media Hooks
   3. Audience
   4. Message
   5. Event Details
   6. Outlets
   7. Plan

III. Practice

IV. Evaluation

Addendum: Timeline & Samples
I. Principles Of Media Events

1. We Make the News
   Many people believe that journalists are constantly doing in-depth exposés and undercover stories based solely on their own sleuthing. In reality, most reporters simply cover the stories that come across their desk. They rely on news tips. If we create an event, plan well and make sure reporters know about it, we are likely to make the news.

2. Develop Relationships with Reporters
   It’s important to remember that reporters are people. Take the time to get to know them. It is also important that they trust you as a good source of information. Never lie or exaggerate. Appear more reasonable than your opponent, deliver what you promise, and call them back immediately. Be friendly yet persistent. Remember that they are very busy people.

3. Be Concise and Consistent: Keep it Simple and Repeat Your Basic Message
   Do not try to explain everything. Boil your issue into a sound bite. Repeat your message over and over again. Remember that everything you say to the press, no matter what the circumstances, is on the record. The simpler the message and the more times you repeat it, the more likely they will get it straight.

4. Control the Issue by Responding to Questions with Your Key Message
   No matter what question a reporter asks you, always respond by bringing it back to your key message. Do not simply answer the question. Always find a way to wrap the conversation or question back to your main point, and never say “no comment.” Use phrases like, “The real question is. . .”
5. Make it Newsworthy

Be deliberate about using hooks to make your event newsworthy. You need to figure out why a reporter would want to cover the story. Reporters typically cover stories with conflict, visuals, new information, unlikely allies coming together or a personal viewpoint to the story.

6. Go Beyond Your Event

To influence the decision-maker you often need to show that you can get sustained media attention, not just a blip on your event in the evening news. Continue to reach your audience and take advantage of press attention by holding an editorial meeting, printing letters to the editor, and building relationships with reporters long before and after your news event.
II. Steps to Planning a Media Event

Step 1: Goals

Campaign goals:

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Target decision-maker:

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Strategy:

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

News event goals:
1. What do you need to accomplish with your event to influence the decision-maker?

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

2. Are there other goals for your event such as educating the public or recruiting new members?

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
## Step 2: Newsworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of News Hooks</th>
<th>Specific Examples</th>
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| New Information         | • Formation of a new organization or launch of a new campaign  
                          | • Unprecedented, ground-breaking or first-ever announcement  
                          | • A fresh angle on an old story  
                          | • A report release or release of new test results  
                          | • An exclusive story  
                          | • A trend: three examples or more that suggest new opinions, emerging behavior patterns or attitudes |
| Local Angle             | • Special events like a rally or gathering  
                          | • A nationally breaking story with local impact or vice versa  
                          | • A VIP speaker weighing in on a local issue. |
| Timely                  | • An event coming up on the calendar  
                          | • Anniversaries, milestones, one year later, one decade later, etc.  
                          | • Response or reaction to news others have made |
| Conflict                | • Two opposing parties  
                          | • David vs. Goliath, neighbors taking on a big company  
                          | • Be careful about controversy: paint the issue as black and white, good vs. bad |
| Unlikely Allies         | • Where two parties that usually disagree find common ground  
                          | • Strange bedfellows |
| Human Interest          | • Ordinary people doing extraordinary things  
                          | • Stories of real people: their triumphs, tragedies, adventures, and anecdotes  
                          | • Profiles of community leaders or galvanizing spokespeople that are news in themselves |

### What Makes Our Event Newsworthy:

- [ ] __________________________________________________________________________________
- [ ] __________________________________________________________________________________
Step 3: Target Audience(s)

Step 4: Message

**Words That Help Your Cause**  **Words That Hurt Your Cause**

Effective messages tell a good story and motivate people to get involved. The key parts of any good campaign message are: Problem, Solution, and Action.

**Problem:**

**Solution:**

**Action:**
**Message**

Condense the problem, solution and action into a compelling and concise message that you can repeat to elected officials, townspeople and the media. Form potential headlines and choose the best one for your event.

**Messengers**

Who will be the speakers at your event? Brainstorm possible speakers and decide on your top choices.

**Headlines**

Draft potential headlines and choose the best one for your event.
Draft Your Soundbite or Quotable Quote:

Create a soundbite that you can use with your message to be sure that your audience remembers your story.

Examples of Memorable Soundbites:

“Restarting the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Plant is like giving the keys back to a drunk driver.”

“We were looking for a smoking gun, but we found a firing range of pollution.”

“This is just the tip of the toxic iceberg.”

“Polluters can drive a truck through this loophole.”

“Letting General Electric oversee the cleanup is like letting the fox guard the henhouse.”

Visually that Complement Your Message
Step 5: Event Details and Media Advisory

Headline:

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

What: What is your event?

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Person who will write news advisory/release: ______________________

Who: Who will be your speakers at the event?

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Person who will invite/confirm speakers:__________________________

Where: Where will your event take place?

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Person who will secure location: _________________________________

When: Date and time of your event?

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Person who will contact media: __________________________________
**Visuals:** What will create a compelling picture?

Person who will coordinate visuals: __________________________

**Step 6: Outlets**

Identify specific media outlets that reach your target audience.

**A. Daily Print (Reporter/Section)**

**B. Weekly Print (Reporter/Section)**

**C. Television (Reporter/Show)**
D. Radio (Reporter/Show)

E. Online News Source/Blog/Social Media (Contact)

F. Other
### Step 7: Plan and Timeline  
(See Best Timeline in Appendix)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Tactics</th>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Dates ➔</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
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<td>Visuals</td>
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<td>Core Group Meeting</td>
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Write your goals for each tactic you plan on using in the “goals” boxes and then work backward.

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<th>Goals</th>
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III. Practice

Sample reporter pitch:
Hi, my name is Sylvia Broude, and I’m calling with Toxics Action Center, the public health and environmental non-profit. How are you?

Do you have a moment or are you on deadline?

I saw the story you covered on… (develop relationship)

I wanted to let you know about our upcoming event… (describe event, why it is newsworthy, speakers, visuals…)

I thought you’d be interested because…

Does this sound like something you would be interested in covering?

Why don’t I send you the advisory. Can you give me your email?

Practice the following:

1. Call a reporter to ask him/her to cover our event.

2. Call an expert, a coalition partner, or a supportive elected official to ask if they will speak at the event.

3. After the formal comments at your news event, a reporter asks the following questions:

   “What are you most concerned about?”
   “What will this cost taxpayers?”
   “Why should people care about this issue?”
   “What can people do to get involved?”
   “Do you have anything else to add?”
IV. Evaluate

Take a few minutes to evaluate your news event plan.

☐ Is your event newsworthy?

☐ Is your message compelling, concise and consistent?

☐ Are you prepared to respond to the opposition’s message?

☐ Do you have the right messengers and do those messengers flow from your goal and strategy?

☐ Is your event consistent with the goals of your campaign?

☐ Does your plan have a clear timeline?

☐ Are you going beyond your event?

☐ Does your group need to do additional consultation sessions for planning your campaign, making a recruitment plan, fundraising, developing materials, winning a community vote, or planning for an upcoming hearing?
ADDENDUM

Media Event Planning Timeline

Two Weeks Ahead
- Decide if the event is newsworthy.
- Choose the message and plan the event details.
- Schedule editorial board meetings.

One Week Ahead
- Prepare visuals.
- Get quotes from speakers.
- Write the news advisory and the news release.

Four Days Ahead
- Email advisory. Send embargoed release to weekly papers if the event is after their deadline.

Three Days Ahead
- Go through the presentation with speakers.
- Role-play the event, including questions from reporters.

Two Days Ahead
- Call reporters to “pitch” the story. Re-send advisory if necessary.
- Write your radio feed—your sound bite recorded by radio stations over the phone, done in conjunction with sending them your release.

One Day Ahead
- Call reporters again. Re-send advisory if necessary.
- Reconfirm speakers.
- Make media packets (release, fact sheet, other important information).

Day Of Event
- Arrive 45 to 60 minutes before to set up.
- Have someone greet media with packets and a sign-in sheet.
- Hold a great media event!
- Email (or deliver) news release to reporters who did not attend.
- Call reporters who did not attend.
- Do radio feeds (call stations and have them record your “sound bite”).
- Debrief the event to evaluate how it went.

Day After Event
- Thank speakers.
- Clip articles from newspapers.
- Send or fax letters to the editor about your issue to newspapers.
A media advisory is essentially an invitation or notice of an upcoming event or story. It should contain only the essential information such as who, what, where, when, and why as well as contact information.

**Connecticut Coalition For Clean Air**

For Immediate Release  
March 22, 2002

Contact:  
Alyssa Schuren, Toxics Action Center  
(860) 233-7623

Media Advisory

Connecticut Coalition For Clean Air Hosts Power Party  
Rally Participants Want Governor To Clean Up Sooty Six

**WHAT:**  
The Connecticut Coalition for Clean Air and the Middlesex Clean Air Association will hold a “mock birthday party” to recognize 47 years of air pollution. The event will be held outside the NRG power plant and will urge Governor Rowland to clean up the state’s six oldest and dirtiest power plants.

**WHO:**  
Alyssa Schuren, Field Director, Toxics Action Center  
Rebecca MacLachlan, Middlesex Clean Air Association  
Dr. Joe Brown, pediatrician

**WHEN:**  
Tuesday, March 23, 2002, 11:00 AM

**WHERE:**  
261 Main St., Middlesex, CT, in front of NRG’s power plant. Directions: Rt. 44, turn left on Rt. 58. First left after hardware store onto Main St. Also find directions at www.maps.google.com.

**PHOTO OPPORTUNITY:**  
Dozens of local residents will present the power plant with a birthday cake to recognize 47 years of Sooty Six pollution.

#    #    #
Sample Media Release
A media release is the basic way of communicating your story to a reporter. It is written like a newspaper story and usually handed out at the event. It should have the most important information in the headline and the first paragraph and be factually accurate.

Connecticut Coalition For Clean Air

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March 23, 2002 Alyssa Schuren, Toxics Action Center
(860) 233-7623

Media Release
Connecticut Coalition For Clean Air Hosts Power Party
Rally Participants Want Governor To Clean Up Sooty Six

Middlesex—The Connecticut Clean Air Coalition held a “birthday party” outside the NRG power plant today to recognize 47 years of the Sooty Six power plants polluting the state’s air.

The “Sooty Six,” all owned by NRG, are the state’s oldest and dirtiest power plants and due to a loophole in the Clean Air Act, are not required to meet modern pollution standards.

“My hope is that Governor Rowland will do the right thing and require dirty old plants to meet the current emissions standards of the Clean Air Act so our children can breath clean air,” said Rebecca MacLachlan, a member of the Middlesex Clean Air Association.

The Connecticut Clean Air Coalition has vowed to make cleaning up the plants a major issue for the upcoming legislative session and is calling on Rowland to address the problem immediately.

“These dirty power plants are causing thousands of asthma attacks and deaths each year. Connecticut’s children deserve clean air,” said Alyssa Schuren, Clean Air Organizer with Toxics Action Center.

Asthma rates in Connecticut are on the rise and have been linked to pollution from the Sooty Six.

#    #    #
Sample Opinion-Editorial

Opinion-Editorials are “guest columns” written to express an opinion on a current event. The editor of the editorial page decides whether or not to print these—the piece has a better chance if it meets the paper's size requirements, is well written, if an expert is the author, and if there is a “local angle.”

Sooty Six Law: A Victory For The Little Guy

Thomas Jefferson warned that a working democracy requires an informed and involved populace. Fortunately, the passing of the Sooty Six cleanup law in May was not only good for public policy, it was, in Jeffersonian fashion, a victory for our democratic system.

Six years ago, when concerned residents, environmentalist and public health groups embarked on a campaign to address pollution from dirty power plants, few people knew or cared about the Sooty Six. Yet, when the Connecticut legislature passed and Gov. John G. Rowland signed the bill to clean up Connecticut’s most notorious air polluters, the public’s voice was finally heard in the long, echoing halls of the state Capitol — despite the powerful electric industry lobby.

As a result of this six-year effort, Connecticut will benefit not only from national precedent-setting policy that requires our dirtiest power plants to meet modern air pollution standards, but also from a new, more educated and active citizenry that will continue to work to make our state a better, safer place to live.

The story of the Sooty Six clean-air victory reads like the tale of David slaying the giant Goliath. In the true spirit and tradition of our great democracy, ordinary residents-turned-activists picked up simple tools at their disposal, paper and pen, to fight for the right to breathe clean air. In the true spirit and tradition of our great democracy, ordinary citizens are fighting to clean up their own power plants without using the controversial credit-trading system.

This significant public health victory could not have happened without the support of a handful of legislators within the state House of Representatives and Senate. But the Sooty Six cleanup law is a textbook example of the adage that when the people lead, the leaders follow — a notion that Jefferson believed in when he crafted the building blocks of our democratic system.

Bernadette Del Chiara is the organizing director of Toxics Action Center in West Hartford.
Christopher Caruso of Bridgeport is a Democratic member of the state House of Representatives.
Sample Letter To The Editor

Letters to the editor are used to publicize your point of view. Letters to the editor should be brief. A letter is more likely to be printed if it is responding to a news item in that newspaper. Your letter will also be more likely to be printed if you call the editorial page editor to confirm that s/he received it and ask him/her to print it.

Letters to the editor

Pollution law loophole should be closed

In response to the Jan. 11 article “Helping Kids Breathe Easy,” I want to applaud James Gorman for his work alleviating the debilitating symptoms of childhood asthma. However, I want to respond to the tone of the article, which suggested Connecticut’s asthma crisis is OK because “the condition can be controlled.”

Certain parts of Connecticut have childhood asthma rates seven times the national average. Minority and lower-income families are disproportionately affected because they live near sources that aggravate asthma.

Five power plants, owned by Midwestern power giant NRG, are largely responsible for the bloated childhood asthma rates in Connecticut. These plants account for more than half of the soot-forming pollutants emitted by all of the state’s pollution sources. They continue to pollute at levels above modern standards because of a loophole in the law.

This year, the Legislature will vote on a bill to close the pollution credit trading loophole. I hope that people like James Gorman, who know what it is like to be unable to play alongside healthy children, will write their senators and representatives in support of that bill.

If we really do want to give Connecticut children “a level playing field,” we might start by cleaning up one of the worst air pollution problems in the country.

Nat Garrett
Hartford

The writer is Waterbury clean air organizer for the Connecticut Coalition for Clean Air.
Sample Editorial

The ability to generate a favorable editorial is a sign of real power and influence in your community. Your issue is more likely to receive editorial support if you have a clear message, are making the news and if you meet with the editorial board.

Clean Up The ‘Filthy Five’

Air pollution from five old smog- and soot-belching power plants in Connecticut doubled between 1993 and 1997. These fountains of toxic irritants produce a majority of the state’s nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide emissions from industrial sources. It’s time that Gov. John G. Rowland and the legislature ordered them cleaned up.

The fossil-fuel plants — nicknamed the “Filthy Five” by clean-air activists — are located in Bridgeport, New Haven, Middletown, Norwalk and Montville. If these plants are made to comply with modern standards, air quality in the entire state would improve significantly.

That goal is worth pursuing.

The five plants are legally allowed to emit up to five times the amount of air pollution that would be allowed for the same facilities if they were built today. The 1977 loophole should be closed.

Officials at the Department of Environmental Protection note that recent state action will reduce nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide emissions from all power plants. Although that’s a step in the right direction, it doesn’t go far enough because the old plants will still be emitting two to three times the amount of pollutants as newer plants.

Operators of the old plants say that forcing their facilities to meet new standards will likely result in their closing because newer plants would be far less expensive to run. Not necessarily. New and cleaner plants, built in a deregulated climate, will use high-priced natural gas as a fuel, making the old plants, which use coal or oil, cheaper to operate. Furthermore, plants — old and new — won’t be generating electricity just for the Connecticut market because under restructuring, electricity will be sold nationwide. It’s likely that old plants will continue to operate along with the new.

Proposed legislation would authorize bonding to retrofit the five dirtiest plants. But tough, so-called new-source standards for emissions would not be required. That should be changed.

The state should help the utilities — United Illuminating owns two of the plants and Northeast Utilities the other three — with the cleanup cost. The old fire-breathing dragons should be forced to meet tough clean-air standards.
Organizing with residents to clean up and prevent pollution since 1987.

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