2018 ANNUAL REPORT

TOXICS
ACTION
CENTER

To Our Members

Kimball Nelson

Sylvia Broude
Executive Director

It's through this strategy that we win lasting change and build a stronger, people-powered, grassroots movement.

Dear friends,

I don't have to tell you what a bad couple of years it's been for the environment and public health in our country: From the devastating climate change-fueled fires that ravaged California communities this past year, to explosions from a fracked gas pipeline impacting homes across Massachusetts' Merrimack Valley, to a drinking water crisis facing more than 110 million Americans stemming from a nationwide loophole exempting hundreds of cancer-causing chemicals from regulation.

For 32 years, Toxics Action Center has worked with communities directly threatened by polluters, turning these threats into opportunities for environmental and social change. We help bring impacted neighbors together, build their capacity to solve the local environmental problem, and ensure that the local victory tells the story for a statewide policy change. Then we help connect these new activists with statewide, regional and national campaigns for solutions so they can continue to be active long after their local victory is won. It's through this strategy that we win lasting change and build a stronger, people-powered, grassroots movement.

In the face of a presidential administration intent on dismantling decades of progress, we feel called to step up our efforts to fight back.

With your support, in 2018, we helped communities fight new fracked gas pipelines and transition away from polluting fossil fuels and toward 100 percent renewable energy, ramped up a regional effort to close New England's remaining landfills and make progress towards Zero Waste, grew the grassroots movement against toxic pesticide spraying, and expanded a national coalition fighting for clean drinking water in the face of the PFAS contamination crisis.

Against great odds, we continued to win victories! As we enter our next year, I'm prouder than ever to stand with you.

In gratitude,

Sylvia Broude
Toxics Action Center Executive Director

Organizing Locally for Healthy Communities

Local residents are almost always the first to recognize a problem and often the best people to solve it. With your support, we worked side by side with these first-time grassroots activists to clean up and prevent pollution at the local level.

New Hampshire town stops landfill expansion

In the heart of the White Mountains, one small town took on a multimillion-dollar polluter and won. When Casella Waste Systems, a company with a long record of toxic pollution, decided to triple the size of its landfill in Bethlehem, New Hampshire, neighbors came together and fought back. Amid a February snowstorm, residents turned out in record numbers to vote down the expansion proposal, and now leaders like Kristina Zontini and Kelly McCann are turning that momentum into local solutions, a win for the town's environment and economy.

Precedent-setting victory at Vermont lake

When Meg Handler, Roger Donegan, Elizabeth Deutsch and their neighbors were organizing to stop a plan to apply pesticides on their lake, they were attempting to accomplish the unprecedented: Never before had a permit of this kind been permanently denied anywhere in Vermont. But that didn't stop activists at Lake Iroquois in Hinesburg, Vermont, from organizing their neighbors, packing public hearings, garnering media attention and winning a groundbreaking grassroots victory when the permit was denied. We expect this decision to have ripple effects throughout Vermont.

Maine city wins victory in fight against ExxonMobil's tar sands oil

Years of dedicated organizing paid off when the grassroots community group Protect South Portland stopped tar sands oil from passing through their city on the way to overseas markets. Local leaders took on one of the world's biggest oil companies by passing a city ordinance to protect their air from the toxic pollution that tar sands oil—one of the most polluting fossil fuels—would have brought with it. This year, a federal judge sided with Protect South Portland in upholding the ordinance, and activists continue to support the city's legal defense of this landmark case.

Neighbors protect town from toxic sludge

In Granby, Massachusetts, neighbors were alarmed to hear about a plan to dump toxic sludge in their town, which would put their drinking water at risk. What was even more surprising? The sludge was part of a "remediation plan" put together by a local gun club to address previous environmental violations. And worse, the sludge would come from Casella Waste, the waste company already known for its polluting history. Neighbors stood up to protect their environment and drinking water—and they won!

Kristina Zontini, Andrea Bryant, Cheryl Jensen and Bethlehem residents build support at press conference to protect their rivers and drinking water by stopping a landfill expansion.

With the guidance of Toxics Action staff, my community developed a campaign, engaged the media, lobbied Connecticut state environmental leaders and organized the public to fill our Town Council chambers with a standing room-only crowd to deliver the No Pollution Solution message. That message was eventually adopted by our Town Council.

—Ed Chiucarello
Riverfront Preservation Society

Working Nationwide for Clean Water

Three years ago, we started organizing with residents in North Bennington, Vermont, to address drinking water contamination from a chemical most people had never heard of before. Today, with your help, we are now organizing with 25 communities in 15 states to take on big polluters and win clean water for all.

More than 110 million people in the U.S. alone are estimated to be drinking water contaminated by the toxic Teflon chemical known as PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. PFAS is used in many everyday products including nonstick pans, rain gear and firefighting foam that then get into our environment, drinking water and bodies. Even though PFAS is linked to cancer, kidney disorders and more, the companies that produced these chemicals, including DuPont and 3M, lobbied for and won loopholes to avoid regulation. Today, there are no national enforceable standards to keep us safe from PFAS water contamination.

Communities poisoned by Teflon chemical bring local fights to national level

With so many communities just now finding out that their water is contaminated and may have been for decades, we know that we need a national drinking water standard that will require polluters to clean up their messes now. That's why we joined communities from across the country together to form a national coalition.

Grassroots leaders in the National PFAS Contamination Coalition shared their stories of toxic drinking water contamination at the EPA Region 1 listening session.

The National PFAS Contamination Coalition is made up of grassroots leaders who have been directly impacted by the PFAS crisis. Together, we won $10 million for a national health study on PFAS, the attention of the EPA, and more than a dozen victories at the state and local levels to strengthen regulations and win clean water for impacted families.

The coalition is a collaborative and powerful force for change on an issue we believe is one of the biggest toxic crises of our time.

2018 BY THE NUMBERS

117 calls to our hotline for help

195 community organizing group trainings

1,774 activists trained

424 leadership coaching sessions

21 environmental health experts added to our network

111 side-by-side actions with groups

19 victories!

Moving Our Region Forward on Clean Energy

Until we transition to 100 percent renewable energy, the plans for fracked gas pipelines and other dirty energy projects will keep coming. We need to work together to stop these pipeline projects and organize for bigger, lasting change on clean energy.

Massachusetts increases clean energy commitment thanks to coalition effort

Three years ago, we co-founded the Mass Power Forward coalition, which is now 150 community groups strong and a powerful force statewide for renewable energy.

This year, hundreds of Mass Power Forward members lobbied and rallied at the State House for renewable energy. Their efforts paid off, and the Legislature passed a law that raises the Renewable Portfolio Standard and doubles how much renewable energy our state will use over the next decade. The law gives wind power and renewable energy storage a boost, which will decrease our reliance on fracked gas and other fossil fuels.

Our movement is growing stronger as local pipeline fighters transform into long-term leaders and join the fight for clean energy beyond their backyards.

Rene Theberge

Jacqueline Velez, an organizer with the powerful community organization Neighbor to Neighbor, speaks out against the Holyoke pipeline proposed by Columbia Gas—the same company responsible for the explosions in the Merrimack Valley gas explosions.

Cities and towns leading the way

New Hampshire town rejects fracked gas

Kathy Beckett, Jon Chaffee, Philip Bush and other activists in Lebanon, New Hampshire, have joined with others across the Upper Valley organizing to stop a fracked gas pipeline and storage depot on the grounds that the facilities are dangerous for our communities and our climate. In October, Sustainable Lebanon delivered a petition with more than 1,100 signatures from local residents including Lebanon High School students, calling for the city council to take every legal and regulatory action at its disposal to stop the plan from moving forward.

Fight continues to stop dangerous compressor station

For four years, activists in Weymouth, Massachusetts, have been fighting a compressor station—the most polluting part of a pipeline—which is proposed for the last piece of green space in the Fore River Basin. Alice Arena and other activists formed the Fore River Residents Against the Compressor Station and are taking on one of the biggest fracked gas companies in North America, and hundreds of members of the Mass Power Forward coalition are standing with them.

Community says no to new pipeline

In Holyoke, Massachusetts, we're partnering with leaders in the powerful community organization Neighbor to Neighbor to stop a pipeline proposal by Columbia Gas, the same company responsible for the explosions in the Merrimack Valley. Our partnership with Neighbor to Neighbor began with transitioning the Mount Tom coal-fired power plant into a solar farm, and we're proud to continue to work together for clean energy in Western Massachusetts.

Vermont pipeline faces setback in lawsuit

A lawsuit brought by community activists Rachel Smolker, Lawrence Shelton, and Nate and Jane Palmer took a step forward when Vermont Gas was ordered to prove that its Addison Natural Gas Project pipeline should be allowed to remain in service. This order came after citizens provided documentation of dozens of construction and safety violations currently under investigation, and pointed out that the company had failed to obtain review and approval of construction plans from a licensed professional engineer as required.

2018 Campaigns: Cleaning Up and Preventing

1 Springfield, Mass.: Organizing for a healthy Gerena School

The Gerena Community School in Springfield, Mass., is more than a school. As a Montessori school, Gerena serves children all across the city. It's also a central gathering place for the black and Latino communities that live in the North End of the city. But the school has serious problems that are affecting people's health, including mold from climate-induced flooding. Neighbor to Neighbor organizers Zulmalee Rivera, Juana Girona and others brought together a group of concerned parents and residents to organize for the repairs needed to keep the school open as a safe, healthy place for learning and community.

2 Norfolk, Mass.: Improving toxic living conditions in prisons

Prisons are places of deep environmental injustice. The prison in Norfolk, Massachusetts is no different, with water that runs brown or black and is polluted with toxic levels of manganese. The Deeper Than Water coalition, made up of current and formerly incarcerated people and allies, formed to address the toxic water and other health issues in prisons. This year, the coalition won important improvements in living conditions, including fans for prisoners on unusually hot summer days, and called attention to the deaths of two prisoners this year, whose lives were lost due to toxic prison conditions.

3 Providence, R.I.: Residents work for plastic bag ban

Environmental justice activists are working for a fair and just ban on plastic bags. This year, the city council passed an ordinance banning single-use plastic bags, as cities like Boston have done, to reduce their waste and keep plastic out of the environment. But the ban would have allowed the use of thicker plastic bags and did not go far enough to address the concerns of the environmental justice community. In response to pressure from environmental groups, Mayor Jorge Elorza vetoed the ordinance, and now environmental justice activists across the state are coming together to push for a statewide ban that works for everyone.

4 Champlain Valley, Vt.: Neighbors unite against pesticide spraying

Organic farmers, beekeepers, fishermen, grandparents, and other concerned neighbors have joined together to study and reduce the environmental and health threats of toxic pesticide spraying. The pesticides, which are sprayed out of the backs of pickup trucks on town roads passing farms, schools and waterways, are part of a plan to control mosquitos in a district that includes Brandon, Leicester, Salisbury, Goshen, Pittsford and Proctor. But, neighboring towns have successfully limited mosquitos with safer non-toxic methods, and residents are working to make sure that this toxic spraying no longer threatens their communities.

5 Claremont, N.H.: Trash incinerator closed for good

This year, the major polluter Wheelabrator Technologies surrendered its permit for the trash incinerator in Claremont, New Hampshire, making it very unlikely that the facility will ever burn trash again. The incinerator closed its doors in 2013, after decades of work by Katie LaJoie, John Tuthill, Reb McKenzie and activists in the grassroots group Working on Waste. Through their organizing, residents shined a spotlight on the incinerator's pollution and high cost, and helped block a bill that would have allowed renewable energy subsidies to flow to this dirty energy and waste facility.

6 North Branford, Conn.: Neighbors defeat dangerous propane storage plan

For four years, a group of concerned neighbors in North Branford, Connecticut have been fighting to stop a plan to store dangerous amounts of propane in their community. The oil company J.J. Sullivan Oil & Propane sought to locate two 30,000-gallon propane tanks on a dead end street less than 1,000 feet away from two gas stations, where a blast would be a catastrophe. Neighbors came together over concerns for the safety of their homes and families, collected over 1,000 signatures from town residents, and brought a lawsuit to the Connecticut Superior Court that, barring an appeal, will keep propane tanks out of North Branford for good.

7 Coventry, Vt.: Stopping a polluting landfill's expansion

Vermont is reducing more and more waste every year, thanks to trailblazing recycling and composting laws. But in the Northeast Kingdom, the state's only permitted landfill is trying to grow by 51 acres. That's both dangerous and, given our progress on waste reduction and recycling, unnecessary. Landfills are the largest man-made source of methane, a greenhouse gas 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide. And all landfills leak, which means our water is at risk—including the nearby Lake Memphremagog, which crosses

Pollution Throughout New England

the border between Vermont and Canada. So neighbors got together and formed the group Don't Undermine Memphremagog's Purity (DUMP) and are fighting to stop the expansion and keep their lake safe.

8 Leverett, Mass.: Neighbors bring water contamination from landfill to light

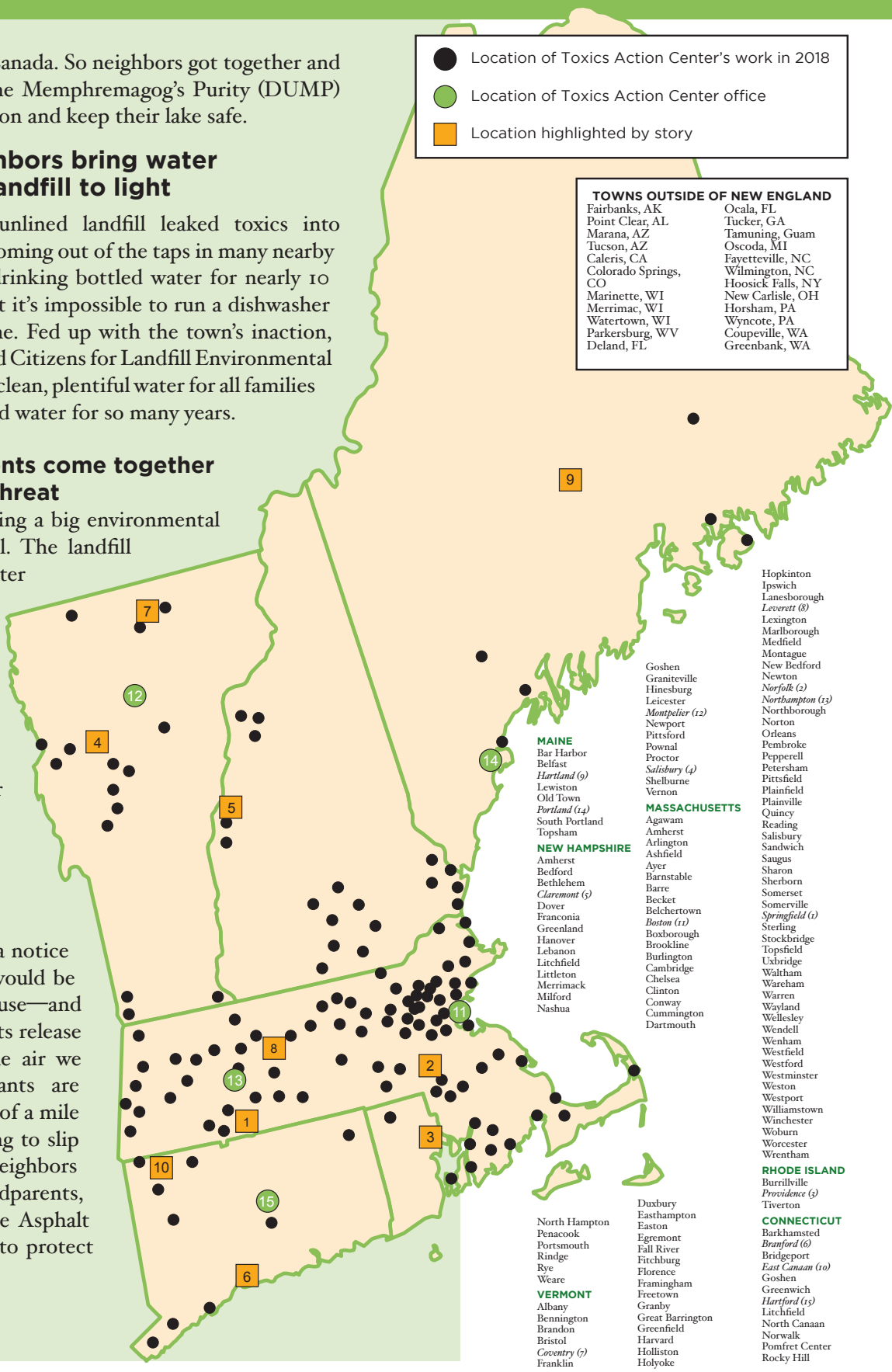
In Leverett, Massachusetts, an unlined landfill leaked toxics into groundwater, poisoning the water coming out of the taps in many nearby homes. Some families have been drinking bottled water for nearly 10 years and the wells are so weak that it's impossible to run a dishwasher and take a shower at the same time. Fed up with the town's inaction, neighbors came together and formed Citizens for Landfill Environmental Action Now! (CLEAN!) to fight for clean, plentiful water for all families that have been dealing with polluted water for so many years.

9 Hartland, Maine: Residents come together to fight landfill's toxic threat

Hartland is a small, rural town facing a big environmental problem: a giant, polluting landfill. The landfill has been causing major drinking water contamination, and residents are saying it's time to stop this threat to their health. Debbie Cooper, Paula and Earl Hughes, and Eric Tuttle joined with neighbors to form the Hartland Environmental Advisory Team, and are fighting to close the landfill and to protect their drinking water and community.

10 Canaan, Conn.: Organizing to stop a toxic asphalt plant

This year, Robin Markey received a notice in the mail that an asphalt plant would be going in right next door to her house—and she called us for help. Asphalt plants release a slew of toxic chemicals into the air we breathe—and although these plants are required to be built at least a third of a mile away from homes, this one is trying to slip through a loophole. More than 30 neighbors of all ages, from millennials to grandparents, got together and formed Stop The Asphalt Plant! (STAP!) and are organizing to protect clean air in their community.



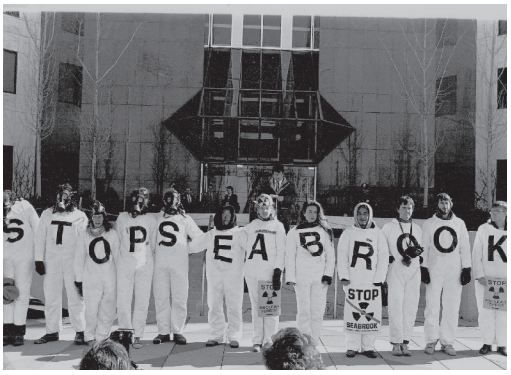
Credit: Map of United States of America with States - Single Color by FreeVectorMaps.com

Local Heroes with Big Impacts

Photo courtesy of Cynthia Jennings

Cynthia Jennings, Hartford, Conn.

Cynthia Jennings was living less than a mile away from a massive landfill, located right next to a predominantly black community in Hartford, Connecticut, when she realized she needed to take action. Toxic ash, smoke from periodic fires and the stench of trash were staples in her neighborhood—and when a particularly bad fire forced her family to move entirely, she knew it was time to do something. Cynthia became a civil rights lawyer, was elected to Hartford City Council, and was instrumental in winning the closure of the landfill in 2015. Her work has had a profound impact on the environment in Hartford, and she has become a leader and mentor across the region.



Nuclear Regulatory Commission via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0

John Tuthill, Acworth, N.H.

John Tuthill is a longtime activist and environmental watchdog in New Hampshire. John's activism began with Clamshell Alliance, the group formed in opposition to the nuclear reactor in Seabrook, New Hampshire. He became a leader in a decades-long fight to close an ash landfill in Newport and an incinerator in Claremont, where trash was burned at the cost of the community's health. John has maintained scrutiny on environmental laws in the state, working with other activists to keep New Hampshire moving toward Zero Waste, clean energy and environmental progress as a whole.

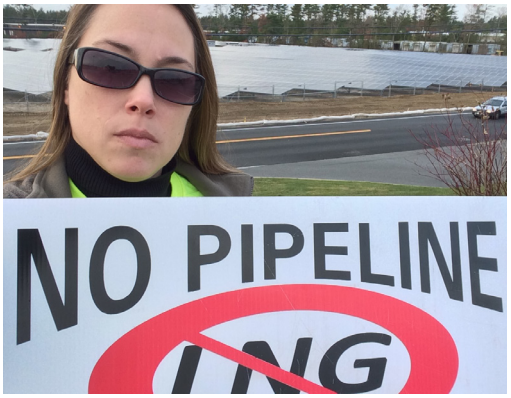


Photo courtesy of Wendy Graça

Wendy Graça, South Coast Neighbors United

Wendy Graça got involved in the South Coast's fight against massive liquefied natural gas storage tanks when she realized that the pipeline that would connect to those tanks would have gone right through her driveway. Wendy had never been an organizer before, but she quickly became a leader in the grassroots group, South Coast Neighbors United, and was instrumental in stopping the fracked gas project in its tracks. Wendy is now the president of South Coast Neighbors United, coordinated a monthly environmental movie night for her community, and is working with the Town Selectboard to make a green committee that could tackle issues from clean energy to recycling to wetlands conservation.

In Memory of Carlos Rodriguez, Neighbor to Neighbor

Carlos Rodriguez was a powerful and dynamic member and leader with the Holyoke, Massachusetts, chapter of Neighbor to Neighbor. When we partnered with Neighbor to Neighbor to retire one of the state's last remaining coal-fired power plants, he organized members and residents to not only win justice for coal plant workers, but also to transition the site to solar energy. This year, we lost a powerful leader, incredible storyteller, skilled organizer and beloved friend when Carlos passed away. He will be missed by so many who were touched by his joy, humor and kindness, and his legacy lives on in the movement for justice in Holyoke, Springfield and all the places his work brought about meaningful, lasting change. Carlos Rodriguez, *¡Presente!*

See how Holyoke went from Coal to iSol!: toxicsaction.org/coal-to-solar

Building a Movement for Visionary Solutions

The environment we live in touches all of us. The decisions we make around our economy and our environment from energy policy to waste have direct impacts on health and climate for all. But powerful corporate polluters want us to believe that we have to choose between social justice and environmental progress, by pitting working people against environmentalists and loading more pollution in poor communities and communities of color.

We know it doesn't have to be like this. It's possible to win healthier communities for all people, black, brown, white, and people in every economic class. We all need to come together and center equity in our work to ensure that people who have been most burdened by environmental harm are most uplifted in our progress, and that our victories result in lasting change.

Coalition for equitable Zero Waste plan

After nine years of organizing by dedicated activists, Boston rolled out a plan to transition the city to Zero Waste. From the very beginning of this yearlong process, the Zero Waste Boston coalition we co-coordinate has prioritized good, safe jobs in the new Zero Waste economy, opportunities for local businesses, and explicit benefits for the communities of color and poor communities in Boston who have had to bear the brunt of the polluting waste system of the past. We're proud to work with environmental justice groups, worker-owned cooperatives and workers' rights groups, along with Zero Waste advocates to bring this vision to life.

Building justice-centered movement leadership

To win a healthy environment for all, we need to focus on race and economic class. Black, brown and poor communities are disproportionately burdened with pollution, including toxic waste, landfills, polluting energy and other environmental harm. We need a movement that is ready to tackle these issues head-on, and at our 2018 Leadership Retreat we focused explicitly on race and class to ground our movement in justice.

A partnership for clean energy and jobs

Two years ago, we celebrated with our partners at Neighbor to Neighbor as ground broke on a new solar farm in Holyoke, Massachusetts, at the site of a former coal-fired power plant. We worked with Neighbor to Neighbor to retire this coal plant, which was making people in the neighboring Latino community sick, but recognized that closing the plant wasn't enough—the city needed a revitalization and clean-up plan. So we decided to work together on a campaign that centered working people, and we won job training, retirement packages, and a new, clean energy facility in Holyoke featuring a solar array and energy storage. We're continuing to work with Neighbor to Neighbor to stop a fracked gas pipeline proposal, and we're proud of how powerful our partnership has become.

Community leaders working for a healthy Gerena School in Springfield, Mass., helped lead trainings for 75 activists at our Leadership Retreat.

When we heard of Toxics Action Center and had the initial meeting with them, our spirits were immediately lifted and we felt that maybe we could win this battle.

— Debbie Cooper
Hartland Environmental Advisory Team

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