National Toxics Campaign Encyclopedia Article

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National Toxics Campaign

The National Toxics Campaign (NTC) was once a leading environmental organization, dedicated to helping local communities seek environmental justice. From its inception in the 1980s until it ended in 1993, this grassroots organization helped many citizen groups develop strategies to hold industry and government accountable for damages to human health and the environment.

The NTC's basic philosophy was that people have the right to a clean and healthy environment regardless of their race or economic standing. Unlike many of the larger environmental organizations that worked on national legislation and international issues, the NTC focused its efforts on empowering local groups and organizations to work together to solve local problems. The NTC succeeded in encouraging leaders of different ethnic groups to organize their own campaigns against polluters that affected residential areas. The NTC's leaders worked with many not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) groups—groups of citizens trying to keep toxic-waste dumps out of residential areas.

In the beginning, the NTC's founder, John O'Connor, concentrated on local battles against chemical dumps and incinerators. Soon the organization started the only toxics analysis lab in the country that was run by the grassroots movement. As the organization grew, members were able to address more and more toxic-waste problems.

During its lifetime, the NTC was responsible for helping citizen groups bring many polluters to court and for strengthening environmental protection legislation. The NTC was instrumental in the expansion and reauthorization of the Superfund and in the passage of right-to-know legislation the Toxics Release Inventory, which required a limited set of industries to report a release of a limited set of chemicals. The organization played a central role in bringing environmental violations by U.S. military facilities to the attention of the public. Equally important, the NTC developed a network of leaders (including a significant number of organizations of people of color) to develop strategies for environmental justice.

Many people were surprised when the National Toxics Campaign ended in 1993. However, there are several other national organization that have been able to carry on similar grassroots campaigns. Groups such as the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (formerly called the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste), Highlander Center's STP Schools, Greenpeace, and People Against a Chemically Contaminated Environment (PACCE) support grassroots campaigns against toxic-chemical dumping.

Bibliography

Cohen, Gary, and O'Connor, John, eds. (1990). *Fighting Toxins: A Manual for Protecting Your Family, Community and Workplace.* Washington, D.C.: Island Press.