

Tackling Toxics In Your Community:

Organizing a Community-Led Campaign

Since 1991, Pesticide Watch Education Fund has worked side-by-side with communities to clean up and prevent pesticide pollution and exposure. We believe everyone has a right to breathe clean air, drink clean water and live in a healthy and safe community. Below is a simplified version of the outline we use when working with community groups to develop a campaign:

1. Research Toxic Threats in Your Community

You are the primary researcher. What are the problems? If you are exposed to chemicals or pesticides, document your exposure and that of your neighbors in writing. How and when do you think you were exposed and what were your symptoms? And seek out doctors that recognize chemical exposure symptoms.

Lots of great information is available online—here are just a few sites:

www.pesticideinfo.org – Pesticide product information maintained by PANNA

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxpro2.html> - ATSDR, part of the Centers for Disease Control, maintains toxicological profiles and a wide variety of info on toxic threats

www.epa.gov/enviro/html/em/ - U.S. EPA EnviroMapper – a website that maintains geographic data about pollutants in our air, soil and water

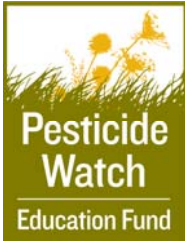
www.scorecard.org – Green Media Toolshed's database that compiles much of the information like EnviroMapper above.

2. Build a Community Group

The key to building a community group is recruitment. But recruitment does not happen in a vacuum. Give lots of people lots of opportunities to get involved on lots of levels. Some will host press conferences and others will sign your petition. The most committed will become your core group, the group that steers your efforts. The key to maintaining a group is investment (in you, the group and the issues). So cultivate your group members and support them and give them lots of opportunities. The worst thing they can do is say “no.” The worst thing you can do is not give them a chance.

3. Set Your Goals

What are the changes or protections you would like to see? What can be accomplished in the short- and long-term. Do you want to stop aerial pesticide spraying or do you want to eliminate phthalates in toys? Decide and prioritize your goals since they motivate the rest of the campaign. A community group and its campaign cannot survive without shared goals.



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4. Know Your Strategy

Remember high school civics class? Do you remember the three branches of government? Executive, legislative and judicial sound familiar. Well, you should also add the fourth: corporations. Now these are the options for your campaign—you can work to pass some regulatory change through some state agency, you can pass a bill that becomes law, or challenge an existing law in courts, or even change the ways companies operate.

5. Choose a Target and Influences

Determine who is the person or people that will ultimately ensure victory. Is it the governor, mayor, or school board? If it is a group of people (e.g. school board) determine what individual or individuals will give you what you want. Then, take a step back. Who or what will influence these individuals, ignoring your resources for a moment? Is it the public, the press, friends, family, colleagues, other organizations, church leaders? Pick a few of the most important since you have limited resources. Then figure out what access you have to these people and institutions and how you can draw them to your cause.

6. Pick the Tactics that Work

Tactics are what most of us think about when we think about a campaign. Writing letters to editor, phonebanking, holding meetings with elected officials, turning people out to a hearing—these are all tactics. You can spend a lot of time pursuing a lot of tactics, but its important to work backwards. What will influence your target most? Pick the tactics that influence them directly or influence your most important influences first.

7. Plan or Die

You're almost there. Now you need create a timeline for all your tactics. And you need to determine the point person for each of them. Unless you delegate these tactics out you will be stuck with them, or you won't be able to hold group members accountable. Work backwards from your goals, and figure out the steps it will take to get there. If we want 200 people at the hearing, how many phone calls do we need to make? Figure out your rates and use them to reach your goals.

For more information, or if you would like free assistance in planning a toxics campaign, please contact Pesticide Watch Education Fund at 916.551.1883 or info@pesticidewatch.org