



For Immediate Release
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America's "First Lady of Environmental Justice" aims to help Ohio families out of toxic nightmare

Mom from Love Canal fame launches pilot project to help local residents make their neighborhoods clean and safe again

(Columbus) Lois Gibbs, the stay-at-home mom turned environmental crusader who helped rescue her neighborhood from the notorious Love Canal toxic waste dump, wants Ohio to be a staging ground to help make America's polluted neighborhoods clean and safe again.

And she's taking her fight to the very areas hardest hit by dangerous toxic pollution: working class neighborhoods and communities of color.

"Too many families in America are living a toxic nightmare," said Gibbs, founder and director of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice near Washington, D.C.

"Their children go to bed at night and get up in the morning in the shadow of a stinking smokestack or polluting pipe. They deserve a healthier shot at the American dream. That's what this pilot project aims to help them achieve."

Tomorrow, Gibbs and a host of state and local environmental justice groups will launch the first of several "Environmental Justice Forums." One each is set this month for Columbus, Cincinnati and Cleveland. Organizers plan additional forums in other Ohio cities this year.

The goal of the forums is to inventory problems and identify solutions for families hit hard by toxic emissions and odors from foundry smokestacks, asphalt plants and other high-pollution operations.

To gather this information, project organizers are targeting a natural source: community residents who live next to such industrial facilities.

"We want to talk with real people about the real challenges they face everyday living with this toxic burden," said Gibbs. "Challenges like illness, school and work absenteeism, and stagnant economic development. We want a citizen-driven effort that generates real ideas on how to fix this problem. I can't think of a better place to start looking for that than Columbus, Ohio – the test market of America."

Project organizers hope the effort will yield ideas for a state environmental justice policy. Such a policy would assure meaningful involvement of all Ohio citizens in the development, implementation and enforcement of state environmental laws.

Legislation has been introduced in Congress to make enforceable under federal law an executive order issued by President Clinton in 1994. Last year, the U.S. EPA Inspector General issued a scathing report finding that the EPA has failed to conduct environmental reviews of its programs and policies, as required by the executive order.

Project organizers chose Ohio for the environmental justice project because of Ohioans' exposure to toxic emissions.

According to company data reported to the U.S. EPA, industry smokestacks emitted more than 126 million pounds of acid gases, lead, mercury and other poisonous air toxics in Ohio in 2005—most in the nation. The data is still in draft form but is expected to be released soon, according to EPA sources.

According to a 2005 study by the Associated Press, U.S. EPA data revealed that Ohioans suffer the highest risk of long-term health risks from exposure to industrial air pollution. The AP study reported that 26 of the nation's 200 most at-risk neighborhoods are in Ohio, including the nation's single most vulnerable neighborhood, near Marietta, Ohio. The AP analyzed federal pollution, health and census data for the study.

The U.S. EPA has designed three neighborhoods in Ohio as potential or probable environmental justice communities: one surrounded by a heavily polluted area of Cincinnati known locally as the "toxic doughnut," one surrounding the WTI hazardous waste incinerator (the largest such facility in the country) in East Liverpool, and the village of Cheshire, Ohio, adjacent to the AEP Gavin power plant.

According to a 2004 American Bar Association report, 35 states have an official environmental justice program, policy, or statute.

The following organizations are involved in the Ohio environmental justice project:

Center for Health, Environment and Justice (www.chej.org)

NAACP, Ohio Conference (www.naacp.org)

NAACP, Cincinnati

NAACP, Cleveland

Buckeye Environmental Network (www.buckeyeenvironmentalnetwork.org)

City Fresh and Tremont Gardeners (Cleveland)

Communities United for Action (Cincinnati)

Earth Day Coalition (www.earthdaycoalition.org)

Environmental Community Organization (Cincinnati)

Marion Franklin Civil Association (Columbus)

Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org)

Ohio Environmental Council (www.theOEC.org)

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