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Our mission

We envision a society where everyone has equitable access to healthy food and clean air and water, and underserved communities are included in decision making processes that affect them. Together, we move beyond the damaging environmental practices of the past and collectively work to support and maintain ecological resilience and balance.
Over a decade ago, Beyond Toxics published a report on the devastating school pesticide poisonings happening across the state. Students and teachers were sent to emergency rooms and entire schools were evacuated after being exposed to pesticides on school grounds. The extent of the poisoning ultimately led us to launch a successful advocacy campaign for the School Integrated Pest Management Act. Medical studies continue to warn us that pesticides cause developmental and neurological problems for children, even at very low levels.

Over the years, we’ve kept watch on pesticide use at schools. Unfortunately, we uncovered some serious violations of the law. These cases demonstrate a need to provide more resources to help schools comply with Oregon’s law.

In one case in northwest Oregon, Fumitoxin, a rodenticide that caused the deaths of children in other states, was used repeatedly - and illegally - on multiple school ball fields.

Another school district in western Oregon is using industrial-strength pesticides meant for commercial forestry, instead of Oregon’s list of Low-Impact Pesticides that are appropriate for school use!

In yet another case in Central Oregon, parents of two high school athletes were told to pay $1,700 to the school district just to get information about the pesticides sprayed on sports fields where their kids played, presumably because the spray records were so difficult to locate.

These examples convinced us, and lawmakers, that it’s time for us to modernize Oregon’s laws to ensure pesticide practices do not jeopardize the well-being of our children, teachers, and groundskeepers.

The Toxics Free Schools Act will enable schools to update their policies and get trained in least-toxic and non-toxic pest management solutions. Pesticides listed as known or likely to cause cancer will be prohibited.

Finally, the bill would help school districts adopt a simple, accurate pesticide application record keeping system. This will ensure that parents and faculty are notified about upcoming pesticide applications.

As we face uncertain environmental conditions and climate changes, we want schools to be better adapted to the goal of maintaining school grounds without toxic chemicals. Kids need a non-toxic place to grow and thrive.

Toxics Free Schools policy will:
- Provide training and resources for schools to shift to alternatives to dangerous pesticides.
- Prioritize assistance for schools with students from vulnerable communities.
- Modernize practices to ensure that pesticides known to cause cancer and hormone disruption are not sprayed at schools.
- Modernize pesticide record-keeping so that information access is equitable for all parents.
FIGHTING FOR RIGHTS AND FINDING SOLUTIONS

By Arjorie Arberry-Baribeault
West Eugene Community Organizer

Since joining Beyond Toxics three years ago, I’ve realized how instrumental small, local nonprofits are in helping communities advocate for their rights to clean air, water and soil. Fighting for our rights can be difficult and down-right frustrating. Meaningful change certainly doesn’t happen as swiftly as we envision.

I raised my children in West Eugene, one of whom faced detrimental health impacts from pollution. Fighting childhood cancer gave me a new outlook on environmental health.

Parents shouldn’t have to sacrifice their children’s health simply because they live in an affordable, working class neighborhood.

West Eugene residents have been demanding stronger environmental protections for decades! I believe that the closure of J.H. Baxter, the company responsible for extensive dioxin contamination in the Bethel neighborhood, is absolutely a big win for the families living in west Eugene. It was inspiring to witness the community mobilize to demand that J.H. Baxter be held accountable for its pollution. Their closure is a small, but critical part of the larger battle for clean and healthy air.

This one victory moves us a step closer to getting the basic rights we deserve and it’s important for local residents not to forget how effective community action can be to make change.

I envision a new approach, one where we don’t repeat the same mistake of letting industrial polluters set up shop next to neighborhoods. Let’s change the rules to prioritize healthy, pollution-free neighborhoods!

With strong support from neighborhood leaders and local organizations, Beyond Toxics is advocating for a new and innovative Public Health Overlay Zone (PHOZ).

Eugene needs a PHOZ to end historical zoning decisions that depress our property values and harm our frontline communities closest to heavy industrial polluters.

It’s important to me to make sure that public health values are at the forefront of our land use decision-making conversations!

During a September Eugene City Council work session, councilors expressed strong support for a PHOZ. I’m excited to see the next work session when councilors plan to land the plane on adopting the new policy.

I’m relying on the tenacity of the Beyond Toxics team to continue to hold J.H. Baxter accountable for their damages as well as any existing (or new) facilities that threaten the lives and properties of people in Bethel.

How can you get involved to help make the changes we need for more livable neighborhoods? Reach out to the city council, city managers, the mayor, and Beyond Toxics. Tell your story!

Don’t be afraid to advocate for your family, yourself, and your community. For our families and our shared future in Eugene, we will continue to stand together!
VICTORY FOR CLEAN ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

By Lisa Arkin

This October, Beyond Toxics joined with other organizations to stop a proposal by the fracked gas company, NW (not) Natural, for a $10 million project to build an experimental hydrogen-blending facility in West Eugene.

 Barely weeks after our team intervened in NW Natural’s application and began to educate the impacted community about the air, water and economic impacts of the project, the fossil fuel corporation formally withdrew its application!

The cancellation of the methane-hydrogen blending project in West Eugene is a clear victory for community organizing! I believe NW Natural saw the writing on the wall. This ill-conceived project was being forced upon residents of the Bethel area in Eugene, the working class neighborhood targeted for this pilot project.

NW Natural’s plan was to blend 5-10% hydrogen into fracked “natural” gas that would be piped to 2,273 residences in the Bethel neighborhood.

Customers in NW Natural’s experimental zone in Bethel weren’t given the ability to opt-out. As one Eugene elected official told me, “Here in Bethel, we’re their guinea pigs.”

Adding insult to injury, blending hydrogen and methane increases emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) compared to burning methane alone, which raises the risk of NOx-associated chronic respiratory diseases.

Hydrogen also causes pipes to crack more easily, which makes them more susceptible to leakage and explosion than gas.

We believe that corporate promotion of blended hydrogen for residential use is pure greenwashing, a way to maintain the status quo for gas companies and keep us chained to fossil fuel infrastructure such as gas pipelines and appliances.

Because the final blended product remains 90-95% fracked gas, blended hydrogen in homes does very little to help Oregon achieve its carbon reduction goals.

Despite NW Natural’s greenwashed claim that hydrogen is the “transition” away from fossil fuels, this project would have taken us in the wrong direction to realistically meet carbon reduction goals.

According to Forbes Magazine (7/31/2021), “... many of the companies pushing hydrogen aren’t doing so to save the planet. They’re doing so to save their business models in a time of extreme transition towards greener technologies and e-mobility.”

This is a climate victory!
For these reasons and more, Beyond Toxics stepped up to end this risky project. Now we can get back to the business of investing in the emissions reductions we need, and quickly, to protect health and solve the climate crisis.

NEW PODCAST

Big things are happening in the world of community organizing and advocacy. We’re very excited to announce our brand new podcast called Why We Do The Work. The podcast features conversations with an energetic group of nonprofit professionals, parents, and activists who share their experience, wisdom, and insights regarding all things environmental justice!

We’ve released 5 episodes that focus on real life experiences with cancer, environmental pollution and the need to address inequities in our communities.

Since it’s launch, Why We Do The Work has reached over 2,500 listeners and there’s more episodes are coming soon!

Listen and subscribe to Why We Do The Work on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and more!

Hosted by Arjorie Arberry-Baribeault
Your support helps us collect air quality data!

MAKING A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A TRASH HILL

By Mason Leavitt
Cartographer & GIS Technician

Dip your head into your garbage can and take a deep breath. Foul, right? Now you have an idea of what it's like to live next to a landfill where nearby residents have little choice but to inhale toxic methane, hydrogen sulfide, and micro-plastic particles continuously emitted from a mountain of garbage.

Last spring, Valley Neighbors for Environmental Quality and Safety (VNEQS), a neighborhood association based in the Soap Creek Valley just north of Corvallis, reached out to Beyond Toxics to coordinate an air quality testing program.

This program would help verify the noxious vapors and greenhouse gases from the nearby Coffin Butte Landfill owned by Republic Services, a national waste disposal management corporation. The neighbors shared their concern over a proposed expansion to Coffin Butte Landfill because they already experience days where the air outside smells so putrid, they are afraid to be in their yards or open their windows.

The expansion would not only increase the footprint of the garbage mountain by about 60 acres, the size of 54 football fields, but it also would allow Republic Services to increase the amount of garbage they import from outside the Corvallis area and even beyond Oregon’s borders. Working with VNEQS, Beyond Toxics is gathering air quality data to help affirm the community’s experience.

VNEQS and Beyond Toxics agree that the proposed expansion should not go forward for several reasons.

Since the 1970’s, our society has chanted “reduce, reuse, recycle,” yet we have not fully embraced those practices. Ironically, Republic Services and others made widespread claims in the late 2000s that the landfill would eventually become useless because of a zero waste future.

Back then, the Coffin Butte landfill was supposed to last until 2070. Now the landfill operator purports it will be filled by 2024 and argues that a 33% expansion is inevitable!

A zero-waste future is still possible, but shoveling our resources into unsustainable use of landfill technologies will not help reduce the amount of trash we generate.

The second reason for stopping this expansion has to do with the specific location of the landfill. The placement of the waste in the wet and densely populated Willamette Valley contributes to more environmental damage and public health consequences (Fig. 1.)

Rain inevitably permeates through the garbage mountain, mixing with rotting food, various plastics, and other pollutants. This process creates toxic leachate, which pollutes the groundwater, local soil, and the rivers it’s dumped in after being semi-treated. The landfill also substantially lowers air quality in a region where air stagnation is already a human health issue.

VNEQS residents living in Soap Creek Valley are concerned that this continuous exposure to dust, methane, micro-plastics and other materials contributes to illnesses such as asthma, increased blood pressure, and cancer. Figure 1, to the left, shows how local topography combined with typical Willamette Valley south winds, traps polluted air and debris blowing from Coffin Butte Landfill into the Soap Creek Valley.

Fig. 1: The Soap Creek Valley & Landfill Expansion
I, and many others, agree we cannot allow Republic Services to profit by importing the most garbage possible and creating an environmental crisis for Soap Creek Valley residents. Enabling toxic and unsustainable forms of waste management diverts attention and resources away from creating the infrastructure needed to "recycle, reduce, reuse."

Additionally, 90% of the garbage brought to Coffin Butte is from outside Benton County. Republic Services imports approximately 10% of the waste it receives from outside of Oregon. Locals near Coffin Butte see little reason why they should sacrifice their local environment and health in order to provide garbage disposal for out-of-county and out-of-state residents.

Luckily, a team of Corvallis high school students invented a precise and cost-effective air monitor that measures eight different pollutants. The science fair award-winning instrument provides valuable real-time information on air quality without the use of commercial labs, which come with eye-popping price tags.

Our study design will test the air quality north, south, east, and west every half mile from the center of the landfill to measure the concentration of pollutants at set distances from the facility while accounting for wind and topography (Fig. 2.) We will also test the air in Soap Creek Valley and Adair Village on particularly rotten-smelling days to better understand what locals are breathing in.

Our goal for collecting this data is to stop the expansion of the Coffin Butte Landfill, understand air toxic exposures for nearby residents and support conversations about how we can update our garbage practices to embrace greener waste management.

"I for one would rather see (and smell!) real examples of environmental stewardship and sustainability from governments, policymakers, and corporations being held accountable."

~ Mason Leavitt
We need to support youth-led climate action. Youth have an unprecedented mobilization worldwide that shows the massive power they possess to hold decision-makers accountable. Their clarion message is that the older generation has yet to enact meaningful climate policies and the youth have to pay the growing climate debt. The Beyond Toxics team developed The Rise as Leaders (RAL) training to help support BIPOC* youth entering their academic and professional careers with more robust skills to correct decades of climate inaction.

RAL workshops focus on providing leadership training for BIPOC youth. My goal for the RAL program is to expand its scope by offering more internship opportunities and hands-on community engagement to help the youth more deeply participate in environmental justice work. The youth learn about what it means to organize around environmental justice and issues that matter to them and encourage their civic engagement. Every week, I see they are inspired to take meaningful action! This fall, the RAL cohort are experiencing a new curriculum that includes Just Transition education and development.

You may ask, what is a Just Transition and what does it have to do with youth leadership?

Simply put, a Just Transition is the process of getting from where we are now to where we need to be – by transforming the systems of economy and governance. A Just Transition requires moving from a globalized industrial economy predicated on unfettered growth to more participatory economies that support thriving local communities and well-being for all.

During a workshop session, youth are asked to dive into this question, “What are some ways in which the extractive economy impacts your community?”

One participant responded that agriculture, especially animal agriculture, contributed heavily to air pollution which harms their community.

So, my greater question is this: How can our communities reduce their climate footprint without hindering their ability to produce enough healthy food to feed themselves?

Students are exploring the possibilities of applying a Just Transition to agriculture to better understand how this approach may reduce environmental consequences while protecting farmers, the land, and local communities. Such a transition would advocate for a return to small-scale, localized agriculture and a reduction in growing food for animal products due to their disproportionately negative impact on the environment and climate.

I am working to help youth build skills that will ultimately guide them in pursuing climate action at regional and national levels throughout their future careers.

A Just Transition does not need to start at the national level. Each of us is capable of pursuing this change in our own lives. Youth who are motivated by their RAL experience are very eager to share their ideas with their local communities!

*BIPOC: Black, Indigenous and People of Color
As a climate justice organizer, I am concerned that our elected officials and policymakers are not putting enough resources towards the enormous threat that climate change is. I say this because wildfires, drought, and extreme heat have already wreaked havoc on Oregon’s most vulnerable communities and many are still recovering. Throw in a lack of affordable housing, inflation, lack of funding, disinformation, and dwindling clean water and you can begin to understand some of the many barriers that prevent local communities from enacting stronger climate goals.

My role as a community organizer at Beyond Toxics enables me to partner with the Lane County Climate Equity Task Force and work to build out a strong and meaningful Resilience Plan.

In climate equity and resilience planning, we recognize that impacted communities will bear the brunt of those who have been historically excluded from the decision-making process. It is critical that we bring Black, Native American, Indigenous, People of Color, low-income, rural, and other vulnerable populations into these conversations to better serve the needs of all residents.

I was especially interested in making sure that community representatives and stakeholders who live and work with diverse and underrepresented communities in Lane County were included in these conversations.

Throughout 2021 and 2022, I worked to hold a series of stakeholder meetings with the goal of developing climate resilient strategies that are equitable and just.

For example, residents in rural forested areas who endured weeks of wildfire smoke brought up their dire need for home air filtration. In contrast, coastal residents expressed concerns about inadequate stormwater management and sea-level rise.

I believe that stronger climate action begins with informed decision-making, and it’s crucial to understand many different perspectives before enacting a plan that will impact a wide range of people. The task force worked for 18 months to discuss and plan for mitigation and resilience strategies to ensure that the needs of all residents are represented.

The strategies developed from these meetings and workshops were included in Beyond Toxics’ Equitable & Resilient Climate Strategies report. I am pleased to share with you that this report is now being used as a roadmap and a compliment to the County’s Community Climate Resilience plan. Community knowledge is essential for effective climate action!

It is critical that we bring voices of BIPOC, low income, rural, and other vulnerable populations into these conversations to better serve the needs of all residents.

~ Paige Hopkins
DEFFENDING THE CLIMATE
By Teryn Yazdani
Staff Attorney and Climate Policy Manager

Last spring, Oregon’s landmark Climate Protection Program (CPP) came under serious threat when a consortium of fossil fuel and industrial polluters sued the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) over the Program’s adoption. This flagship climate policy is the first of its kind in Oregon and has the potential to help our state meet necessary climate goals.

The CPP is currently being attacked by big polluters that don’t want to meet stronger regulations.

As of September, Beyond Toxics and a coalition of state and national advocates have officially intervened in this lawsuit to support the State’s authority to adopt and implement the CPP. We are fighting to protect Oregon’s climate future! As Beyond Toxics’ staff attorney, I am excited to work with the coalition fighting to protect this bedrock climate policy!

This new climate program aims to reduce Oregon’s greenhouse gas emissions by setting a declining and enforceable limit on emissions from various fossil fuel sources including diesel, gasoline, natural gas, and propane.

The CPP will cap fossil fuel use across multiple sectors and regulate site-specific greenhouse gas emissions at manufacturing facilities. Also included in this policy is the innovative Community Climate Investments Program— a voluntary program designed to spur innovative climate mitigation projects and alleviate burdens on communities bearing the brunt of environmental injustices.

The industry polluters challenging this policy argue that adopting the Program goes beyond the EQC statutory authority and claim there could be economic impacts on their operations.

This lawsuit threatens not only the Program’s future but also the future of climate policy in Oregon and beyond. If the fossil fuel industry groups are successful in court, it would set precedent limiting Oregon’s authority to regulate greenhouse gases. Such a result could undermine all future climate-centric and decarbonization regulations throughout the nation.

Given the current conservative makeup of the U.S. Supreme Court, as well as the historic inaction of the U.S. Congress on climate matters, it is up to individual states to take climate action.

Why is Beyond Toxics compelled to take legal action?

If this program crumbles, so will Oregon’s climate goals!

We are standing firm against industry’s efforts to eviscerate Oregon’s climate program. Our purpose is to ensure that Oregon achieves the strong emissions reductions we all need to thrive. Keeping the Climate Protection Program intact is key to improving public health for Oregon’s environmental justice and frontline communities.

For more information about all the groups intervening and to stay on top of case updates, please sign up for e-alerts at beyondtoxics.org!

“As of September, Beyond Toxics and a coalition of state and national advocates have officially intervened in this lawsuit to support the State’s authority to adopt and implement the CPP. We are fighting to protect Oregon’s climate future! As Beyond Toxics’ staff attorney, I am excited to work with the coalition fighting to protect this bedrock climate policy!”

~ Teryn Yazdani
Alyssa grew up in Miami and Las Vegas before moving to Eugene to study marine biology at the University of Oregon. She fell in love with the ocean as a child. Everything she’s learned about the ocean and the communities around it has made her passionate about marine ecosystems and law. She recently graduated from UO with a BS in marine biology and minors in environmental studies and legal studies. She plans to pursue a career in oceanic research and policy. She is excited to intern with Beyond Toxics to learn as much as she can about the work that goes into policy reform and community outreach.

Aaron grew up in the north suburbs outside of Chicago. He is a fourth year biology student with minors in chemistry and global health. He is a member of Lambda Chi Alpha and the men’s club volleyball team. Recently, he spends most of his time doing undergraduate research in Dr. Shawn Lockery’s lab at the University of Oregon. In the lab where he documents the behaviors of evolutionarily significant nematodes, C. elegans. Aaron is excited to work on the importance of wetland conservation and its role in climate change. In his free time he enjoys camping, hiking and being outdoors.

Miriam grew up in an immigrant household in rural Missouri. She became invested in the intersections of environmental and social justice watching activists in her community mobilize to serve individuals insecurities and crises in St. Louis. Miriam is a third year global studies major with minors in environmental studies and dance. She is passionate about community building and advocacy built on strong interpersonal relationships. She is delighted to be working with Beyond Toxics to protect and celebrate where we work, live, and play. In her free time, Miriam enjoys exploring Oregon’s forests and reading in coffee shops.

Emily Matlock
Membership & Communications Coordinator

Emily is a native Oregonian who grew up in Sherwood, near Portland. She came to Eugene to attend the University of Oregon where she studied journalism and Spanish and wrote for the campus newspaper, The Daily Emerald. After graduation, she worked for Early Childhood CARES and then as a journalist for a small Portland-area newspaper before transitioning to the Beyond Toxics team.

She is excited to bring her passion for cross-cultural communication to Beyond Toxics and work with a dedicated staff and community. In addition to her role as membership and communications coordinator, she also serves as an intern and volunteer coordinator, and staff photographer. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, teaching fitness classes, dancing, and doing art.

MEET OUR NEW STAFF & INTERNS

Alyssa Rueda
Policy Research Intern

Aaron Schatz
Research and Curriculum Development Intern

Miriam Yousaf
West Eugene Community Organizing Intern
This mural is a lot more sincere than just verbal acknowledgements.... It's a permanent art installment in a public space. Public art really starts conversations. It's a great place to meet people.

~ Jennifer Eisele