Power to the People: Community Toxics Reporting
by Mary O’Brien and Lisa Arkin

Whether by air, water or land, it’s important to know when you’re being poisoned by industrial toxic discharges. Some would even say you have a right to know, but current law interferes with that right. Gaps and loopholes in federal and state regulations have allowed stained-glass manufacturing companies to pollute Portland residential neighborhoods with heavy metals. Until recently, people in those neighborhoods lived without knowing that extremely hazardous air pollutants were going into their air.

Oregon’s Health Authority has reported that cancer clusters and poisoned garden vegetables may be associated with these air pollutants. For decades, thousands of people were unknowingly exposed.

In 1996, some of the original Board of Directors of Beyond Toxics called for a Eugene city charter to make it everyone’s right to know about even small amounts of toxic chemicals. Our goal was a mandate for local manufacturers to track and report those chemicals they use and emit. The businesses, of course, were already keeping careful track of their chemical inventory and the dollars coming in and going out. We were sure they could do the same for toxics. Now, they do.

Each year, Eugene businesses that use more than 50 pounds of hazardous chemicals file a report with the fire marshal. The report covers chemicals federally listed in the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Sensible and reliable, this reporting program is called the Community Toxics Right-to-Know law. The detailed report is filed online for public access.

In Portland, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) indicated they knew that cadmium and arsenic levels were elevated in the air, but they didn’t know where the emissions were coming from. That’s because Oregon factories, everywhere outside of Eugene, do not have to report toxic discharges less than 10 tons per year. By contrast, under Eugene’s system, chemical reporting is by the pound, not by the ton.

If polluters were located in Eugene, the DEQ (and the public) would have immediately known all the sources locally emitting cadmium and arsenic. Everyone would have been able to track historical emissions trends as well. To “know” might mean the difference between a resident being exposed for a short time, or in the case of Portland neighborhoods, a very long time. Simply put, Portland’s plumes of cadmium, arsenic and chromium went up in the air and fell right through an information and regulatory gap.

All cities in Oregon could enact right-to-know laws if Oregon’s legislature would authorize municipalities to enact Community Toxics Right-to-Know, based on Eugene’s tried-and-true approach: reporting toxics in, toxics out and posting the information on a web site. It’s that simple.

Beyond Toxics is working with State Senator Michael Dembrow and Representative Ken Helm to give every Oregon city a path forward to track, report and reduce toxic pollutants. We need more champions for a statewide toxics right-to-know law for all Oregonians.
Dear Friend,

This year we’re proud to have reached a milestone: FIFTEEN years of environmental action for the people of Oregon. YOU and communities across Oregon have helped us get here!

From the start, Beyond Toxics made it clear that we were not afraid to tackle the most dangerous environmental threats.

We took on one of Oregon’s biggest polluters – the grass seed industry – and challenged an obsolete system that burdened the public with toxic pollution. The successful result was a new law requiring stronger air quality protections for people and the environment. In the end, our vision of healthy, clean air triumphed over an archaic approach to agriculture!

Beginning in 2013, Beyond Toxics helped rural communities draw attention to the rampant abuse of herbicides in forestry. We raised red warning flags about the urgency of ending aerial herbicide sprays. Like field burning, dumping poisonous chemicals from the sky on Oregon’s forest ecosystems is a perilous practice shown to be unnecessary and dangerous.

Aerial herbicide sprays threaten our drinking water, salmon habitats and air quality. The practice is especially harmful to rural communities and forestry workers.

Although we go up against seemingly insurmountable odds, Beyond Toxics is leaving a lasting environmental legacy.

During 2015, Beyond Toxics launched our Climate Justice Project. We are going into communities and speaking at the State Legislature, sharing an exciting plan to put Oregon at the forefront of achieving true climate justice. Our urban-rural partnerships are bringing all Oregonians together to demand climate solutions now!

So what’s the impact of our work? Each of our successful campaigns ensures that Oregon adopt lasting and equitable laws for environmental solutions.

We are working to protect Oregon’s ecological treasures so they endure for future generations. Our vision is one that tackles the root causes of today’s problems. We call out for justice, and include the voices of those whose health is most affected by the dangers we face.

Will you help us continue our effective programs to build a healthy, non-toxic Oregon with your donation? Be a vital part of this exciting action! Please support the most dedicated and successful environmental protection work you’ll find anywhere.

Sincerely,

Lisa Arkin, Executive Director

You can donate using the enclosed gift envelope or by going online: www.BeyondToxics.org.

P.S. Beyond Toxics is a grassroots, community-focused non-profit. Your donation makes a significant difference in our ability to advocate on your behalf. Consider becoming a monthly member or giving a gift membership.
Break-throghs for Health and the Environment
by Lisa Arkin

From the beginning of this century, Beyond Toxics has followed our passion for environmental justice. Why add the word “justice” to environmental work?

We understand that there is no respite for the environment, nor ultimate protection for air, water, and soil until we can guarantee safety and health for those who work the land and breathe the air in the most polluted places.

When we shaped our vision to include environmental justice, many environmental advocates considered this work “off-message,” or “unwinnable.” We were not deterred. We know that environmental justice elevates the work to address the root causes of the world’s environmental problems. The core causes are many. Beyond Toxics is working to end women and children’s vulnerability to pesticide exposure, as well as exploitation of vulnerable workers in resource extraction industries. We are also addressing the problem of treating rural and low-income communities and communities of color as dumping grounds for toxic pollution.

Our tenacious vision has garnered results! Your support has helped us accomplish so much:

Justice for the Land and the Worker --
Last fall, Beyond Toxics joined together with allies in the farm and forestry worker unions to host Oregon’s first environmental justice forum for farm and forestry workers. The testimony from workers compelled a series of reports in the Portland media that got the attention of key lawmakers. Today, a mere 8 months later, we are preparing for our first in a series of legislative hearings on the issue. Along with the help of our allies, Beyond Toxics assists workers who have endured injury from pesticides in timber and farming by bringing their voices to policy makers. In keeping with our approach, we are helping marginalized groups to share their experiences at the State Capitol.

Ban Aerial Pesticide Spraying Ballot Initiative --
True to our pledge we are relentlessly challenging aerial herbicide spraying in Oregon’s rural communities and forests. We are working equally hard to change laws that promote this ultra-hazardous activity in the state legislature, as well as taking the issue to the ballot by voter initiative. We’re going to need your help to achieve a victory mandate by Oregon voters next year!

Civil Rights in the Court Room --
We support communities who are fighting in court to demand an end to the criminal conduct of pesticide companies that spray children, workers, and drinking water systems. Beyond Toxics helps by providing grassroots organizing, health information, GIS mapping, and caring support for those suffering from toxic pesticide exposures.

No Secrets for Toxics Polluters --
Polluters think they can get away with poisoning nearby communities by not publically disclosing toxics they emit to local airsheds and watersheds. We’re going to end that secrecy! Beyond Toxics is working with many communities and elected representatives to demand that Oregon adopt a Toxics Reporting System, paired with a mandate for toxic use reductions. With those programs in place, communities will be guaranteed cleaner air and water, and solid information for future air quality policies.
Youth Are Rising Up for Climate Justice!

Including and amplifying young people’s voices
by Joel Iboa

*In the wake of an environmental crisis, youth must be heard.*

Workers’ rights, air toxics, pollinators, policy change, racial justice, chemical exposures, pesticides, herbicides - these and many others are all issues Beyond Toxics continues to fight for. And while it’s important that we continue this work, it’s also important that we remember who we are doing it for. A year ago Beyond Toxics made a commitment to engage with youth in Eugene.

There are many who say it is important to hear from the youth, to let them speak their mind, to give them opportunities to contribute. I heard this when I was in high school as well as throughout college. We want youth to become knowledgeable, intelligent, contributing members of society. Yet, Oregon has the lowest graduation rate in the country and many youth feel disempowered and apathetic.

I have been reaching out to youth, having conversations on environmental justice, food deserts, climate justice, and chemical exposure to workers. I’ve gone to high schools, youth groups, student unions on campus, and youth conferences throughout our Eugene. In classrooms at the University of Oregon, Beyond Toxics staff give several lectures each term. We also work with college students on projects that will benefit the larger community and contribute to reducing the harmful effects of toxics in our world.

Our questionnaire work seems to confirm the suspicion that when key community decisions are made, youth feel unheard. The questions that arise after our workshops include, “what can I do to make a difference, and how can I do it?” Lack of transportation, time commitments to school, work, sports, and family are all barriers to involvement. It is difficult for youth to attend city council meetings and climate justice rallies. It is difficult for them to hold meetings with elected officials, government agencies, and go to legislative hearings. We have made an effort to hear from youth. That’s why we created a unique questionnaire. How do YOUth Envision Eugene?

Through eight questions, we assessed the beliefs regarding climate change as well as environmental issues that are pertinent to youth and young adults in Eugene. We formulated this questionnaire with a talented group of University of Oregon students. Since February, we’ve recieverd over 140 submissions from 14-25 year olds from every public high school within Eugene city limits, as well as three colleges.

The questions are all centered on youth and their experiences. We want to know how aware they are about environmental issues, both on a local and global scale, and those issues which worry them the most. How do youth feel? Are they hopeful? Are they worried? Whose fault is it? Do they believe their family and future generations will live in a safe and healthy environment?

The last question was open-ended: “What six words come to mind when you think about the future of the environment?” (As pictured in the word cloud photo.) A range of responses and emotions where captured in those six words. Many were hopeful and ready for a change, while others were afraid and confused. The responses we gathered reflect the reality that youth are aware of what is going on around them—they cannot afford not to be aware. One thing was clear: they are ready for positive change.
Youth Are Rising Up for Climate Justice!

A life with dignity

by Joel Iboa

“Queremos una vida con dignidad, por una sociedad mas habitable.” - Katy Machoa

“We want a life with dignity, so we may have a more livable society.” - Katy Machoa

I heard Katy say these words at the annual CAER (Coalition Against Environmental Racism) conference at the University of Oregon. She was telling us about extractive companies coming into Ecuador and decimating the lands her people rely on to live. Many people she loves have been detained by authorities without due process. The slogan circulating around Ecuador, “To Resist [is] our Right,” is a rallying cry for all who recognize that climate change and environmental racism are real concerns.

We in the USA also experience these problems. From fracking and the Flint water crisis in the Midwest to industrial pollution and oil trains in the Northwest, it became clear to me that what historically has been affecting people of color and low-income communities is closing in on all of us.

The issues people face locally are reflected in oppressed communities abroad. Pollution knows no borders, be it water or air. Greed also knows no borders. Whether in cities or across the Amazon rainforest people face daunting vulnerabilities.

I often hear of people who try to do the right thing being silenced and slandered. What surprised me is the common thread of resistance. Across borders and time people have resisted and fought for their rights.

We will all feel the brunt of climate change, however, the first to feel its effects and the first to feel it hardest are marginalized communities. Because of this fact, it is more important than ever to participate in the fight for climate justice. There are long-standing threats against the health of these communities that are compounded by climate change. The “heat island effect” occurs when there is too much concrete and not enough green space, which leads to many deaths in cities worldwide. Rising temperatures create negative effects on communities, like West Eugene, that don’t have enough tree canopy.

Where the economy is in decline, there is political pressure on communities to accept polluting industries, such as fracking and biomass. These industries further exacerbate climate change.

The effects of climate change will be felt by all. Beyond Toxics and other organizations that are committed to providing change must contribute to the conversation.

We are committed to being leaders in the movement for climate justice.
Welcome new Beyond Toxics Board Member and Staff!

We’re grateful you are adding your knowledge and experience to Beyond Toxics!

Francis Eatherington
BOARD MEMBER

Francis worked as Conservation Director for Umpqua Watersheds and Cascadia Wildlands from 1995 through last year. She monitored public land projects for compliance with environmental regulations, with a focus on protecting old growth forests. Francis lives in an intentional community outside of Roseburg and cares for 57 acres of wildlife habitat. She worked to stop the Jordan Cove LNG Export Project in southern Oregon and is active in the effort to reform the Oregon Forest Practices Act.

Krystal Abrams
STAFF: Social Media & Outreach Coordinator

Krystal was raised in a Cherokee-Muscogee family in northern Florida. After graduating from a community college she embarked on a road trip across America which led her to settle in Eugene and study Environmental Sciences at the University of Oregon. During her time at UO she collaborated with the McKenzie Watershed Council (MWC) and the McKenzie River Trust (MRT) to monitor and restore critical riparian habitat along the McKenzie River. After graduation, Krystal recruited and managed volunteers for the Walama Restoration Project, leading non-chemical environmental restoration work parties and nature hikes around the Eugene-Springfield Area. When she’s not reaching out to advocate for environmental education and conservation, you can find her whipping up some speed on a nearby bike path or hiking and enjoying the great outdoors.

Emily Hajarizadeh
STAFF: Legal Assistant

Emily is a second-year law student and Hans Linde Fellow at the University of Oregon School of Law. She is a graduate of Portland State University where she earned a degree in Environmental Studies with a focus on Urban Planning and Sustainable Systems, and a minor in Spanish. During her legal education, Emily has worked with Crag Law Center in Portland, Oregon, on environmental quality issues in the Klamath Basin.

Emily aims to focus on a career in public service, working toward social, cultural, economic, and environmental equity in the Pacific Northwest. She enjoys hiking the snow-capped Cascades, cultivating communal feasts from her garden, and long-distance cycling trips through the diverse landscapes of Oregon.
The Power of Coalition by Joel Iboa

In September of 2015 we held the first ever “Justice for the Land and the Worker” an event focused on connecting the experiences of workers with the Governors Environmental Justice Task Force and the 14 state agencies required to attend. Over 10 people testified that day. They made it clear that chemical exposure in the workplace is still a problem. These workers testified that basic rights such as access to water, a bathroom, and a workplace free of discrimination was not a reality for them. Since that day we have had many milestones on the path to finding justice for those workers and workers like them.

This ground breaking event was just the beginning of our campaign. Since then, I spoke at a number of high profile events that served to strengthen this movement.

October 2015: “Environmental Justice for Healthy Communities” panel at the 2015 Democratic Summit (Bend)

November 2015: Oregon Environmental Council’s “Present Matters: A look at environmental justice challenges in Oregon today” conference (Portland)

November 2015: Environmental Justice Issues panel: House Committee on Energy and the Environment (Salem)

February 2016: Roundtable discussion with Brad Avakian (BOLI Commissioner) and Michael Wood (OR-OSHEA Administrator) at the Environmental Justice Task Force (Salem)

MAY 2016: Senate Committee on Workforce hearing: forestry workers

These milestones are paramount. We are proud of them. I am proud of them. Our relationship with well-established organizations -- the Northwest Forest Worker Center, UNETE, and PCUN -- are key to our continued success. We value the power of working in a coalition. As we move forward it has become clear that we need more allies, more supporters.

We want workers who work on farms and in forests to be safe from chemical exposure. These concerns are but a sliver of larger systemic issues that bleed beyond our state borders.

We have many questions and fully expect resistance on our road to justice, but regardless of the obstacles we face, we will not stop fighting.

We hope you will stand with us as we forge ahead.

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BEE-FRIENDLY GARDENING

1. Plant bright blue and violet flowers to attract bees to your garden
2. Plant for continual blooms throughout spring, summer and fall
3. Use all-natural organic pest and weed control methods
4. Say, "NO!" to neonicotinoids
Beyond Toxics weaves social justice and human rights advocacy into environmental protection policies.

Leadership for a Clean and Just Oregon

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Beyond Toxics invites you to Bee Jazzy!

SAVE THE DATE
Thursday
August 25
6 PM
A benefit to save bees
AT
Silvan Ridge
WINERY

Make your plans to attend Bee Jazzy!

Featuring music by A Side of Beets

Sponsored by: Kim Kelly, the Oregon Insurance Lady and Oregon’s Constant Gardener