



## Center for Health, Environment & Justice

### NEWS RELEASE

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### **Scientists, Advocates to EPA: "Protect Families from Cancer-Causing Dioxin"**

*Advocates, Scientists Meet with EPA Officials to Call for Stronger Soil Cleanup Standards*

**Falls Church, VA** – The time for incremental progress is passed, according to scientists, environmental health advocates and community activists gathered to respond to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s draft cleanup goals for the cancer-causing chemical dioxin. The draft cleanup goals, first announced in December, lower cleanup levels for residential areas to 72 parts per trillion (ppt), down from the current standard of 1,000 ppt. However, this standard is based only on non-cancer health effects and does not adequately address the known carcinogenic properties of dioxin. The EPA has acknowledged that a cancer-protective standard for soil cleanup would be 3.7 ppt.

As the public comment period draws to a close this week, environmental health advocates from the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ) and allies met with EPA officials to voice their concern that the proposed standards will not sufficiently protect human health.

"To protect the health of American families, EPA must set health-protective cleanup goals for dioxin that are based on both cancer and non-cancer health effects. There is no justification for only using non-cancer endpoints. EPA needs to revise the cleanup goals for dioxin in soil to take into consideration a cancer risk of one-in-a-million, as well as non-cancer effects," said **Stephen Lester, CHEJ Science Director**.

Mr. Lester presented EPA officials with letters from over 145 environmental health, consumer and community organizations and over thirty labor groups concerned over the cancer impact of dioxin contamination. Groups such as the United Auto Workers, Service Employees International Union, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, United Steelworkers and the Communications Workers of America signed on to a letter expressing concern that under the new standards, workers will be exposed to the much higher level of 950 ppt. Additionally, over 2,000 individuals have taken action and sent letters to the EPA.

**Professor of Environmental Health Richard Clapp DSc, MPH of Boston University's School of Public Health** further commented, "The EPA has been officially reassessing dioxin for over twenty years now. The scientific evidence has only gotten stronger over that time period. EPA should set dioxin standards that are as low as reasonably achievable, with the ultimate goal of zero exposure." States such as Florida, Maryland, Oregon, Delaware and Nebraska have set state soil cleanup levels below 10 ppt.

Mr. Lester was careful to acknowledge that the preliminary cleanup goals are a step in the right direction, even as the goal of fully protective standards have been complicated by efforts of the chlorine-based chemical industry to delay the release of an EPA health assessment for dioxin. "For approximately two decades, efforts by EPA to assess the risks of dioxin have been delayed. We commend EPA Administrator Jackson for finally moving forward with the development of preliminary cleanup goals to protect the health of the American people from exposure to dioxin. But EPA must address dioxin's classification as a human carcinogen."

Leaders from dioxin-contaminated communities also attended the meeting with EPA. The Tittabawassee River in Michigan has become the largest dioxin-contaminated site in the country. Dow Chemical has contaminated approximately 50 miles of a Great Lakes watershed in Michigan with dioxin. Parks, residential backyards, fish and game have all been contaminated.

**Michelle Hurd Riddick of Lone Tree Council** is counting on the new cleanup standards to make the communities along the river safe for children once more: "It is long past time for EPA to take definitive action and reject industry's ongoing campaign to minimize the toxicity of dioxin. Absent an explicit position from EPA, cleanup in Mid Michigan has languished in a veritable limbo created by Dow's aggressive politics and ability to manufacture scientific uncertainty about dioxin."

**Margaret Williams, a survivor of another dioxin-contaminated community** offers a sobering reminder of the human toll of dioxin exposure. Ms. Williams lived in a Pensacola, FL neighborhood next to the Escambia Wood Treating Company Superfund Site, more commonly known as "Mt. Dioxin." She lost two children and watched both parents die of cancer. "Many families put up little white crosses in front of their homes, for the family members they had lost. A cleanup standard that fails to protect families and children from a known cancer risk is not good enough." Ms. Williams led the local community group Citizens Against Toxic Exposure (CATE) that worked for the relocation of over 400 families and advocated for the soil cleanup standard of 7 ppt that Florida enjoys today.

The EPA's public comment period ends on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and EPA plans to finalize the soil cleanup guidelines by June, 2010, which will have a major impact on dioxin-contaminated sites across the United States.

**ATTENTION Reporters:** Copies of the labor and coalition letters to EPA are available upon request by contacting Moira Bulloch: [mbulloch@chej.org](mailto:mbulloch@chej.org) 703-237-2249 ext. 19. For additional dioxin information and resources, please visit <http://www.chej.org/campaigns-Key%20Dioxin%20Resources.html>

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#### About CHEJ

The Center for Health, Environment & Justice exists to mentor the movement to build healthier communities by empowering people to prevent harm in as many ways, and for as many people, as possible. We believe this can happen when people and groups have the power to play an integral role in promoting human health and environmental integrity. CHEJ's role is to provide the tools, the direction, and the encouragement to these people and groups, so that they can build strong, healthy communities where they live, work, learn, shop, play and pray. Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for the people living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ in 1981 in order to continue mentoring others seeking to prevent harm. CHEJ provides mentoring assistance to communities, homeowners, families and individuals throughout the country. To date, CHEJ has assisted over 10,000 groups nationwide. Currently, CHEJ is mentoring community groups in Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina and Ohio. Details on CHEJ's efforts to help people and communities prevent harm can be found at <http://chej.org/>.