



Louisiana Environmental Justice Voices

Volume 1, Issue 4

December 2004

Louisiana Environmental Justice Project

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Shintech Round Three

by Darryl Malek-Wiley

The Shintech Corporation has a history, which began in the 1990's, of trying to site a "World Class" PVC production plant in Louisiana.

Round One was the proposal to place the plant in Convent in St. James Parish. Shintech lost and the round went to the environmental justice and community activists.

Round Two was Shintech 'light,' a smaller plant built in Iberville and West Baton Rouge Parish, which slipped through the process and the round went to Shintech.

Following this round, the fight for a clean and safe environment for our families and our future in Louisiana focused on other fights and struggles.

Then, a news release on the December 7, from Shin-Etsu, the parent company of Shintech, stated that the company wants to build their "World Class" PVC production plant in Louisiana or Texas. Shortly after, the Baton Rouge Advocate ran the story about Shin-Etsu/Shintech's plans in the article, "La. Sites on Short List for New Shintech Plant" (12/9/04).

This was not what Louisiana's environmental justice activists wanted for the Holiday Season.

The following Tuesday, December 14th, a group of us went to the meeting held by Shintech to

learn and listen about the new plan and the start of Round Three.

The good news was that 350 people showed up for the hearing, showing that interest in the Shintech proposal is high. The bad news was that 345 of those people wanted the plant to be built. The Baton Rouge Advocate headline the next morning was, "Most Support Shintech plan at meeting" (12/15/04)

Thus brings forth the questions the EJ community must ask ourselves:

- What does this new plant-siting mean for people who care about the environment and the future of Louisiana?
- What should we be doing to plan for the next hearings in January 2005?
- What should we as environmentalists and environmental justice activists be saying at those meetings and to the media about the proposed "World Class" Shintech PVC Plant?
- Should we focus on making this the most environmentally sound chemical plant in the world or do we just want to say NO?

These are the questions, and I do not yet have the answers. Please call or e-mail me with your thoughts.

The next hearings are set for Thursday, January 6th in Addis and Thursday, January 13th at the Iberville Civic Center.

From Bhopal to Louisiana

A call for corporate accountability and environmental justice

The Association for India's Development (AID) of Baton Rouge, a non-profit organization, will hold a Bhopal Day as part of its campaign to raise awareness on the fight for environmental justice in Bhopal and all around the world.

AID seeks to explore what such corporate environmental crimes could hold for the future, in-

cluding in Louisiana and the U.S. The evening's discussion will also shed light on how the Bhopal tragedy affected chemical and related industries in the U.S and American policy-making in these areas.

The event will feature a documentary followed by (see **Bhopal**, page 4)

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SIERRA CLUB STAFF GET LESSON IN CIVIL RIGHTS

by Mara Cohen

On Thursday, December 2nd, I was given the chance, to recall the challenges of grassroots organizing. The Sierra Club Southeast Staff Retreat had brought me to the South's center of social change, in Birmingham, Alabama.



Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (HABS/HAER Photograph from www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/all1.htm)

Our first stop was at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which served as a meeting place for civil rights advocates during the 1950's and 60's. Unfortunately, the church is also well known because of a bomb that exploded under its side staircase, killing four young girls. While racially charged bombings were so frequent in Birmingham that the city was known as "Bombingham", this violent attack on civil rights brought national and international attention to the struggle. Although the church has moved on and rebuilt the damaged walls and stained glass windows, largely due to the generosity of others nationally and internationally, they did not rebuild the steps where the bomb was hidden.

When visiting the church, you can see that it still has a vibrant community. While they show videos of the tragic event of the past, they also focus on the crucial role the church played in creating change and welcoming prominent leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They hope to carry their progressive tradition through the future.

After leaving the hub of influential grassroots organizing, we went just across the street to the Civil Rights Institute, which documents the history of Birmingham and its large role in civil rights. Walking through exhibits that recreated the mood, I was struck by the unrelenting power of the organizers, who were depicted through film and photos. One photo showed students preparing for a sit-in by practicing ignoring distractions.

They relied on nonviolent, civil disobedience and were ready to sit immobile for as long as needed to gain equal rights. A short documentary showed the courage of advocates who journeyed on the Freedom Ride, a bus that went from Washington, DC to New Orleans, filled with both black and white activists. While this group was met with violence in Alabama and Mississippi, other took the same historic bus trip in a sign on solidarity.

The exhibits utilized a variety of displays to show the struggle, opposition and determination involved in the fight. One visual piled a stack of books to compare the number of children per classroom in segregated white schools (around 25) versus the black schools (around 45). Then, in the "Confrontation Gallery," obstinate, ghostly faces watch your every move, alluding to the time after the *Brown v. Board of Education* case when integration was encouraged. Those faces wanted to stay as far away from what was unfamiliar as they could. They were not looking for change or progress. They did not want to consider any change to the status quo.

There are many lessons we can take from the civil rights movement in the struggle for environmental justice. We must remember for environmental justice that change takes time. In the EJ struggle, we have seen these same obstinate faces that do not want to listen to the facts. These hardened faces cannot stop us, but we can be loud and open their ears to realities. We must continue to stick together and support each other in the separate struggles that combine to create the large environmental justice problem in Louisiana.

The 16th Baptist Church and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute represent a pivotal time in our history that should never be forgotten, but should be used as an inspiration for our future struggles. Whether it's for civil rights or environmental justice, the means are just as important as the ends. You can find more information about the Civil Rights Institute at www.bcric.org

TELL US YOUR STORY!

Submit your articles & creative writing for the December Louisiana Environmental Justice Voices by Wednesday, Jan 5th.

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MERCURY CONTAMINATION POISONING LOUISIANA ANGLERS

by Ann Taylor, Louisiana Sportsman Magazine

Mercury contamination has become a major battle cry nationwide for environmental groups. With some of the highest mercury emissions in the U.S., Louisiana is at the forefront of this controversy.

Industry giants, the chlorine-making plants and coal-fired power plants, contend that their mercury releases are within the legal limits, and are low enough not to affect public health.

National environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council dispute this, claiming there is evidence that the chlor-alkali plants are underreporting the amount of mercury they are releasing into the environment. They also claim that the mercury released from these plants is raising the concentrations in our waterways to dangerous levels.

“There have been significant discharges of mercury over the last 50 years, and that's the mercury that's in the soil,” says Barry Kohl, geologist at Tulane University and chair of the New Orleans Audubon council.

Among the biggest offenders in amount of mercury released into the air are Louisiana's two Pioneer America chlor-alkali plants, one in Lake Charles and one in St. Gabriel.

Only nine such plants that use mercury in their chlorine-making process are still operating in the U.S. The rest have switched to a much cleaner process that does not use mercury.

Most of the chlor-alkali plants like the ones still operating in Louisiana were closed down.

“Two plants in Alabama, one in North Carolina and one in Texas have been closed down and are now superfund sites,” Kohl said.

In Louisiana, the Pioneer America chlor-alkali plants have been given a free ride.

Louisiana's two plants report discharging two tons of mercury into the air every year. They could be releasing much more according to an article published by The Washington Post last June.

“Each year (chlor-alkali) plants buy massive amounts of mercury – in 2002 it totaled more than 100 tons- to replace the amount they lose in production,” stated the article.

That would leave over 20 tons of mercury unaccounted for in the Louisiana plants in just one year.

“Over 50 percent of the mercury from these plants falls within a 10- to 20-mile radius of the plant. The rest drifts with the wind,” says Kohl, who also holds conservation chair of the Sierra Club in New Orleans.

Kohl says mercury emissions from these plants are responsible for poisoning 29 Louisiana waterways, including fishing hotspots like the Atchafalaya Basin.

This is a concern for everybody who enjoys fishing, and eating their catch, because once the mercury gets into the water, it can take hundreds of years to get out.

Kohl said that most of the other chlor-alkali plants in the U.S. have converted to the diaphragm process, which does not use mercury at all and is much cleaner. But Louisiana has not required its plants to do this.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco's administration has begun a mercury initiative that has opened the door for an investigation into the mercury pollution problem. By the beginning of 2005, they hope to present a mercury action plan.

“The fact they're having meetings open to the public, which has never been done before because of that I think this administration is really trying to change things,” said Kohl.

Louisiana Sportsman Magazine brings the outdoors indoors by providing readers with the most up-to-the-minute hunting and fishing news found anywhere across the state. Subscribe today: 800-538-4355.



Boy with flounder
(<http://home.gwi.net/~ccamaine/ccastory.htm>)

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environmental_justice](http://www.sierraclub.org/environmental_justice)



Bhopal (cont from page 1)

two speakers. "Bhopal: The search of justice," a documentary film on Bhopal from the National film board of Canada, will be shown first. Then you will hear from Nishant Jain, an active Bhopal campaigner for 5 years and AID volunteer; and Darryl Malek-Wiley, Associate Representative and Grassroots organizer, Sierra Club. Finally, there will be open discussion among speakers and the audience.

Date: December 18, 2004 (Saturday)

Time: 6.00 pm-8.00 pm

Venue: Room 1109, CEBA Building, Louisiana State University

For more information: Email: aidbatonrouge@yahoo.com; Phone: 225-281-6162 or 225-281-6840

History

Twenty years ago, on December 3, 1984, Union Carbide's pesticide factory in Bhopal, India, released more than 27 tons of deadly gas into the air. As a result of this catastrophe, 20 thousand people are dead, 50 thousand disabled and 150 thousand still suffering to date. Bhopal is known as the "Hiroshima of the chemical industry" and remains the worst industrial disaster in human history.

The Union Carbide Corporation came into India promising a green revolution with their super chemical "Methyl Isocyanate."

**May you have a joyous holiday
season & a happy new year!**

For the people of Bhopal, it was an encounter with death. Union Carbide's cost-cutting ensured that none of the six safety systems were operational on that fateful day, allowing gas to spread throughout the city of Bhopal. This corporate disregard for basic safety left 8 thousand people dead in the first week. Twenty thousand have died to date. Today, thousands of tons of toxic wastes in and around the Bhopal factory continue to contaminate the environment and leach poisons and cancer-causing chemicals into the groundwater sources that supply a community of 20,000 people. Dow Chemical, which acquired Union Carbide, has refused to take responsibility for its liabilities in Bhopal so far and has not taken any action on its part to clean up the mess that Union Carbide left.

Although 20 years have passed, the group emphasizes the need to continue to hold the corporation responsible for the worst industrial disaster in human history. In 1984 it may have Bhopal, but without corporate accountability and environmental justice, this tragedy could be repeated anywhere. There is still time to make a difference.

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

<http://batonrouge.aidindia.org>

Join the Sierra Club for Lunch!

As always you are welcome to join the Sierra Club- Baton Rouge for our monthly brown bag lunch. The next lunch will be on **Jan 11th**. Please RSVP to mara.cohen@sierraclub.org or 225-925-8650