

Building a Healthy Organization

In this, our third year, the capacity and structure of LEAS have been greatly enhanced. We have a 19-member Board of Directors with wide representation from the labour and environment communities and a close connection with many aspects of labour-environmental alliance work.

We have produced and published an introductory pamphlet about the organization, a new logo and letterhead. A website is currently under construction and should be fully operational by the new year. All our materials now carry the new logo which features water, air and mountains that we all share, together with a red rose, symbolizing equality and social justice (after the famous labour song Bread and Roses). Our mission statement now reads "Revitalizing jobs and the environment through social justice".

We undertook a membership and individual donor drive and now have 80+ members who have contributed more than \$7,000.



A few of our board members: Harold Funk (l), Mitch Anderson, Mae Burrows, Loretta Woodcock, Herb Barbolet.

Staffing and volunteers

Since July 1, 2001, Mae has been working full-time for the Labour Environmental Alliance. Sean Griffin continues to work half-time producing communication materials, a number of people have done short-term contract work, and we have volunteers to call upon. I am particularly pleased about three key volunteers who have contributed an enormous amount of time and expertise to LEAS issues. We have:

Larry Stoffman: a nationally acknowledged expert in occupational health and safety and hazardous materials. He is a member of the Canadian Labour Congress and BC Federation of Labour Health and Safety committees, and Health and Safety officer for United Food and Commercial Workers' Union.

Claudia Ferris: CEO of Production Magic Inc., Claudia's company has produced dozens of educational, documentary and training videos for industry, unions and non-profit groups over the last 20 years. She has very useful connections in industry, and she has done significant pro bono work for LEAS over the last year.

Louise Leclair: Louise has worked in the communications field for 20 years and is currently on leave from her position as Communications Director for CUPE-BC. She is working with us to update our strategic plan and to produce material to explain our programs and role. She will also develop and execute a media strategy so that LEAS can move out from our background facilitating role and more into the public view.

LEAS has rented an office in downtown Vancouver on Water Street, close to other environmental and social justice organizations. We are located on the premises of Farmfolk/Cityfolk to share their equipment. Our goals are very compatible. FarmFolk/CityFolk executive director Herb Barbolet is an active LEAS board member.

Greening Jobs

I was a guest advisor for the Winter 2001 edition of ALTERNATIVES Journal on “Green Jobs, Good Work”, which contained a number of articles on green jobs and greening jobs. I also wrote a feature article in the journal, entitled “Just Transition: Moving to a green economy.”

Cleaners, Toxins and the Ecosystem. This project helps workers and environmentalists recognize that environmental issues are also health and safety issues. Cleaners, Toxins and the Ecosystem, works through local union health and safety committees to examine the ingredients in commercial cleaning products, understand the health and environmental effects of using these products, and bring health and safety activists and environmentalists together to find environmentally responsible substitutes.

Our work to date involves: a long-term care home (Hospital Employee’s Union), a sports facility, major hotel and the Vancouver Airport (Canadian Autoworkers’ union), mega-food store and meat packing plant (United Food and Commercial Workers’), Burnaby schools (Canadian Union of Public Employees-B.C.), and an office complex (International Longshore and Warehouse—Canada). We also have the T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation, Sierra Legal Defense, Workers’ Compensation Board, Corporate Cleaning for B.C. Buildings Corporation, Reach for Unbleached, B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union, B.C. Teachers’ Federation and the B.C. Federation of Labour Health and Safety Committee involved in the project. We have several requests to undertake this project at other union and non-union worksites.



Mae Burrows (top left) with members of the Hospital Employees Union working on the Cleaners and Toxins project.

While we have been effective in some cases in substituting products containing carcinogenic or endocrine-disrupting toxins, one of the aspects of this program I am most proud of is how this project presents an opportunity to engage people not normally involved in “environmental” issues in discussions about our inadequate sewage treatment facilities and how these toxins affect the receiving environment, and the impact they have on the health of salmon, Orcas, and other marine life.

This project has highlighted the need for the development of non-toxic cleaning products, source control bylaws to eliminate these toxins from entering our sewage system and for a national right-to-know campaign that would compel manufacturers to provide ingredient labelling and potential health effects on products intended for the household consumer market..

The labour movement is becoming increasingly engaged in workplace Prevent Cancer campaigns following the lead of the CAW and CLC in this area. We see a key strategic alliance-building opportunity to bring worker health and safety issues together with environmental problems.

I will participate in a political action panel on our project at the November CLC conference “Preventing



Looking over MSDS for the Cleaners and Toxins project.

Cancer and Occupational/Environmental Disease.” Elizabeth May from the Sierra Club, and Andy King from the Steelworkers’ Toronto Prevent Cancer campaign will also be on the panel. I will also be a workshop facilitator at the conference.

Sean and I will also be leading a major workshop on the Cleaners and Toxins project at the Hospital Employees’ Union annual health and safety conference where 100 rank-and-file activists will be in attendance.

I participated in a provincial multi-stakeholder consultation on Pollution Prevention. Through the Labour Environmental Alliance, I officially represented the B.C. Environmental Network.

Environmental Education.

LEAS has created a number of opportunities to undertake environmental education with teachers and students:

Earth Day in the Schools. With volunteer union members, we reached 2,500 Grade 4/5 and 10/11 students with CAW “Making a World of Difference” materials as an Earth Day activity.

B.C. Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) Social Justice and Environment Committees.

We have established an effective relationship with the members of the B.C. Teachers’ Federation’s social justice and environment committees. We are exploring the relationships between social justice, environmental justice and just transition.

Improving sewage infrastructure/eliminating toxins.

LEAS has been working with its board members from Sierra Legal Defense and the T Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation on sewage issues. We have undertaken research and have urged the provincial government not to approve the Greater Vancouver Regional District’s Liquid Waste management plan. This plan is based on “risk analysis,” with enforcement action to be taken only after possibly irreversible damage has been done. It is the direct opposite of the precautionary principle.

We have been developing relationships among workers in the unions involved in sewage treatment and pollution prevention and have also established some contacts in pollution prevention and water quality monitoring in the federal and provincial environment ministries. We are also still working on possible litigation strategies under the federal Fisheries Act, and want to develop a campaign for source control bylaws (see Proposal section).

Enforcing environmental regulations/protecting environmental rights.

We continue to meet with the B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union’s environment committee to discuss whistle-blower protection and other issues related to de-regulation of environmental standards. We have been supporting the development of the Public Service Employees’ for Environmental Ethics, an advocacy organization for public service environmental workers to inform the public about environmental problems without being silenced by senior management or government.

Public Transit.

We have become involved in Vancouver-area transit issues in coalition with Better Environmentally Sound Transportation, the AMS UBC Bike Co-op, MayWorks, SPEC and the bus drivers and mechanics union (CAW



LEAS volunteers Darcy Suehn and Loretta Woodcock in the classroom for Earth day.

111 and 2200). We organized a major forum, “More Buses. Lower Fares” that drew over 250 people and contained organizational workshops to deal with transit issues from a number of perspectives. The Labour Environmental Alliance brought the successful bus-riders union from Los Angeles to Vancouver last year, and we lent support to the formation of a new group – the Bus Riders’ Union, which is independent from LEAS and is undertaking public awareness and advocacy regarding bus cuts among transit-dependent people. We will continue to be involved in the transit debate as it involves labour, environmental and social justice issues.

WaterWatch/GVRD Water Filtration.

With the Council of Canadians, we organized the first public meeting on the issue of privatizing the Seymour water filtration system. The “It’s Our Water. Keep It Public” meeting included union and NGO panelists as well as Marvin Hunt, chair of the GVRD water Committee. More than 250 people attended the forum which served as a springboard to educate and involve the public in this issue. Collectively, we were able to persuade the GVRD not to privatize the filtration system, but we must maintain our voice on the issue of keeping public resources public.

Health Effects of Exposure to Toxic Mould.

We are also working on the issue of health effects from exposure to toxic mould. Our growing coalition includes First Nations, social, co-op and rental housing groups, community and environmental groups, health and safety committees of unions including the building trades, health care workers, teachers, and public employees. Surprisingly, this is a hot topic that allows us to bring a diverse group together to work collectively.

We held two very successful public forums, one on housing issues and the other on work related issues. We have over 200 people attend the two forums, and I have fielded over 300 calls on this issue. I appeared on several radio talk shows including Rafe Mair and the CBC Afternoon show.

We have two steering committees — worksite and housing issues — and a defined strategic plan for each. We have identified an overlapping public education project dealing with health issues from exposure to mould. However, we need resources to undertake this work and it is very difficult to find a source of funding for this cutting-edge work from either the environmental or health communities.

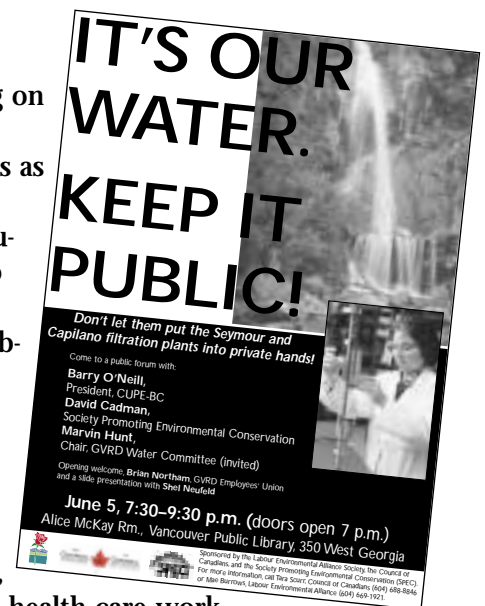
Extending Labour Environmental Social Justice Relationships

The two objectives that we haven’t met this year were to:

- Extend our relationships into multi-ethnic communities, particularly into the Indo-Canadian communities heavily represented in the janitorial and fish packing sectors.
- Have a Canadian miner do a study tour to Peru with the Environmental Mining Council of BC and their allies. While we had an enthusiastic volunteer CAW miner to go, we were unable to raise funds to pay his expenses.

However, we have:

- Extended our reach into unions that don’t normally engage in environmental or community-coalition activities;



- Received a standing invitation to environment committee meetings of six unions (BCGEU, CUPE-BC, PPWC, Vancouver and District Labour Council, Canadian Labour Congress and CAW);
- Become involved in the Clean Air Coalition, which is campaigning to maintain WCB regulations preventing smoking in any workplace (including bars and restaurants). The coalition includes: the Canadian Cancer Society, Lung Association, B.C. Medical Association, several unions and citizen groups;
- Become members of the Forest Futures B.C. Coalition for Sustainable Forestry;
- Supported the activities of the Canadian Reforestation and Environmental Workers (silviculture workers) and have attended an international Canada/Mexico/US summit on non-traditional forestry work and contingent labour organized by the Jefferson Centre;
- Contributed to the development of Headlines Theatre's production of Thirsty, an upcoming main stage production featuring water issues;
- Started working with the Vancouver and District Labour Council Environment Committee to bring back the monthly networking forums.

Pacific Northwest Strategic relations

We have also been developing excellent relationships with social justice, labour council and environmental groups in the U.S. and would like to organize a Pacific Northwest Summit or strategy session. It is clear that environmental, labour, and social justice standards will be challenged during the coming years.

Public Awareness or Visibility Achieved.

We are gratified that more individuals and organizations in the environmental and labour sectors have embraced our alliance-building approach. We have seen positive outcomes from that work. However, one of the biggest dilemmas that I and LEAS face is how to obtain public visibility when the crux of our environmental and social movement building work consists of background facilitation and organizing. For example, we organize forums for our allies to come together and present their information — people who would otherwise never meet each other. However, it is the speakers and not LEAS that gets the profile. We have proven to be an effective catalytic organization that gets campaigns mounted and new and stronger alliances built, but does not create a profile for LEAS. This is our greatest strength in social movement building and environmental campaigning, but also our weakness in terms of establishing a greater public profile for LEAS. We cannot reach our maximum effectiveness unless other groups, potential funders and the general public learn about us and see the pivotal role that we play. We are going to work on that a great deal more in 2002.

General Financial Status

LEAS has grown an appropriate amount again this year. Our funding base has increased and our sources diversified. We received grants from: Endswell, Bullitt, Vancouver Foundation, Tides (Brothers' Fund), Vancity Enviro Fund, Health Canada, and Environment Canada Eco-action. We have received generous donations from several unions including the Canadian Autoworkers' Union, Canadian Union of Public Employees (\$6,350), Hospital Employees Union (\$2,000), United Food and Commercial Workers' Union (\$2,000) and from membership and other donations, including Robert Bateman (\$6,000). Unfortunately, layoffs have dramatically affected the dues base of the CAW, and it is looking pessimistic that we will receive funding when they are having to cut core programs in the union. This will present a large gap in our funding base.

We have been operating on a budget for 1.5 staff with some contract work, and find that we are under-resourced at that level. While I am aware that this could be a tough year economically, I still have a goal of 2.5 staff since the success of our work is demanding at least that much time.

Strategic plans

Our plans for the coming year include:

1. Building cross movement relationships:

- Within BC: Work with labour, environmental and social justice groups on specific projects and develop common perspectives and strategies to maintain and revitalize environmental, labour and social justice rights. Expand the network to include social justice, student and anti-poverty groups, as well as additional unions and their locals.
- Cross border: Develop relationships and common strategies (Pacific Northwest Strategy Session) with groups in B.C. and south of the border, including Jobs With Justice, Labor Centre at Evergreen State College, Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment as well as in Canada, such as the Citizens' Environment Alliance and the Windsor Environment Council.

2. Use the convergence of health-and-safety and environmental issues to develop concrete campaigns to green jobs, eliminate toxins, prevent cancer, fight deregulation, and develop right-to-know labelling.

- Build capacity and expand range of worksites and unions involved in the Cleaners, Toxins and the Ecosystem project. Undertake projects on new worksites. Develop the skills of current participants to research the effects of ingredients on human health and the environment.
- Undertake workshops with suppliers to educate them about the effects of ingredients in the cleaning products they sell and to promote the development and wider distribution of non-toxic and "green" products.
- Initiate research and develop strategy and allies in a right-to-know labelling campaign. We could parallel the right-to-know labelling campaign for genetically modified food, thereby building critical mass on right-to-know labelling issues.
- Continue to link health effects from exposure to toxins with the discharge of these toxins into rivers and oceans because of inadequate sewage-treatment facilities. Develop a source control by-law program modelled after the recently enacted by-laws in Toronto.
- Continue to work on the struggle to prevent deregulation of environmental and labour standards. Develop education in the environmental community about the value of workers compensation laws and the need to maintain and strengthen these laws as a tactic to protect the environment.
- Seize and create opportunities for labour and environmental activists to work together on health and environmental prevent cancer issues. For instance, becoming involved in the struggle to maintain WCB regulations that ban smoking from all work environments gives us an opportunity to work with the medical professionals as well as citizen groups such as Airspace and other unions.

3. Develop greater visibility and increased communication for LEAS.

This is a new strategic direction for us this year and our goals are necessarily preliminary at this time:

- Complete website development and focus on communication through links and additions to website.
- Produce two newsletters.
- Continue to produce articles for other organizations' newsletters.
- Work in a more focused way on LEAS' media presence.

