

# A year to remember for Ohio Citizen Action

Ohio Citizen Action has had a year of tremendous accomplishment, including the culmination of several major campaigns. Here's a synopsis of the highlights since October 2007:



## **AEP agrees to record-breaking clean up of coal plants**

Columbus –based American Electric Power (AEP) agreed in October 2007 to a \$4.6 billion clean-up of 16 coal plants to settle the Ohio Citizen Action et al v. AEP et al lawsuit. Ten of the coal plants are in Ohio or on its border.

More emission cuts are required under the agreement that in any other single air

pollution settlement in history, according to the U.S. EPA. The AEP plants will emit 79% less sulfur dioxide by 2018, and 69% less nitrogen oxides by 2016. These pollutants form fine particles which can aggravate heart and lung disease, and also cause acid rain.

The lawsuit, brought by 13 environmental organizations, 8 Northeastern states, and the U.S. EPA, took eight years to make its way through the court system. Ohio Citizen Action was represented in the case by the Environmental Law and Policy Center.



## **General Environmental Management (GEM) shuts down**

One of Cleveland's most notorious polluters shut down in 2008. GEM was the source of a sickening chemical smell which covered several neighborhoods, downtown, and workers at the nearby U.S. Post Office. Ohio Citizen Action conducted its own air pollution tests at the facility in late 2005 and early 2006, documenting the release of chemical solvents from a "biotreatment" unit. The facility had a major explosion in April 2006, sending

five workers to the hospital with burns, shaking homes for two miles, and filling the skies with black smoke.

After the explosion, Ohio Citizen Action called on Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson to close the facility, and organized community meetings and public events, where neighbors wore ribbons made of duct tape. We exposed GEM's attempts to hide public records from the community. The City of Cleveland Division of Fire and U.S. EPA both took enforcement actions against GEM, which finally confirmed in June 2008 that it would close rather than spend over \$1 million for new fire safety equipment.



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## **Good neighbor campaign victory: Eramet Marietta announces \$170 million investment**

Paris-based mining and metals giant Eramet announced in August

2008 that it will invest \$150 million to clean up its manganese refinery in Marietta on the Ohio - West Virginia border. This investment is in addition to the \$20 million commitment made earlier in the year and came after months of talks between plant management, Neighbors for Clean Air, and Ohio Citizen Action.

Ohio Citizen Action launched its “good neighbor campaign” at Eramet in March 2006, working with neighbors who had been experiencing terrible odors and the release of the dangerous metal manganese from the facility. Manganese, when inhaled, causes symptoms including tremors, balance problems, impotence, and emotional rages and has recently been linked to Parkinson’s disease. Our campaign was the catalyst for a five –year University of Cincinnati study on how manganese affects Marietta’s children.

The campaign built a local base of over 400 local supporters in two states, and involved 58,375 Ohio Citizen Action members in sending personal letters, children’s drawings, and petitions to Eramet managers and officials of the French government. Two hundred residents put up “Eramet: Let’s Clear the Air” yard signs, and when the Neighbors for Clean Air were told they were “too controversial” to march in the 2007 Labor Day Parade, two neighbors filed a successful lawsuit to protect their First Amendment rights.

The turning point in the campaign came in December 2007, when the campaign focused on Eramet’s second-largest shareholder, the French government. France’s Ambassador to the United States, Pierre Vimont, became involved in bringing Eramet and the neighbors together. Neighbors for Clean Air and Ohio Citizen Action will continue to work with Eramet over the next several years as the plant implements its plans and improves its relationships with its neighbors.

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Throughout the past year, Ohio Citizen Action also continued its good neighbor campaign at Mittal Steel in Cleveland, its opposition to the construction of AMP-Ohio’s proposed new coal-fired power plant in Meigs County, and its ongoing work of “following the money” in Ohio politics.

On September 14<sup>th</sup>, Ohio Citizen Action presented its highest honor, the Howard M. Metzenbaum Award, to native Clevelander Phil Donahue. Six hundred people attended the event, which featured the presentation of the award by Senator Metzenbaum’s daughter, Susan Hyatt, and the showing of Donahue’s stirring documentary, *Body of War*.

