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# Allegany County resists nuclear dumping, 1989-1990

- [Anti-Nuclear Power Movement \(1960s-1980s\)](#) [1]
- [local community or neighborhood-level campaign](#) [2]

- [Anti Nuclear Power Movement \(1960s-1980s\)](#)

## Timing

May

1989

to:

April

1990

## Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Allegany County, New York

Location Description:

Actions took place on roads, in parking lots, and on potential dumping sites throughout the county.

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To prevent a nuclear waste dump from being built in Allegany County.

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 199. Nonviolent confinement > linked arms to confine members of the siting commission

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 006. Group or mass petitions > Presented petition to stop dump planning to governor
- 012. Skywriting and earthwriting > wrote no dump in flour on airstrip
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 050. Teach-ins

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 171. Nonviolent interjection›Formed roadblocks on all roads leading to the dumping sites
- 199. Nonviolent confinement›linked arms to confine members of the siting commission

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 075. Refusal to rent
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 6th segment:

- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 171. Nonviolent interjection›Formed roadblocks on all roads leading to the dumping sites

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 034. Vigils
- 038. Marches

Notes on Methods:

In the last segment, members of ACNAG wore masks to conceal their identities. This ensured that they wouldn't be charged after the fact based on police video/photos with violating the injunction. People on horses were also used as a method of nonviolent obstruction; without them the resistance may not have been successful.

Segment Length:

2 months

## Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Allegany community members (spotlighting grandparents for arrest)
- Members of ACNAG

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Allegany County Nonviolent Action Group (ACNAG): claimed to "have no leaders", but Sally Campbell, Gary Lloyd, Spike Jones, and Thomas Peterson were effectively the leaders of the campaign.

Partners:

Concerned Citizens of Allegany County (CCAC)

External allies:

Don't Waste New York (DWNK), Alfred University

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Alfred University

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Don't Waste New York

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

2 months

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

Siting Commission and, by extension, Gov. Cuomo

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

## **Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Not only did Allegany County deny nuclear waste dump from being built in their county, their efforts went on to ensure that there wouldn't be any in New York State. ACNAG's civil disobedience to nuclear waste became known in the industry as "New York Style protests," as they spread across the United States.

The state of New York was required by federal law to have a nuclear waste dump by January 1, 1993. In 1988, a special siting committee formed to determine where to put the dump. The siting commission considered five sites in rural Allegany County, New York, as potential spots to put the nuclear dump. The people of Allegany County linked arms in several acts of civil disobedience to prevent the construction of a nuclear waste facility in their backyard.

Initially, opposition mounted with the formation of the Concerned Citizens of Allegany County (CCAC), who were committed to waging a political and legal battle against the commission. Then, the Allegany County Nonviolent Action Group (ACNAG) formed from concerned residents who determined that nonviolent resistance was the only way to stop the dump from being built.

On May 31, 1989, ACNAG completed its first action in Belmont outside of the county courthouse. The siting commission planned to do a "windshield tour" of potential sites and meet with local legislators. When the commission members arrived, protesters surrounded their car and linked arms, preventing them from exiting. A designated person placed wooden blocks behind the wheels, so that no one would get run over by the car. All of the demonstrators who were willing to be arrested wore orange bands on their arms, while other supporters wore yellow bands. The sheriff arrested 48 people wearing orange bands; all of them walked peacefully to the holding area and waited dutifully for their citations.

On August 1, Governor Mario Cuomo met with members of the CCAC at Alfred State College. Before he addressed the crowd, a woman with a child, representing ACNAG, walked past security officers onto the stage to deliver a declaration by ACNAG to resist the nuclear dump through civil disobedience. Although the CCAC worked tremendously hard to argue that the mandate to build the dump was unconstitutional, they had only marginal success in the political and legal realms. Meanwhile, ACNAG held more than 20 civil disobedience training sessions, many drawing over 100 people. People realized that the only way to save their land was through nonviolent action.

At the end of October, the CCAC held a community-wide rally called a "Night of Rage" at one of the proposed dumping sites. The event was decorated with anti-dumping signs, caricatured jack-o-lanterns of Governor Cuomo, and full-sized effigies of members of the commission. The B.A.N.D.I.T.S., a band formed against nuclear dumping, played a few songs, and a physics professor presented his paper on the horrific effects of low-level radiation. People addressed the crowd about the importance of keeping the resistance nonviolent in nature.

On December 13, 1989, members of ACNAG prevented a technical team sent by the commission from carrying out their tests. Activists gathered early in the morning at the three sites that the technical team could have chosen to work at that day. Once ACNAG leaders located the technical team, they sent everyone there from the other sites for support. ACNAG surrounded the technical team along with their sheriff escort. They promised to keep their arms linked until the technical team agreed to stop their work and leave the county.

The Sheriff defused the situation. When the landowner complained that the technical team hadn't asked his permission to enter the land, the Sheriff, wanting to get everyone out of the freezing cold, cited the technical team for trespassing. ACNAG agreed to let the team leave the scene in the Sheriff's custody.

Just over a month later, on January 16, the technical team tried to go to the Caneadea site, only to find the road blocked by old farm equipment and protesters. The team tried to enter via an alternate route, but they just encountered more roadblocks and protesters. The state police came in to help the team gain access to the site, but despite making eight arrests, they couldn't get past the multiple roadblocks and the teams of demonstrators willing to be arrested.

Two days later, the technical team went to another site, West Almond. ACNAG, with the help of local farmers, set up roadblocks on all access roads. This time more than 50 troopers came prepared with paddy wagons to shuttle people to the jail. People both young and old from around the county lined up at the opportunity to be arrested. When officers asked the activists their names before arresting them, they responded, "My name is Allegany County." For every one person who was arrested, there were two people ready to fill their spot. Eventually, in the late afternoon the troopers stopped making arrests, because they weren't making any progress.

After learning of the technical teams failure to carry out its work, the chairman of the siting commission issued a press release that likened the people of Allegany to mushrooms being starved for information. People responded by writing letters to the editor, explaining how informed and determined they actually were.

Property owners banded together to deny the siting commission's attempt to rent out office space. Instead, the commission sent a mobile office in a van to provide information on the dump to local residents. However, when they arrived, the van was blocked in by a manure spreader, plastered with posters, blasted with music, skunked, and rocked back and forth as people made it loud and clear that the van was not welcome.

A state Supreme Court judge issued an injunction that forbade anyone from preventing the siting commission from carrying out its work. This would force them to appear in state court, where they would likely receive a \$1000 fine and possible incarceration up to six months. ACNAG revised its tactics to minimize arrests by utilizing more old farm equipment as roadblocks to continually delay the troopers. The activists started wearing paper masks to avoid being identified in photos as breaking the injunction. They would force the troopers to arrest grandparents, while the rest of the demonstrators retreated to the next roadblock. ACNAG even enlisted the help of horses to act as a last line of defense.

On April 5, the siting commission came in full force to the Caneadea site with the new injunction in hand. ACNAG was ready to confront them with hundreds of protesters coming out to stand in the way. Six grandparents who chained themselves to the bridge positioned themselves in front of several pieces of farm equipment and masked supporters standing in silence. The state troopers cut the chains, arrested the grandparents, and walked around the equipment and snow barricades that people had constructed. Determined to gain access to the site, the troopers arrested anyone in their way. However, before the troopers got to the angry crowd of 300 people, they encountered a band of masked horsemen. The troopers retreated after attempting to dismount the riders, only to have their feet stomped on by the horses. They were still over a mile away from the site.

The last triumph over the troopers at Caneadea marked victory for Allegany County. Shortly afterward, Governor Cuomo ordered the siting commission to discontinue its attempts at testing in Allegany County. The activists fight ultimately was what stopped the nuclear dump from being built at all. Their story served as inspiration to many similar nonviolent actions against nuclear dumping across the nation.

## **Research Notes**

## Influences:

ACNAG's civil disobedience to nuclear dumping served as inspiration to many communities around the nation confronted with similar situations. Spike Jones, a leader of the campaign traveled around to these communities to help each of them to incubate their own nonviolent resistance. (2)

## Sources:

Peterson, Thomas V. *Linked Arms, A Rural Community Resists Nuclear Waste*. Albany: State University of New York Pr, 2002. 1-259. Print.

"Albany Chooses 10 Possible Sites For Atom Waste ." *New York Times* 21/12/1988. B2. Web. 22 Sep. 2011. <ProQuest Historical Newspapers >.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Walker Stole, 18/09/2011

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## Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/anti-nuclear-power-movement-1960s-1980s>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/local-community-or-neighborhood-level-campaign>