



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Chester residents blockade Westinghouse incinerator, United States, 1992-1994

December

1992

to: June

1994

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Chester, Pennsylvania*

Goals:

Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living demanded that Westinghouse decrease its pollution and truck traffic. Residents also began a proactive defense against new facilities.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 042. Motorcades
- 044. Mock funerals
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 006. Group or mass petitions

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Chester residents

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Zulene Mayfield

Revered Horace Strand

Monsignor Probaski

Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 3 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Westinghouse Electric Corporation

Environmental Protection Agency

Chester City Council

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

It is unclear whether the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources investigated and fined Westinghouse due to campaigner pressure.

Following an industrial boom during World War II, Chester, Pennsylvania began an economic decline. In 1990, the census reported that about 60% of residents were African American, 25% were living below the poverty line, and 20% were unemployed.

In the 1980s, Philadelphia area landfills were reportedly nearing their capacity. In 1988, despite objections from Chester residents, the Pennsylvania Department for Environmental Quality granted a permit for a waste incineration facility. The Westinghouse Electric Corporation would be one of the United States' largest waste-to-energy incinerator plants. Westinghouse promised to open 110 jobs and to provide \$2.7 million in revenue to the Chester City Council through taxes and fees. Once in operation, the generated electricity was sold to the city of Atlantic City, New Jersey.

After opening in summer 1991, Westinghouse daily processed over 2,600 tons of garbage from across Delaware County. Chester residents soon linked increased rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses with the opening of Westinghouse.

In order to deliver garbage to the incinerator, over 350 18-wheel trucks drove down the residential Thurlow Street every day starting at 4:00 am. Chester residents complained about the noise and dust associated with the constant stream of trucks. Further, they noted that the truck traffic made it dangerous for children to play in front of their homes and that the garbage in the trucks brought rats.

In October 1992 Chester Mayor Barbara Bohannon-Shepherd called a town meeting of Chester residents, government officials, industry representatives, Environmental Protection Agency representatives, and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection representatives. In this meeting, citizens voiced their concerns about the pollution, noise, and trucks associated with Westinghouse.

Residents did not feel that the officials genuinely listened to their grievances. Following the meeting, resident Zulene Mayfield initiated weekly meetings of concerned residents which eventually became a formal citizen advocacy group: Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living.

The Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living focused its campaign on elevating residents' concerns about Westinghouse. Two clergy, Reverend Horace Strand and Monsignor Probaski, served as the group's co-chairs. The group held a series of individual meetings with private and public officials. Specifically, residents demanded that Westinghouse limit its pollution and truck traffic. Residents found these meetings frustrating and inconclusive.

On 22 December 1992, the residents group held its first protest, having been frustrated by the institutional channels. Between ten

and fifteen residents blockaded Thurlow Street for almost two hours, blocking the Westinghouse trucks.

That day, Westinghouse's chief financial officer flew to Chester and met with Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living. In that meeting, the Westinghouse representative agreed that Westinghouse would build an alternate access road so that trucks would no longer use Thurlow Street.

In January 1993, Strand brought a large rat to a Delaware County Council meeting to show that the garbage-filled trucks were attracting rodents.

On 5 April 1993, the Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living picketed in front of the Delaware county seat in Media. About thirty-five demonstrators held signs, some of which stated: "We Deserve Clean Air," "Westinghouse is an Environmental Racist-at-Large," "You Wouldn't Live Like This. Why Should We?" "Save Chester, Stop the Incinerator," and "No Trucks, No Trash, No Rats." Demonstrators also chanted some of these slogans.

The protest continued as a march from Media to Chester. Twenty demonstrators marched, some pushing an open coffin on wheels with a sign inside stating: "Here Lies Chester." Seven cars accompanied them. The marchers recited chants, including "Do you know where your trash goes?" Once the protesters arrived to the Westinghouse facility in Chester, they again blocked the trucks' route on Thurlow Street. The protesters' blockade forced the trucks to take a side road.

By 29 April 1993, Westinghouse had begun construction on an access road to the plant, removing the truck traffic from residents' doorsteps. Trucks traveling to Westinghouse would then pass behind residents' houses on an extended Harwick Street rather than on Thurlow Street. Westinghouse also paved the area where the trucks waited, reducing dust.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources charged Westinghouse with exceeding legal levels of pollution from late 1992 through early 1993. On 10 March 1994, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources announced that Westinghouse would pay a \$356,000 penalty for those pollution violations. Westinghouse accepted the charge of those violations, but stated that the problems had been addressed.

In spring 1994, Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living decided to work for legal change that would protect them against future siting of waste facilities. They created a petition for a local zoning law that would limit pollution. The group gathered about 3,000 signatures and presented the petition to the Chester City Council. In June 1994, the Chester City Council passed the ordinance demanded by the petition. The regulation prohibited any new waste-treatment facility from increasing the net rate of pollution in Chester. Chester City Councilman William Rocky Brown III recognized that such a strict regulation was basically equivalent to a ban on new polluting facilities.

Research Notes

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