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# USCCB Environmental Justice Program & Catholic Campaign for Human Development

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## **CCHD. *Working on the Margins.* Major Environmental Justice Initiatives Funded by CCHD**

### **Tohono O’odham Community Action (TOCA)**

Since 1996, TOCA has been dedicated to creating a healthy, culturally vital and sustainable community on the Tohono O’odham Nation, located in the Sonoran Desert of south-central Arizona. TOCA encourages community self-sufficiency and strengthens the material roots of O’odham culture. After 1930, O’odham farming began to decline, and following the Second World War, the federal government introduced commodity foods into O’odham, leading to a rapid rise in the rate of type 2 diabetes in the community. In an effort to recapture traditional agricultural practices, TOCA established the “New Generation of O’odham Farmers” program in 2009. Dedicated to training and empowering community members to begin careers in sustainable agriculture, this program emerged from experiences on TOCA’s two farms and the interests of local young adults to learn how to create a livelihood for themselves in their own communities. The training of new farmers and gardeners is a key part of TOCA’s larger efforts to rebuild a sustainable local food system and a healthier way of life.

### **Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice, Inc. (CCEJ)**

CCEJ aims to protect urban environments through educating communities, promoting changes in local, state, and national policy, and promoting individual, corporate and governmental responsibility. CCEJ has worked with a local commissioner to deny the request for an air permit for the reopening of a dirty power plant in a largely Latino section of New Haven, helped to pass a state BPA ban, and educated over 1000 Hartford residents on asthma through its Asthma Speakers Bureau.

### **Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ)**

YMPJ’s purpose is to transform both the people and the physical infrastructure of blighted South Bronx neighborhoods and change the systems that negatively impact them. The mission of YMPJ is to rebuild the Bronx River and Soundview/Bruckner neighborhoods by preparing young people to become prophetic voices for peace and justice. Through an organizing campaign to ensure proper remediation of a local contaminated waterfront park known as Starlight Park, over 300 YMPJ members and community residents convinced a manufacturing gas plant responsible for contaminating the park to produce a remedial action plan that protects the health of local residents and youth. Originally, the company proposed simply covering the contaminated area in Starlight Park with three feet of clean soil. After a huge community organizing effort, the remedial action plan includes six feet of clean soil, removal of waste materials and most contamination, and testing of the Bronx River for contamination.

### **Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC)**

The NPRC was formed by ranch families concerned about the threat that industrial-scale coal mining would have on their property and their ability to make a living from ranching. Northern Plains has worked on a wide variety of issues that impact family agriculture, land, water, air, and communities. In 2009, NPRC organized a landowners association to help farmers and ranchers in the path of a planned tar sands pipeline to negotiate as a bloc, which will help them gain better protection for their land and water. In addition, through a sustained legal campaign, NPRC has protected precious rivers essential for irrigation from being rendered useless by salty water discharges from coal bed methane drilling.

### **Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM) Resource Project**

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SOCM is a member-run organization that encourages civic involvement and collective action so that the people of Tennessee have a greater voice in determining their future. SOCM is working for social, economic, and environmental justice for all. SOCM members monitored and inspected a 2,000 acre mountaintop removal (MTR) site and got the state to issue the first notices of violation and have one section of the mine shut down. Over the last year SOCM members persuaded the Governor and state administration to oppose proposed federal regulations that would weaken a 100 foot stream buffer zone and to call instead for strengthening of these regulations. SOCM members' organizing efforts also resulted in changes in state water quality policy, getting the state to broaden its definition of a 'stream' to include more tributaries in MTR mining areas and to announce a policy of not allowing mining through these designated 'streams.'

### **Calumet Project for Industrial Jobs (CP)**

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The vision of CP is to ensure the disadvantaged, low-income, minority populations residing near polluting industries are treated equally and fairly. CP works to reduce toxic pollution produced by certain industries in Northwest Indiana. After CP led community meetings, toxic tours, and research on other asphalt plants showed a high rate of cancer cases, BP withdrew their petition to build a new asphalt plant in Hammond. CP started a 'Bucket Brigade'. The Bucket Brigade is a community based air-sampling program approved by the EPA. CP has also organized around brownfield redevelopment in Hammond to ensure that clean companies which provide living-wage jobs with medical insurance locate at the cleaned-up sites.

### **Louisiana Bucket Brigade (LABB)**

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The purpose of LABB is to assist fence-line neighbors in their campaigns to make industry accountable for its pollution. LABB provides community members with tools and training to conduct sampling of air, water, soil and seafood and the capacity to organize and advocate for a healthy environment. These tools help community groups achieve their goals, be it relocation away from a polluting facility, reduced emissions or a moratorium on facility expansions. Community members trained by the LABB to use buckets have taken over 75 air samples since 2000. These samples have detected over 300 violations of state and federal health standards, creating the first ever community documentation of neighborhood pollution. The more evidence the communities gather, the more power they have to achieve their goals.

### **Greater Long Beach Interfaith Community Organization (ICO)**

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ICO works through member congregations in Long Beach to engage low and moderate income families in civic life and the democratic process through leadership training and congregation-based organizing. ICO works to identify key issues and to engage and energize local leadership to work towards resolution and social transformation. ICO brought 300 people and the South Coast Air Quality Management District to a town hall meeting on air quality. ICO is positioned to be a key participant in development decisions for the ports and oil refineries that have major influence on local air quality. Meetings with health researchers and air quality regulators helped focus attention on the health impacts of air pollution in the region.

### **Illinois People's Action (IPA)**

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IPA is the state's largest faith-based community organization. The mission of IPA is to organize for justice in local communities and throughout Illinois' urban and rural communities. IPA works with local grassroots and faith leaders on a wide variety of justice issues they themselves identify. After faith leaders, including members of Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Bloomington, expressed concern about the possibility of fracking coming to Illinois, IPA held meetings to inform the community about the negative effects of fracking. Since the passage of the Public Act to allow and regulate fracking, IPA has worked with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to give teeth to the regulation of fracking. In concert with its advocacy efforts, IPA continues to hold informational campaigns, and recently hosted the premier to an audience of 400 of the documentary film on fracking, Gaslands 2.

### **Naugatuck Valley Project (NVP)**

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The NVP is a regional organization of religious congregations and labor, tenant and small business organizations organized in 1983 to save and create jobs, affordable housing, and critical public and private services in the Valley. The mission of NVP is to build relationships among diverse groups around their shared values and help them organize to gain the power to put these values into action. NVP is organizing to create green jobs by institutionalizing professional training of Valley workers in remediation in order to employ the local workforce and teach a new marketable skill. As well as keeping the jobs in the cities where transportation is accessible, NVP can prevent the destruction of green space in the suburbs and cut down the growing traffic jams on the highways.