Community-based Research Institute examines environmental contaminants in Norton Sound region

Twenty-four participants from eleven villages convened in Nome to explore the local rivers and streams while discovering how environmental contaminants can affect human health. Alaska Community Action on Toxics, in collaboration with the University of Alaska, sponsored and organized the university accredited course Community-Based Environmental Health Research: A Field Sampling Institute in Nome, Alaska during June 2012.

The Field Institute course examined the significance of environmental contaminants that are globally transported and those generated from local sources (i.e. past and current use mining sites, formerly used defense sites, local dump sites) on community health in the Arctic. The course included classroom, field, and laboratory components. The classroom component focused on understanding of exposure pathways for environmental contaminants, the impact of these exposures to human and environmental health, children’s environmental health, the latest science about health

From the Director

When the book Silent Spring by Rachel Carson was published in 1962, I was 6 years old. I first read the book when our 10th grade biology teacher, Mr. Martin, assigned it as required reading. It has had a profound effect on my understanding of the world and helped me choose my life’s work.

September marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of Silent Spring. Rachel Carson died of breast cancer at the age of 56, just two years after her book was published. Her prophetic book has inspired a generation of scientists, writers, naturalists, activists, and policy makers. While she endured scathing attacks by the chemical industry, Silent Spring caught the attention of then President Kennedy and Congress, prompted a wave of environmental legislation, and led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. And yet, this system of law is inadequate to protect our health. It is now outdated and there is still so much left undone.

Continued on page 2
Rachel Carson spoke about the world with an innate “sense of wonder,” addressed our responsibility to protect the fragility of our world, and asserted our human rights not to be senselessly poisoned without our consent. She wrote in Silent Spring: “If the Bill of Rights contains no guarantee that a citizen shall be secure against lethal poisons distributed either by private individuals or by public officials, it is surely only because our forefathers, despite their considerable wisdom and foresight, could conceive of no such problem.” Her prescient writing also noted the presence of the pesticide DDT in Arctic wildlife in the early 1960s. Today, Arctic Indigenous Peoples are among the most highly exposed people on earth to dangerous and persistent chemicals. Alaska Community Action on Toxics addresses this as a violation of human rights and works to prevent the production and release of chemicals that contaminate the Arctic.

Our work here at Alaska Community Action on Toxics is inspired by the writings of Rachel Carson. We work to achieve health, human rights, and justice. Our staff responds to requests from villages to offer assistance and information to address contamination. We work to hold the military and industry accountable through our advocacy and environmental health research. We’re working closely with the communities on St. Lawrence Island together with scientists from the University of Alaska Anchorage and the University at Albany on a community-based research project to protect the health of future generations by assessing and preventing exposures to endocrine-disrupting chemicals. We stand with communities threatened with harmful coal development and call upon our government to prevent damage to health and the environment. We’ve launched a mission-related project to offer green, healthy cleaning services to homes and businesses. We plant a community garden, donate the produce to the local food bank, offer workshops about organic gardening, and sell compost tea at the Anchorage Farmers Market. We work to achieve protective policy change on local, state, national, and international levels.

Terry Tempest Williams writes in When Women Were Birds, “I want to feel both the beauty and the pain of the age we are living in. I want to survive my life without becoming numb. I want to speak and comprehend words of wounding without having these words become the landscape where I dwell. I want to possess a light touch that can elevate darkness to the realm of stars.”

Please join us in our efforts. Together, with strong hearts and minds, we can help create a safe and healthy world for our families, communities, and future generations.

International Indigenous Women’s Environmental and Reproductive Health Symposium

Sixty Indigenous women from North America, Latin America, the Arctic and the Pacific, gathered in Chickaloon from April 27-29 to share their stories and discuss the serious environmental and reproductive health issues their Peoples are facing. The three-day 2nd International Indigenous Women’s Environmental and Reproductive Health Symposium took place at the Yah Ne Dah Ah Tribal School, Chickaloon Native Village in Alaska.

The women provided testimonies and submitted recommendations to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and to UN Special Rapporteur Professor James Anaya, who made a commitment to include the concerns expressed by participants in his report to the UN Human Rights Council.

Participants shared their stories, songs, traditions, and the experiences of their Peoples. They expressed collec-

Continued from page 2

tive outrage that current federal and international laws permit industry, military and all levels of government to knowingly produce, release, store, transport, export, import and dump hazardous chemicals and radioactive materials. They voiced their concerns about the expansion of contaminating activities such as fossil fuel development, hydraulic fracturing, uranium mining and milling, introduction of genetically modified seeds and animals, bio-fuel production and pesticide-intensive agriculture. ♦

Testimonies from participants:

I was able to develop positive lasting connections with women from around the world facing similar social and environmental challenges. The symposium provided a mechanism to develop our collective voice into a unified and powerful position statement in which to present our challenges to world leaders. The Symposium brought me a new found sense of optimism and renewed energy to continue caring for my community.

Lisa Wade, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (Nay’dina’an Na’), Alaska

The Symposium connected us in a way that empowered me to promote The Rights of Indigenous Peoples with the Indigenous Women’s beliefs of well-being. It is our Truth as the caretakers of life.

Marian Naranjo, Honor Our Pueblo Existence, New Mexico

I have never seen so many different women from all over the world in my entire life!! It was a great learning experience and I truly enjoyed it.

Susie A. Booshu, Native Village of Gambell, Alaska

The 2nd Indigenous Women Symposium is very important to all Alaskans as we continue to live in our lands and waters with others coming to our state to change them. The traditional knowledge of sharing our stories of our families continuing the traditions and cultures in all of the processes before us can only come from us. Taking the process into an international forum expands the opportunity to share concerns of indigenous women in Alaska. Sharing our concerns helps to build understanding as to what is important to the health of our future generations and working with others who face similar concerns in indigenous communities throughout the world helps to amplify the message.

Rosemary Ahtuangaruak, Barrow, Alaska

The world labels you an activist, when in actuality you are merely a mother and grandmother fighting to keep your waters healthy for your children and their children’s children.

Emily ‘Funny’ Murray, Elim Students Against Uranium, Elim, Alaska

As Indigenous mothers and grandmothers, youth and elders, traditional healers, tribal leaders, human rights and environmental activists, we express our profound concern for the life and health of our communities, children, ecosystems and Mother Earth due to the proliferation of environmental toxics.

- Excerpt from The 2nd Declaration for Health, Life and Defense of our Lands, Rights and Future Generations
ACAT urges the Alaska Mental Health Trust to divest from coal

What do mercury-contaminated fish and the Alaska Mental Health Trust have in common? Alaskan coal! The Alaska Mental Health Trust is a state corporation with a mandate to manage its resources, including land, to fund mental health assistance and treatment programs. Unfortunately, The Trust has chosen coal mining and export -- an extremely unhealthy industry -- to generate revenue. The Trust has sold two of the largest coal leases in Alaska, the Chuitna watershed and the Matanuska Valley, to coal mining companies with plans to strip mine through mountains and salmon streams—all for export to coal-burning power plants and smelters in Asia.

Coal burned overseas generates a toxic cloud of emissions, including mercury, that travels back across the North Pacific and contaminates our land, water, and fish with mercury and other harmful substances. Coal mining here for export overseas will increase the mercury content of Alaskan fish, threatening the health of all Alaskans. Mercury is a potent neurotoxic chemical best known for causing developmental and learning disorders in children.

There is an inherent contradiction between the health treatment programs of the Alaska Mental Health Trust which include programs for people with developmental disabilities, and the Trust’s use of the coal industry to fund their important work. ACAT is collaborating with people who are affected by the proposed coal development in the Matanuska Valley and Chuitna to educate the Mental Health Trust Board of Trustees about medical studies linking exposure to coal industry contaminants with serious health problems including developmental disabilities. ACAT staff provided public testimony at The Trust Board meetings in May and September and will continue to do everything we can to compel The Trust to divest from coal. ✤

What you can do:
- Please add your name to the Mothers Against Mercury petition asking the Alaska Mental Health Trust to stop all investment in coal mining—to protect our children!
- If you work in the medical field, please also sign our petition asking for a Comprehensive Health Impact Assessment on all coal mine proposals in Alaska.
- These petitions and much more info on coal and health are on our new website: www.protectakhealth.org

Verdict against chemical corporations in international human rights case

In collaboration with Pesticide Action Network North America, ACAT prepared the Arctic case for the Permanent People’s Tribunal trial against the six largest pesticide manufacturers (Monsanto, Dow, BASF, Bayer, Syngenta, and Dupont). The trial was held in Bangalore, India from December 3-6, 2011 before a jury of internationally renowned legal experts and scientists. Pesticide Action Network facilitated the participation of groups and individuals from around the world, including ACAT, to collectively present 25 cases of human rights violations by the transnational corporations before the Permanent People’s Tribunal. For the trial, ACAT prepared the Arctic case document (“Pollution and Endangerment of Arctic Tribal Nations and Their Environment”), witness statements, and video testimony.

The Permanent People’s Tribunal jury issued a strong final verdict in April 2012 against the transnational pesticide corporations, pronouncing in a 40-page document: 1) the corporations have violated basic human rights to health, life, livelihood, food and food security; 2) these violations have had particular impact on the rights of Indigenous peoples, women, and children.

Based on our case concerning the Arctic, the jury verdict stated, in part in the section Violation of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—Threat to Survival of Indigenous Peoples and Their Cultural and Traditional Practices:

“Though not being the users of agrichemicals themselves, Indigenous Peoples are particularly affected by persistent toxic agrichemicals which accumulate in the environment and food chain, with devastating effects on the health and way of life of Indigenous Peoples. These pollutants are passively transported to their environment through air and water. This is particularly the case for Indigenous Peoples living in the Arctic Circle, with a high
level of pollution by persistent organic pollutants, as produced by Syngenta, Bayer, and Dow. Not only do these chemicals accumulate in the region and hardly degrade due to the low temperatures, but everything that is linked to the lives of Indigenous Peoples is affected. All their ways of life, traditional practices and resources, including their food sources and their building and working materials, are intrinsically linked with the animals of the region, all of which are accumulating toxins to an alarming rate, in particular those higher up the food chain. A continuation of their way of life and practices threatens their very own existence and survival...The case of the Arctic is also a most compelling case for the application of the precautionary principle.”

Further, in the section Violation of the Right to Health and Life:
“as a consequence, the bodies of Arctic Indigenous Peoples are continuously being poisoned and health effects are reaching increasingly high proportions, thereby causing great suffering not only to this generation but to the generations to come.”

The Tribunal’s ruling represents a significant victory for Indigenous Peoples throughout the world and a reminder that our collective efforts are making a difference for present and future generations. ◆

Watch a clip of the witness statement of Vi Waghiyi, Yupik Eskimo of the Native Village of Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island and ACAT’s Environmental Health and Justice Program Director: http://www.youtube.com/user/pannavideo/videos.

Tips for improving Indoor Air Quality

As the days become shorter and the temperature drops, we’ll all be spending significant time indoors. Mold, chemicals in cleaning supplies, and contaminated dust are among the indoor air contaminants found in homes, schools, and workplaces. Indoor exposures can be 100 - 1,000 times greater than outdoor exposures. The good news is you can take steps to improve indoor air quality.

- Avoid stirring up dust when you clean. Use a damp cloth and a vacuum with a HEPA filter.
- Use non-toxic cleaning products and avoid any products that list ‘fragrance’ as an ingredient.
- Eliminate the conditions which promote growth of molds by fixing leaks and maintaining a warm and dry environment. ◆
Progress towards passage of Safe Chemicals Act

In May 2012, ACAT staff Samantha Englishoe and ACAT volunteer and retired special education teacher Sonja Tobiessen traveled to Washington D.C. to participate in the Safer Chemicals Stroller Brigade, a successful effort sponsored by the Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families campaign, a national effort to protect families from toxic chemicals. As a result, Senator Lisa Murkowski met face-to-face with Samantha and Sonja to discuss chemicals policy reform. In July, Sen. Murkowski became one of three Republicans among 26 Senators to sign a bipartisan letter to the U.S. EPA Administrator about the need to regulate toxic flame retardants—a step toward supporting broader federal chemicals policy reform.

Only weeks later, the Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works passed the Safe Chemicals Act! This vote was a victory for American families dealing with the many health problems, including childhood cancer, linked to unregulated chemicals. There is still a long way to go, but this is the first official action by a Congressional Committee to address the problem of our broken chemicals policy in 36 years. Unfortunately, the Committee voted along party lines. We hope Senate Republicans can find a way to join in this important work as this legislation moves to the Senate floor. We thank Senator Mark Begich for his leadership in serving as a co-sponsor of the Safe Chemicals Act.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all ACAT supporters for your hard work and dedication to passage of this bill. We know you spent a lot of time following the Hearings, calling your Senators, and participating in our calls to action. This would not have happened without your support!

If passed, the Safe Chemicals Act (S. 847) would protect public health by improving the safety of chemicals used in consumer products, increase public information on chemical safety, protect our most vulnerable populations, require EPA to use the latest science in evaluating chemical safety, and support innovation and incentives for safer chemical alternatives. The national Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families coalition represents more than 11 million individuals and includes parents, health professionals, advocates for people with learning and developmental disabilities, reproductive health advocates, environmentalists and businesses from across the nation. Alaska Community Action on Toxics is a founding member of the coalition and our staff serves on the steering committee.

Supporting toxic-free food and community gardening in Anchorage

Despite the late start to the gardening season and an early frost, ACAT’s garden plot at C Street Community Gardens produced a healthy crop of potato, kale and cabbage which was donated to the Food Bank of Alaska.

Many thanks to our loyal compost tea customers who kept us busy at the Anchorage Farmer’s Market and to those who donated and brought their own containers.

Stay tuned! We are planning a series of organic gardening workshops over the winter and already dreaming about ways to expand our community gardens next summer! Please contact GeorgeAnne Sprinkle, ACAT’s Organic Gardening and Market Coordinator for more information, Email: garden@akaction.org

www.akaction.org
implications of endocrine-disrupting chemicals, and how environmental sampling can be useful to and empower communities. It detailed the proper methods for collecting various environmental samples (air, water, soil/sediment, macroinvertebrates, and fish), methods for quality control and assurance, and provided explanations of analytical methods. The field component provided participants with the opportunity to practice environmental sampling methods including:
- Sediment coring (to measure contaminants in soil and have the ability to date the deposition of the contaminants);
- Stickleback collection (to determine if endocrine-disrupting chemicals are present in water bodies and the aquatic food web);
- Semi-permeable membrane devices (which mimic fish membranes to measure the hydrophobic contaminants present in a water body), and
- Basic water quality assessment (consisting of water chemistry, physical habitat assessment, and benthic macroinvertebrates).

Faculty for the course included: Frank von Hippel, Ph.D., Liz Snyder-Hodges, Ph.D., and James Willacker of UAA; David Carpenter, M.D. and Gretchen Welfinger-Smith of the University at Albany’s Institute for Health and the Environment; and ACAT staff. ◆

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**Double your dollars when you make your annual gift before November 30, 2012**

Please don’t miss this incredible opportunity to make your donation to ACAT go twice as far. The Groundswell’s Catalyst Fund will match your tax deductible contribution dollar-for-dollar, but only if your gift is received by the ACAT office by November 30, 2012. [Donate online at www.akaction.org](http://www.akaction.org). Please renew early to take advantage of this generous grant (check the address label on this newsletter to see your membership renewal date). Your donation in any amount is eligible for the match. Donate $35.00 or more to become a supporting member of ACAT. **Counting you as a member makes our voice that much stronger.** Thank you!

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**Yes! I want to support Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT)**

Name: ____________________________________________________________

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Enclosed is my gift of:

☐ $500  ☐ $250  ☐ $100  ☐ $50  ☐ $35  ☐ $25  ☐ $______ Other

**Please make your check payable to ACAT and send to:**

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Anchorage, AK 99503

**Donate online via our secure website:**

[www.akaction.org](http://www.akaction.org).

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“*The course was great! I learned so much! I will be working with other tribal staff to revise our native food educational information on toxins and their potential effects on people and children*” - 2012 course participant

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![Opik Ahkinga and Dora Katcheak collect macroinvertebrates from a tray at the Penny River in Nome.](https://via.placeholder.com/150)
The Silent Epidemic: Coal and the Hidden Threat to Health

New book by Alan H. Lockwood, MD examines how human health is harmed by the burning of coal.

Learn more at: http://www.buffalo.edu/news/13687

To hear podcasts of CHE-Alaska seminars with Dr. Alan Lockwood, visit our website at: www.akaction.org

Save the date!
October 24, 9:00 AM
CHE-Alaska call

The Unnatural History of Breasts: Industrial Chemicals, Breast Cancer, and Early Puberty

with science journalist and author Florence Williams