# 2025 ACAT Highlights

### 2025 Alaska Community Action on Toxics Highlights from Executive Director, Pamela Miller

First, we extend our immense gratitude to all of you for supporting our work throughout the year, through volunteering, testifying, participating in our events in the community and webinars, and contributing financially. You inspired and encouraged our collective work and made everything possible even in these challenging times. Thank you!

Creating opportunities for building community and solidarity during these difficult times was especially important this past year. ACAT staff organized events including film series, webinars, and workshops that were very well attended and brought people together for discussion and engagement toward positive change. Our monthly Alaska Collaborative on Health and Environment webinars featured leading scientists, health and policy experts, and community leaders—consistently drawing more than 200 people from throughout Alaska and the country. Our Yarducopia organic gardening program was highly successful through our training programs, building community gardens, providing thousands of pounds of produce to food banks, and diversion of organic waste through composting. We have received an enthusiastic response to our new Plastic Free 907 campaign designed to engage businesses and establish local ordinances to reduce the use of plastics throughout Alaska. ACAT made considerable progress on building our Community Science Resource Center, providing information and resources to support community monitoring and environmental health research concerning air, water, and soil quality, and human health biomarkers.

Here are a few highlights from the past year:

Yupik Leaders, Youth, and Elders Travel to Washington, DC for Protection of Health and Human Rights for Present and Future Generations

ACAT staff and our Tribal partners from Sivuqaq (St. Lawrence Island), the Native Villages of Gambell and Savoonga, traveled to Washington, DC in March to raise awareness of the military contamination and persistent pollutants in the Arctic along with the food security and human health implications of that pollution. This trip was a culmination of 25 years of community-based research, advocacy and partnership of tribes, universities, and ACAT. While in D.C., we filed a formal legal petition and met with the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur for Toxics and Human Rights, Dr. Marcos Orellana, concerning violations of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples resulting from military contamination of the Island. Not only are we in this for the long haul, but we found that we can find a way forward even in these dark times.

The following are statements made by members of the Sivuqaq and ACAT delegation:

*"Those before me have been protecting our lands and now I want to help protect the lands and speak for the ones who can't speak for themselves."*
--Trisha Waghiyi, youth leader and great granddaughter of Annie Alowa, a Yupik elder and environmental health advocate who began the fight seeking justice and accountability from the military

*"I am a grandmother, and I am doing this for my grandchildren. I want them to be healthy and self-sufficient and not suffer like our generation has with the pain of all the deaths in our family and community from cancer."*
--Sandra Gologergen, Tribal Council Member of the Native Village of Savoonga

Here is a summary of statewide and national media coverage from our news conference at the National Press Club, including Alaska Public Media, Grist, Environmental Health News, Alaska Beacon, and Cordova Times:

- Leaders from Alaska's St. Lawrence Island take contamination claims to U.N.
- Alaska Natives want the US military to clean up its toxic waste | Grist
- Alaska Natives want the US military to clean up its toxic waste | Alaska Beacon
- Sivuqaq delegation calls for accountability on military cleanup | The Cordova Times
- Alaska Natives push for UN intervention in military toxic waste cleanup - EHN

**State Legislation on Chemicals, Plastics, and Voting Rights**
Representative Andy Josephson introduced a bill (House Bill 25) to ban carcinogenic polystyrene food packaging, and we are working toward advancing more comprehensive policies on plastics, including the elimination of intentionally added microplastics, and elimination of the most dangerous plastics and chemical additives. Rep. Josephson invited expert testimony and a briefing from ACAT. HB 25 is well on its way toward passage. Please sign our petition and contact your legislators to let them know this bill is important for our environment and health! ACAT staff made two trips to Juneau in 2025 to provide invited testimony on HB 25 and to meet with legislators on our priority legislation concerning chemicals, plastics, and voting rights. We have continued to organize meetings with policymakers throughout the summer and fall to build further support for our priority legislation. We are pleased that Representative Carolyn Hall will introduce and pre-file a bill to establish health protective and enforceable drinking water

standards for PFAS in the upcoming legislative session. Senator Scott Kawasaki will introduce a companion bill in the Senate.

**Eliminating the World's Most Dangerous Chemicals**
The Stockholm Convention is the only global, legally binding treaty to eliminate the world's most dangerous chemicals. In May, ACAT, working as a participating organization of the International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN), played a key role in global bans of high-production chemicals and chemical classes that disproportionately harm Arctic Indigenous Peoples. These include medium chain chlorinated paraffins (additives to plastics), long chain perfluorocarboxylic acids (a large group of "forever chemicals"), and chlorpyrifos (a widely used pesticide).

**International Treaty on Plastics**
Within the UN Plastics Treaty Negotiations, we advocated for a strong plastics treaty that drastically curbs plastics production and addresses the entire life cycle of plastics from the extraction of fossil fuels to plastics and chemicals manufacturing, use, and disposal. We uphold and support a health and human rights-based approach in the development of the new treaty. ACAT staff and other IPEN participating organizations worked effectively to ensure that the treaty will contain strong provisions to limit plastics production, measures to control the use of harmful chemicals in plastics, and to protect health, human rights, and the environment throughout the life cycle of plastics.
We worked in solidarity with many movement partners including Indigenous Peoples, scientists, and organizations working for just transition.

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# Holiday Tips

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## Plastic-Free

This holiday season, choose **plastic-free**, **low-waste** gifts such as experiences, books, secondhand items, or homemade treats. Decorate sustainably by making your own ornaments from natural materials like salt dough, pinecones, or dried oranges, or by crafting a wreath from local greenery. If you prefer store-bought decor, opt for durable glass or wooden pieces or shop secondhand, avoiding glitter and tinsel since they create microplastics.

For holiday meals, shop mindfully by choosing loose produce or visiting farmers' markets, use reusable dishes and bags, and store leftovers in beeswax wraps or reusable containers. When wrapping gifts, skip plastic tape and disposable paper by using fabric wraps, newspaper, or paper bags, and secure packages with paper tape, twine, or yarn instead. Check out Blue Market, in Anchorage, for stocking stuffers and locally sourced foods and gifts!

## Christmas Trees

Every December, millions of people bring Christmas trees into their homes, but both real and artificial trees can carry hidden health and environmental costs. Conventionally grown Christmas trees are often treated with pesticides and herbicides throughout their multi-year growth, including chemicals linked to hormone disruption, neurological effects, reproductive harm, and cancer. These residues can remain on tree needles and bark, exposing farmworkers and families, while also contaminating soil and waterways and harming local ecosystems (source: Beyond Pesticides). Artificial trees may seem like a safer alternative, but most are made from PVC plastic containing additives such as lead, phthalates, flame retardants, and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can off-gas into indoor air and household dust. These chemicals are associated with respiratory irritation, hormone disruption, and developmental harms, while PVC production and

disposal release persistent pollutants and contribute to plastic waste and climate emissions (source: Center for Health Justice).

For healthier, more sustainable options, consider decorating your houseplants, making garlands from evergreen clippings, or making a Christmas tree shape out of strung lights. In many states, including Alaska, you can legally and responsibly harvest a tree from public lands where permitted. Click this link for more details on where you can harvest your own tree in Alaska from the Department of Natural Resources! Choosing organic or pesticide-free trees from local growers, or using a potted tree that can be replanted, are also great options that help protect farmworkers, reduce chemical exposure, support local ecosystems, and celebrate the season in alignment with environmental justice values. Happy holidays from ACAT!

# Hometown Heros

Starting 2026 we are dedicating a section of every ACAT newsletter to celebrate Indigenous language, culture and people who have been champions of environmental health and justice. We begin this month by honoring the late Sivuqaq Elder and community leader Annie Alowa, whose tireless advocacy helped lead to the foundation of ACAT. If you have not viewed the video ACAT recorded with her in 1999, you can watch it here: https://www.akaction.org/about/.

We are thankful for the legacy that Annie has left us, and we, too, will fight until we melt. Igamsiqayugvikamken, we are very thankful for you, Annie.

# Important Announcements

Send message to Congress here

**Please join us by sending a letter to Congress**

Every family has a right to be protected from toxic chemicals in the products we buy, water we drink, or the food we eat.

The chemical lobby is working hard to undermine protections that ban harmful chemicals, require health and safety data before chemicals can be used, and uphold the right of states to act.

The **Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)** was updated in 2016 to reduce exposures to harmful chemicals linked to chronic diseases like cancer. The law is working, and that's why the chemical lobby wants to change it now and make it weaker.

The law puts health before corporate profits and has resulted in bans on chemicals like the deadly solvents trichloroethylene (TCE) and methylene chloride. This means less profit from dangerous chemicals.

It also works because states can protect the health of their communities by banning chemicals like PFAS. States are spending billions of taxpayer dollars to clean up PFAS once it's in the environment —the only solution is prevention.

Your senator needs to hear from you that this law is working and that it should not be changed now.

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ALASKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Donate here

**Western Alaska Disaster Relief Fund**

In response to the severe October 2025 storms — including ex-Typhoon Halong — that devastated Alaska's western coast, local organizations and regional partners have joined together to create the Western Alaska Disaster Relief Fund, housed at the Alaska Community Foundation (ACF).

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**December CHE-Alaska webinar is now available to watch on demand!**

Last week, CHE-Alaska was joined by **Lee Bell and Dr. Isabel Smith** in a discussion about thawing permafrost in a rapidly warming Arctic releasing long-stored mercury into Alaska's rivers and landscapes, creating new risks for ecosystems and community health.

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## SUPPORT ACAT

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Inspired by what you read in this newsletter? Your support makes it possible! Donate today and help us expand our reach and increase our impact.

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