



# Moving a Mountain

a neighborhood success story



UCLA-Labor Occupational Safety And Health (LOSH) Program

# MOVING A MOUNTAIN

## Introduction

This novela is based on the story of a community in Southeast Los Angeles County which, over a 3-year period, succeeded in getting a concrete recycling firm in their neighborhood closed down. They were assisted by an urban environmental organization, Communities for a Better Environment, which helped them document health problems and build a broad-based environmental justice campaign.

## Environmental terms that apply to this case include:

**The Brown Act.** This is a California law that requires the public to be notified and allowed to attend meetings of governmental bodies. It prohibits closed door meetings where the public is not invited and does not allow governmental officials to hold "serial meetings" in which one city council member speaks separately with each of the other council members outside the council chambers.

**CEQA.** The California Environmental Quality Act requires governmental agencies to analyze and reduce environmental and public health impacts of proposed projects such as new businesses. The CEQA review process must include a public comment process where public members can voice concerns and suggest ways to reduce a project's impact.

**CUP.** A conditional Use Permit is granted usually by local governments such as cities or counties. The CUP allows a business to conduct an activity at a certain location. The CUP may set limits on hours of operation, requirements for pollution control equipment, buffer zone requirements, etc. CUPs are designed to reduce/eliminate problems businesses might cause for surrounding communities.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What are Planning Commissions, and are they required to hold public meetings to get public comments before they issue a CUP to a business?
2. What happened with this Planning Commission and why?
3. What techniques did the neighborhood residents use to get community support?
4. What are some other techniques they could have used?
5. What may have been some of the reasons why all the city council members did not support the residents?
6. Do you think the mayor's meetings with the individual city council members were in violation of the Brown Act? Why or why not?
7. What are some of the possible reasons why the report from the air quality management district was "inconclusive?"
8. What is PM10 and why is it hazardous to humans?

## Acknowledgments

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Ricardo, You're telling me there was a Planning Commission meeting where they approved putting the plant in our neighborhood?

Yes. It was in October. Only four people attended.

Well, they certainly didn't bother to publicize it!

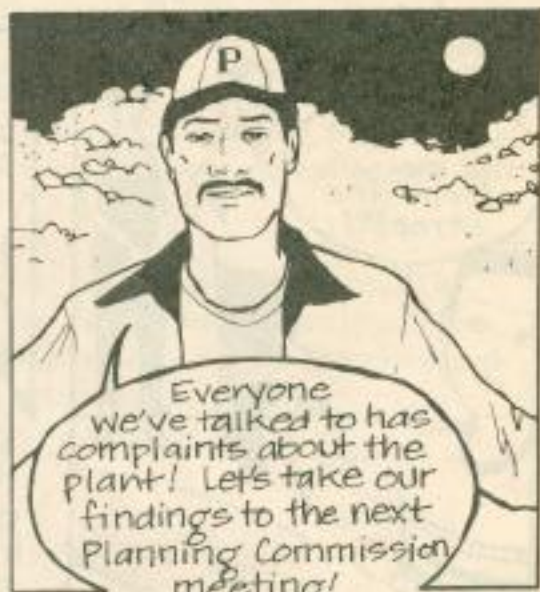
Let's build our case and go back to the Planning Commission. We can start by interviewing people on the block.



Yes, my wife and I have found it impossible to get decent sleep with the machines going all night long!



Recently it seems so hard to breathe!



Everyone we've talked to has complaints about the plant! Let's take our findings to the next Planning Commission meeting!



Here we have a petition, signed by residents of the Grove Street community. We ask that the recycling plant be closed down.

AT THE PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING...



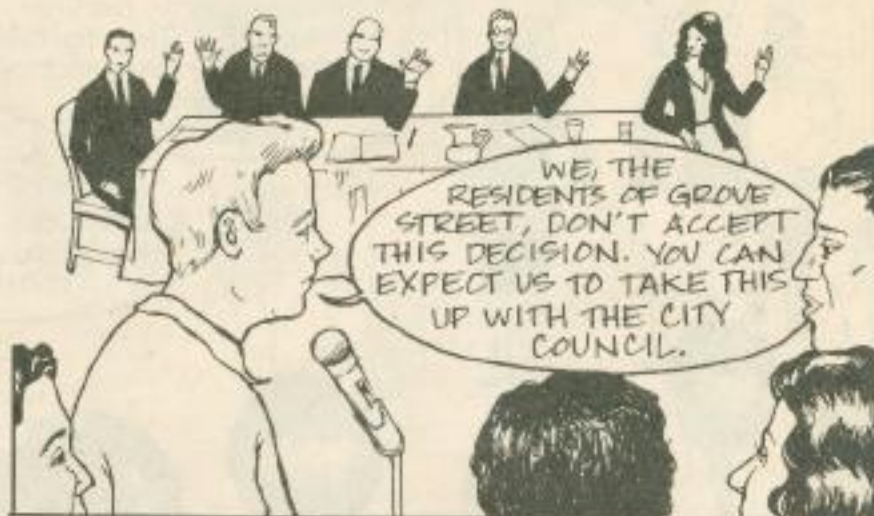
Well, the Planning Commission is not taking us seriously. We'll have to get a City Council member down here to see it for himself!

A NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING...



THE NEIGHBORS MEET WITH COUNCILMEMBER GLORIA AGUILAR...

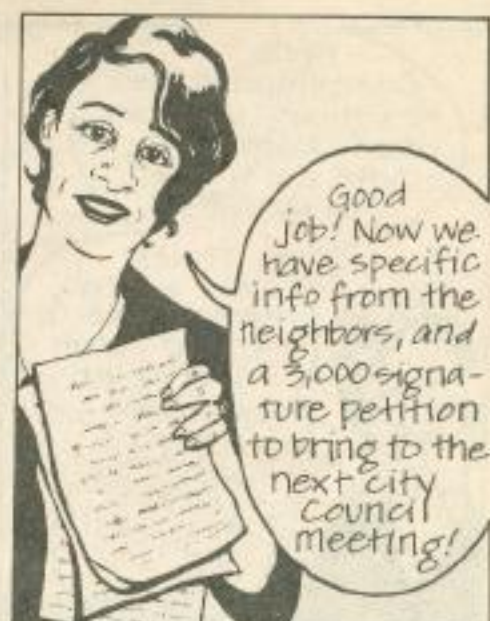
BUT ALTHOUGH THE NEIGHBORS GET SOME CITY COUNCILMEMBER SUPPORT, THE PLANNING COMMISSION STILL SIDES WITH THE PLANT'S OWNER, RENEWING HIS LICENSE TO OPERATE...





I can't believe the air quality report was inconclusive!

I know. I say we get to work on a door-to-door health symptoms survey.



Good job! Now we have specific info from the neighbors, and a 3,000 signature petition to bring to the next city council meeting!



-- and State Assemblywoman Inés, who is standing behind me, would also like to make a statement in support of the Grove Street residents.

Thank you, Congresswoman Rodríguez, for your thoughts on this matter.

Did you hear? The City Council has ruled to deny our right to speak Spanish during meetings

4 MONTHS LATER, THE GROVE STREET COMMUNITY JOINS FORCES WITH A LOCAL CHURCH GROUP...



ORGANIZING A CANDLELIGHT VIGIL OF FORTY PEOPLE WHO, FILMED BY SEVERAL NEWS STATIONS, STORM THE CITY COUNCIL.

THE MAYOR MAKES CALLS TO EACH CITY COUNCILMEMBER



THE GROVE STREET RESIDENTS, NOT TRUSTING MR. PRICE TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THE PLAN TO SHUT DOWN THE PLANT, LAUNCH A MEDIA CAMPAIGN...



...INCLUDING A STORY ABOUT THEIR STRUGGLE ON THE INTERNET.

THE PLANT'S CLOSING DATE COMES AND GOES...



I called this meeting to discuss what to do about the plant... We'll hold a hearing to see if it can be determined to be a public nuisance.



5 DAYS OF HEARINGS ARE HELD AT CITY COUNCIL



STUDIES AT OUR UNIVERSITY SHOW THAT PM10, TO WHICH THESE RESIDENTS ARE EXPOSED, POSES A SIGNIFICANT HEALTH RISK.

No problems have been proven!



I'm going to continue to run my business! Besides, I know some of those people are illegal residents, and their testimony can not be considered!

3 MONTHS LATER...



After reviewing all the evidence, I have concluded that the recycling plant is a public nuisance.

Now, all that's needed is a plan for how to clean it up.

I want the City and CBE to choose someone to develop this plan.

VICTORY!

CBE AND THE GROVE STREET COMMUNITY CELEBRATE!

