

SCHOOL IN THE MIDDLE

Teens take on toxics



SCHOOL IN THE MIDDLE



art: Joe Olney
for: OCCA 2004 Proj

CONCERNED
CITIZENS
& SOUTH CENTRAL
L.A.

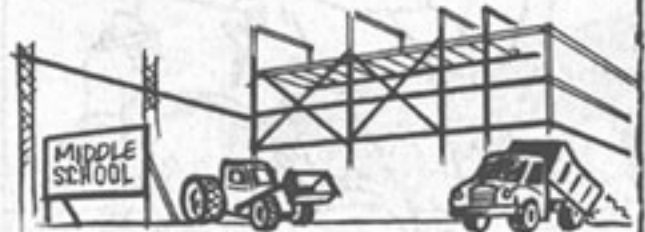
YOU KNOW, I'M
WORRIED ABOUT
THE CONSTRUCTION
SITE OVER THERE.



SOME OF THE
NEIGHBORS ARE
TOO; HERE COMES
MR. TALBOT.



GOOD MORNING LADIES! A STATE INSPECTOR
JUST TOLD ME OUR YARD IS CONTAMINATED
WITH A CANCER-CAUSING
SUBSTANCE.



Wow! AND YOU LIVE
RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET
FROM THE MIDDLE SCHOOL.

THE STAFF OF
CONCERNED CITIZENS
INVESTIGATES INFOR-
MATION ON THE SITE.
THEY GO ON THE
INTERNET, GET CAL-
EPA AND WATER
BOARD INFORMATION,
AND THEN...



THE DISTRICT RESPONDS

NO PROBLEM
THERE!

CONCERNED CITIZENS HOLDS
A COMMUNITY MEETING TO
DISCUSS THEIR
CONCERNS...



ON THE SCHOOL SITE
THERE USED TO BE A
MUNITIONS PLANT, A GAS
STATION, AND A FURNI-
TURE MANUFACTURER



THERE WAS ALSO A
METAL PLATING SHOP
ACROSS THE STREET.

THREE CCSC MEMBERS MEET
WITH THE DISTRICT'S ENVIRON-
MENTAL STAFF PERSON...

- AND YOU SAY THE SCHOOL
DISTRICT FILLED IN THE
SITE WITH SOIL
THAT MAY HAVE
HAD LEAD CON-
TAMINATION?!



ANOTHER COMMUNITY MEETING IS HELD...



THE DISTRICT WILL INSTALL A
VAPOR EXTRACTION SYSTEM TO
REMOVE THE TOXIC VAPORS.



A CCSC MEMBER
EXAMINES THE VAPOR
EXTRACTION SYSTEM
(V.E.S.) AT THE
SCHOOL.

CCSC FINDS OUT THE
V.E.S. IS FAULTY AND IS
LEAKING A TOXIC SUB-
STANCE INTO THE AIR.

THE COMMUNITY
GROUP VISITS THE FIRE
DEPARTMENT TO GET
MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT THE SITE...



THEY FIND OUT THAT GAS STORAGE
TANKS ARE STILL THERE...



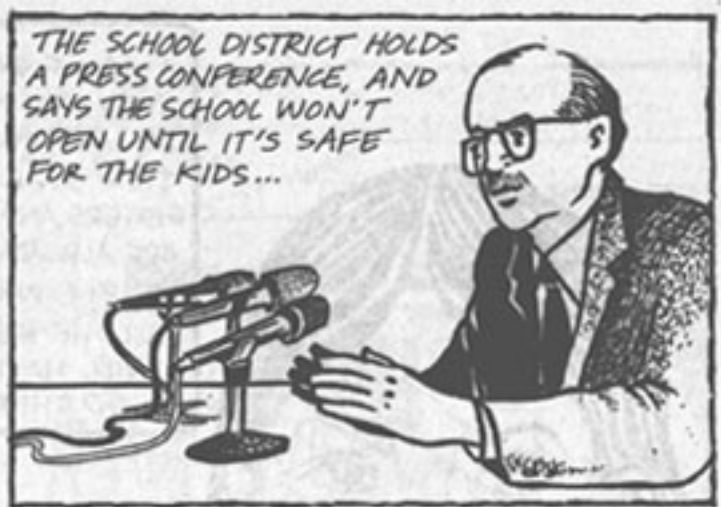
THESE ARE
WHERE THE
UNDERGROUND
STORAGE TANKS
ARE. THEY
HELD GAS
WHEN THERE
WAS A GAS
STATION
THERE.

AS COMMUNITY AWARENESS INCREASES, LOCAL T.V. STATIONS COVER THE STORY.



WE DEMAND THAT THEY DON'T OPEN THE SCHOOL UNTIL IT'S CLEANED UP!

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT HOLDS A PRESS CONFERENCE, AND SAYS THE SCHOOL WON'T OPEN UNTIL IT'S SAFE FOR THE KIDS...



WHY DON'T YOU WANT THE SCHOOL TO OPEN? KIDS HAVE TO TRAVEL TO OTHER MIDDLE SCHOOLS NOW-- AND IT TAKES TWO OR THREE HOURS ON THE BUSES!!

NEXT, REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE WATERBOARD AND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE MEET WITH THE CCSC GROUP...



THAT'S A PROBLEM, BUT THE KIDS' HEALTH COMES FIRST!

A FEW WEEKS LATER... THE STATE TOXICS OFFICE REPORTS...

THE CONTAMINATION AT THE SCHOOL SEEMS TO BE INCREASING. IT'S TEN TIMES HIGHER THAN THE METAL PLATING SHOP ACROSS THE STREET!



THE CCSC GROUP MEETS TO PLAN THEIR NEXT STEPS...



THREE STUDENTS FROM A NEARBY HIGH SCHOOL ATTEND THE MEETING, AND AGREE THEY WANT TO WORK ON THIS ISSUE...





I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY THINK THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH THIS! SURE GLAD MY SISTERS AND BROTHERS ARE ALREADY GROWN UP, BUT WHAT ABOUT ALL THE KIDS WHO WILL HAVE TO GO THERE?!



MARIA, THEY KNOW THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH THIS -- THAT'S WHY THEY'RE DOING IT!!

NEVADA, BUT THEY'RE WRONG! WE CAN RESEARCH THIS -- GET THE COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT AND FIGHT BACK -- LET'S WORK WITH CCSC!

FABIOLA, YOU GO GIRL!



A PUBLIC HEARING IS HELD IN SACRAMENTO, AND TWO COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM CCSC TESTIFY...

THERE ARE CONTRADICTIONS IN THESE ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS!

NEVERTHELESS, THE SCHOOL OPENS FOR CLASSES AND THE CHILDREN ARRIVE...



MARIA, FABIOLA AND NEVADA PLAN A MEETING TO BE HELD WITH STATE AND SCHOOL DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES.



STILL CONCERNED, THEY PASS OUT FLYERS ABOUT THE CONTAMINATION AT THE SCHOOL...



I SEND BOTTLED WATER WITH MY SON -- I DON'T TRUST THE WATER THERE!

THE MEETING IS HELD...

YOU SAY YOUR CHILDREN HAVE RASHES, HEADACHES, THEY FAINT?



AND A STATE SENATOR HOLDS A PUBLIC HEARING WHICH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ATTEND...



CAN YOU AGENCIES STATE UNDER OATH THAT THE SCHOOL IS SAFE AND FREE FROM HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS?



THE SENATOR ASKS FOR MORE TESTING OF THE SOIL FOR CHEMICALS...



AND THE AIR DISTRICT ORDERS THE SCHOOL TO CLEAN UP THE TOXICS...



ANOTHER STATE LEGISLATOR ASKS MARIA, NEVADA AND FABIOLA TO COME TO THE STATE CAPITOL TO GIVE INPUT ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION "WITH TEETH" WHERE THE STATE WOULD HAVE FINAL SAY ON WHERE SCHOOLS ARE BUILT...



School in the Middle Teens Take On Toxics

What's This Story About?

This is based on a true story. Three young high school women over a one year period worked with a community based organization to get some serious toxics cleaned up in their middle school. They researched the issue and organized residents in the neighborhood. By putting pressure on environmental regulators, they caught the attention of state legislators.

Although as of this publication, the middle school still faces some unresolved toxic issues, these teens were successful in mobilizing the neighborhood. The youth helped in the development of legislation – that would give the state, rather than the local school district – final say on where public schools are built.

Questions to Think About/Discuss:

1. What methods did these young women use to get community support for cleaning up toxics at this school?
2. Why do you think the legislators asked these young women for policy input on where to build new schools?
3. What are the advantages/disadvantages of the state (instead of an agency at the local level) having such a responsibility to decide where schools are built?
4. Why do you think these young women got involved in this effort?
5. What skills did they develop in the process?
6. Will these skills help them in the future? In what ways?
7. Give examples of community based organizations that do advocacy work with certain populations? Do you know of one in your community that addresses environmental issues? If so, what do they do? Is there a way for youth to get involved with this organization? If yes, how?

Acknowledgements

Illustrator: Ricardo Garcia O'Meany

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Translation: Sonia Alas

Funding for this was made possible through Grant #97-540 from The California Endowment.