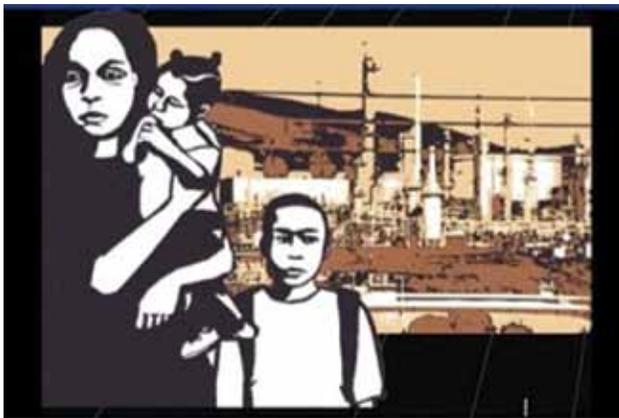


Mossville, LA, “Cancer Capitol”

The Environmental Justice (EJ) movement first gained public attention when the United Church of Christ issued a report in 1987 which found that poor communities and communities of color



were disproportionately impacted by industrial pollution. Today, not only are poor and minority populations more apt to live near polluting facilities, but because they lack both financial resources and political power, they are also less able to redress these inequities. Nowhere is there a better illustration of the harmful, ongoing effects of environmental injustice in our country than in Mossville, LA.

Founded in the 1790s by Jim Moss, a former slave, Mossville is an unincorporated community in Southwestern Louisiana settled by African Americans looking for a haven from racial hostility. Mossville's rich and diverse ecosystem afforded even the poorest families a comfortable life through fishing, hunting and farming.

But in the 1920s and 1930s, oil and chemical companies lured south by cheap labor and favorable laws began building manufacturing plants along the 85-mile corridor between New Orleans and Baton Rouge,

a stretch of land now commonly known as “Cancer Alley”. To the southwest, Mossville, surrounded by 14 industrial facilities that spew over 1000 tons of toxic pollution into the air including oil refineries and the largest concentration of PVC plants anywhere in the U.S., could easily be designated Louisiana's “Cancer Capitol.”

Chief among these toxins are the known carcinogens vinyl chloride, benzene and dioxins – by-products of PVC manufacturing. Mossville residents' blood dioxin levels were tested by the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) in 1998 and in 2001, and found

to be three times that of the general U.S. population. Moreover, the EPA recorded vinyl chloride emissions at 120 times the ambient air standard. Surface and groundwater contamination has also been well documented. ATSDR confirmed that fish caught in waters near the Mossville community are contaminated with unsafe levels of dioxins and PCBs. Ethylene dichloride from local facilities has also leaked into Mossville residents' well water. Despite these findings,

government agencies and industry have been uniformly unresponsive to community requests for medical services, appropriate relocation assistance and, critically, stricter emissions standards.

“Mossville residents are quite literally being poisoned by their environment,” said Susan Baker of Trillium Asset Management. “While they have organized to reclaim their right to a healthy environment, the political and corporate powers have stalled meaningful corrective action.”

In 1998, residents began exhibiting chronic and life-threatening diseases such as cancer, and rashes, as well as respiratory, immune system, reproductive and other organ illnesses that have been linked to the toxic chemicals released by the facilities surrounding Mossville. These toxins have also been connected to serious learning disabilities and behavioral problems.

Facing a dying community, Mossville residents created Mossville Environmental Action Now, Inc. (MEAN) and began collaborating with other groups like Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (AEHR), Earthjustice, Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN), Air Alliance Houston and the Sierra Club, to call for stricter emissions standards policies and practices.

“Environmental Justice (EJ) is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people – regardless of race, ethnicity, income or education level – in environmental decision making. Environmental Justice programs promote the protection of human health and the environment, empowerment via public participation, and the dissemination of relevant information to inform and educate affected communities. Environmental Justice programs are designed to build and sustain community capacity for meaningful participation for all stakeholders.”

- The Environmental Protection Agency



Conoco Phillips plant, Mossville, LA

“In setting the rules for area source PVC plants, EPA did not consider nor provide sufficient protection for public health and the impacts on environmental justice communities where people of color are disproportionately overburdened with toxic pollution.”

Excerpt from investor letter to Lisa P. Jackson, Administrator of the EPA, July, 2012

Said Dorothy Felix of MEAN, “Mossville has been shouldering the burden of breathing this poisoned air for much too long, leaving us with unprecedented levels of disease and illness. Stakeholders from all sectors must continue to call on both industry and government to strengthen standards and advocate for environmental justice for the people of Mossville.”

According to Sr. Judy Byron of the Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment, “Phillips 66, PPG Industries and Georgia Gulf Corporation all had facilities that were contributing to the environmental degradation of Mossville. As shareholders in these companies we knew we had an important role to play in helping to represent the concerns of this disenfranchised community.”

In the summer of 2009, a group of ICCR members traveled to Mossville on a fact-finding trip and met with local community groups including AEHR, representatives from indigenous communities, and local and regional environmental groups. “We are appreciative of ICCR members supporting the defense of Mossville residents’ basic human rights to life, health, and racial equality,” said Monique Harden of AEHR, which is currently representing MEAN in a human rights case against the United States that will be decided by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States.

Recognizing the need for corporate accountability, in addition to the governmental accountability being pursued by MEAN and its allies, ICCR members sent letters to Con-

ocoPhillips and PPG Industries, urging both to meet with Mossville community groups. A meeting between James Mulva, Chairman and CEO of Phillips 66 (previously ConocoPhillips) was finally convened in August of 2009. When PPG failed to respond to their letter, ICCR members filed a community accountability shareholder resolution in 2010 and again in 2011.

“ICCR members believe companies have a moral and legal responsibility to protect the well-being of the communities where they operate, said Christina Herman of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In the cases of ConocoPhillips and PPG, we urge the companies both in dialogues and through shareholder resolutions to implement robust community engagement policies that will help mitigate the health and quality of life concerns being voiced by Mossville residents. Their obligation to these residents springs directly from their social license to operate, which is granted through community consent.”

Investor pressure was successful in motivating both ConocoPhillips and PPG to improve their communications with community representatives; ConocoPhillips also began reporting these engagements on its website. Furthermore, the EPA, industry and local government are collaborating to improve Mossville’s water quality and infrastructure, and both ConocoPhillips and PPG are participating in a water engineering study to explore ways to help mitigate their operational impacts.

Separately, ICCR members called a meeting with top EPA regional staff to

discuss strategies to reduce the toxic burden in Mossville. The EPA also convened a taskforce with industry representatives to improve plant operations and reduce episodic emissions. Armed with this information, ICCR members began asking ConocoPhillips and PPG to better account for their environmental impacts and disclose any corrective actions taken in the Mossville area.

In July of 2012, ICCR investors, in collaboration with the Center for Health, Environment & Justice, sent a letter to the EPA asking it to reconsider a prior ruling on emissions standards for the PVC industry. Stakeholders contend that the ruling was noticeably weakened and would be ineffective in protecting communities such as Mossville, LA and Deer Isle, TX.

“Exposing communities to chemicals that cause sickness and cancer is no way to keep our economy strong,” said Sr. Judy Byron. “These facilities have more than enough money to install protections that would limit the amount of poison people breathe. But when reductions aren’t voluntarily adopted by industry, the responsibility of the EPA to regulate them is clear.”

Said Baker, “The good news is the EPA has agreed to review its ruling and we will be monitoring the process to ensure that all environmental justice concerns are appropriately addressed. The bad news is we don’t know how long it will take.”

For the sake of Mossville residents whose lives hang in the balance, we hope it won’t take long. ■