

Summer 2024 • The Clean Water Action Newsletter

NATIONAL UPDATES

Victory After Ten Years of Clean Water Advocacy: EPA Strengthens Coal-Fired Power Plant Water Pollution Limits

On April 25, 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized more strict Clean Water Act wastewater pollution limits (also known as Effluent Limitations Guidelines or ELGs) for coal-fired power plants. [Our press release](#) describes the details of the new rule, which will prevent millions of pounds of harmful pollution from being released into our waterways each year, protect drinking water sources for more than 42 million people, reduce costs for drinking water systems and their customers, and ensure a healthier future for all communities. As [highlighted in one of our latest blog posts](#), this win is the culmination of more than a decade of advocacy by Clean Water Action and its hundreds of thousands of members across the country.



A Year Since Devastating Sackett v. EPA Decision: Colorado Leads the Way in Restoring State Protections to Wetlands and Streams



The U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in the case of *Sackett v. EPA* on May 25, 2023. This ruling narrowed the Clean Water Act's definition of "Waters of the United States" by removing protections from most wetlands and streams. Clean Water Action has been working to fill the gap from the loss of these federal protections by advocating on the state level. We recently celebrated a hard-fought win in Colorado with the passage of House Bill 24-1379, which strengthened protections to wetlands and streams ([see our blog here](#)). While this was a victory for clean water on the state level, we ultimately need Congress to pass legislation to permanently restore protections to all vulnerable waters and wetlands across the country. You can help by taking action today: urge your U.S. Representative to support [a national fix to the Clean Water Act](#).

VICTORY!

We Are Taking on Toxic PFAS Chemicals and Winning!

Take a bow, Clean Water Action members. You did it! We had TWO massive wins this spring in the campaign to protect our water and our health from toxic PFAS in New England. Both the Connecticut and the Rhode Island state legislatures passed sweeping bans on the use of these dangerous “forever chemicals” in a wide range of products. Thank you for writing letters on your porch with our canvassers, emailing and calling your legislators, sharing our social media, and supporting our work. These victories belong to all of us!



PFAS are a class of chemicals added to products to make them stain and water resistant, but they are harmful to human health and don't break down in the environment, so these toxic chemicals accumulate in our water and in our bodies. PFAS are still found in many household items even though safer alternatives exist, but states across the country are passing PFAS bans covering a wide range of products.

Connecticut joined this wave of action in May when the legislature unanimously passed SB 292 which will restrict the use of PFAS in apparel, textiles, cosmetics, menstrual products, ski wax, cookware, children's products, dental floss, upholstered furniture, cleaning products, carpets/rugs, and, crucially, firefighter turnout gear. The bill will also restrict the application of biosolids containing PFAS.

▲ *Some of the products where PFAS can be found*

Act of 2024 (S2152/H7356) will ban the sale of certain items containing PFAS like carpets and rugs, cookware, cosmetics, fabric treatments, juvenile products, menstrual products, artificial turf, ski wax, and textiles. It also phases out the use of Class B firefighting foam containing PFAS, a major source of water contamination.

In **Rhode Island**, our outgoing RI Director, Jed Thorp, left on a high note, shepherding comprehensive PFAS legislation to unanimous passage in the General Assembly. The Consumer Product PFAS Ban

We aren't done yet! Clean Water Action is leading the coalition to pass strong protections from PFAS in **Massachusetts**, too. The Massachusetts House and Senate have both passed a bill to ban PFAS in firefighter protective gear. At the time of writing, the bill is waiting for a final procedural vote and is expected to be on the way to Governor Healy's desk soon!



◀ *Anne Hulick, Connecticut's State Director, watches the victorious vote to ban PFAS from the gallery with allies.*

ReThink Disposable: We're Building the Solutions to Plastic Pollution

Plastic pollution at beaches and parks. Plastic waste spilling out of trash cans. Summertime is the peak time for disposable plastic dining ware. But Clean Water's ReThink Disposable program offers a different vision. From restaurants to schools to soup kitchens — we are creating models of sustainable dining that can be scaled up. The solution to plastic pollution is to make and consume less plastic, and we have a lot of successes to share!

In **Massachusetts**, we are working on expanding reusable take-out container programs. [POH-keh Bowl](#) and [La Veracruzana](#) are combining forces to offer [returnable to-go containers](#). We partnered with [Newton North High School](#) on reusable containers for their grab and go lunches. And we helped [Truro Community Kitchen](#) offer waste free meals.

In **Rhode Island**, the styrofoam ban we worked to pass takes effect in January. Several Rhode Island schools received a grant from the Rhode Island Department of Education, and we are partnering

► [ReThink Disposable reusable water cups await athletes at the Cedar Lake \(CT\) Triathlon.](#)

with schools interested in reusable food ware to help them make the switch away from styrofoam.

In **Connecticut**, we partnered with the Cedar Lake Triathlon to make the event zero waste. Athletes received reusable cups and water bottles at the water stations which will be washed and sanitized for future races.

The future is reusable!



Plate to Planet Campaign

Every year, Massachusetts residents throw away 6 million tons of garbage. Our trash ends up in landfills and incinerators which not only pollute neighboring communities but also contribute to the climate crisis. But nearly a third of that garbage is food waste that we can keep OUT of the trash. Clean Water Action is working in coalition with allies at MASSPIRG to expand for composting programs. [Learn more and take action here.](#)



When Young People Speak, the World Listens: Cathen Fontanilla Speaks!

Youth Action Collaborative (YAC) is a Clean Water Action leadership development program that seeks to empower Massachusetts youth to act on local environmental issues.

Our Campaigns & Communications Intern, Chhimi Sherpa, was privileged to interview **Cathen Fontanilla**, a recent YAC graduate from Malden High School, about her journey as a young environmental organizer.

What sparks your interest in the environment and climate?

Lack of awareness worldwide. My recent encounter with a classmate who claimed that climate change isn't real left me questioning our current education system. I think ignorance and inaction are our troubles.

Based on your experience or observation, what are some environmental issues in your own neighborhood?

High energy consumption and poor air quality stand out. People struggle with energy efficiency and conservation. And we have poor air quality due to carbon emissions from cars and lack of trees. I believe that education is the key to solving these issues. People need information about the effects of climate change and how they can reduce their carbon footprint.

How did you hear about Youth Action Collaborative?

I learned about YAC from my biology teacher who told me about the opportunity to learn about environmental justice, climate change, and environmental organizing, and I was immediately intrigued.

Could you share some highlights of your experience with the program?

Participating in the YAC program was a fulfilling experience. It taught me numerous valuable lessons, not only in terms of environment and climate, but also skills like collaboration, public speaking, digital organizing, and more. However, one session that stuck to me was when former Rhode Island State



▲ Omesa Mokaya, Clean Water's Youth Engagement Program Manager (left), Kiera Alventosa, Environmental Health Organizer (second from left), and Malden High student Cathen Fontanilla (fifth from left), with students from the Youth Action Collaborative's spring semester.

Senator Cynthia Mendes spoke to us about power mapping and activism. She shared her inspiring story which made me believe that youth hold so much power, and that we must use it; I look up to Sen. Mendes to this day.

Another experience was attending the World Asthma Day celebration in Boston. One of my colleagues delivered a powerful speech that left everyone in awe; they couldn't believe a young person could be that knowledgeable. When youth speak, the world listens.

How do you think young people like yourself can make a difference in combating climate change?

Young people are bold, creative, and ambitious. During the program, I saw young people with brilliant ideas that the system doesn't recognize. YAC taught us the importance of amplifying our voices and taking up space. I believe we can change the narrative. We can start by educating ourselves and others, advocating for change, and taking action. Together, we can create a sustainable future.

If you had a supernatural power, what positive environmental change would you like to see around you?

I would like to make people realize what's happening to our world. If I had the power to change the world, I think that simply altering it would be boring. I want everyone to see what is happening to our world. Then we could collaborate to make it better. I want to see everyone working together because unity is power!

MASSACHUSETTS

Salem Workers are Building the Renewable Energy Future

Salem Massachusetts is poised to bring family-supporting jobs to its port by becoming a major player in offshore wind development. And the best part? Local grassroots organizers have successfully pushed for a Community Benefits Agreement ensuring that the new wind turbine marshalling yard (where turbine parts are prepared before being installed) is a good neighbor to Salem residents and includes pathways to union jobs for local community members historically left out of this kind of opportunity. Salem is modeling the right way to build a renewable future.

Clean Water Action has been engaged with local leaders in Salem since the late 1990s towards a common goal of a fossil fuel and pollution-free future for the city. Originally, this work focused on transitioning away from the coal industry while still advocating for Salem to remain an industry and jobs hub. We are thrilled to report that it's happening! Salem will host a wind turbine marshalling yard where wind turbine parts can be stored and transported to offshore wind farms in the Northeast.

But there is better news! Thanks to efforts by groups like Salem SAFE, the Latino Leadership Council, Conservation Law Foundation, union leaders from the North Shore Labor Council, and Clean Water Action, the marshalling yard's developer created a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with Salem that **locks in victories for local families and workers.** This CBA is a model because grassroots leaders and partners were at the table from the beginning, getting transparent commitments that residents can understand.

The CBA offers specific and measurable commitments for workforce and economic development and environmental protections for the local neighborhood. The agreement also



includes hiring benchmarks for local workers and groups including women, BIPOC workers, language isolated communities, and formerly incarcerated individuals.

This CBA is also aligned with the goals of the Project Labor Agreement, a significant collaboration between environmental organizers and labor. Our collaborative work serves as a roadmap for other communities looking to center environmental, racial, and economic justice. **We go farther when we go together!**

Our grassroots allies in Salem and our union partners are modeling the path forward. This port, and the wind farms it will serve, bring us another step closer to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 50% below the 1990 level by 2030. This is what the clean energy future looks like — local communities and residents involved early in the process to ensure that new projects uplift locals rather than harm them. What Salem neighbors are building here can be replicated in other communities, so we can build a green economy that powers our homes and empowers workers and families.

CONNECTICUT

Waterbury Home Energy Action Kicks Off Round 2!

Connecticut's Waterbury Home Energy Action Campaign kicked off Round 2 to help Waterbury residents learn about and sign up for no-cost energy efficiency services. Thanks to a grant from the Energize Community Partnership Initiative, we're excited to do more to help residents learn about this program and sign up. Clean Water Action's Energy Justice Organizer, Sharod Blizzard stated, "As a lifelong Waterbury resident, I know the challenges residents here face, and high energy bills is just one problem. We help residents learn about no-cost energy efficiency services that will help them save money on energy bills, make homes more comfortable, and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions. It really is a win-win-win!"

The goal of the campaign is to increase awareness of the free energy efficiency services and help get more than 600 Waterbury residents to sign up this year. To do this, we've partnered with Waterbury Mayor Pernerewski, NEST, Inc., and Riba Aspira to help spread the word and meet residents where they are. Sharod is leading and coordinating events, forums, and other options for direct community outreach.

What are energy efficiency services?

Connecticut's program to make homes and buildings more energy efficient is a top goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from heating and cooling. Many CT homes are older and poorly insulated with old windows and many areas in the home that are drafty. This means that residents use more energy to heat and cool their homes, driving up energy costs and emissions. Sealing up leaks throughout the home can save residents more than \$200/year, freeing up money for other important items.

We've partnered directly with the team at New England Smart Energy to make it easy for Waterbury residents. They offer certified, specially trained contractors that schedule a convenient appointment to come to homes, conduct tests to determine where leaks occur, seal up those leaks on the spot, and swap out less efficient faucets and shower heads. All these measures go a long way to make homes more efficient and comfortable — and the service is often free.

Why doesn't everyone sign up?

There are many barriers to participation including language barriers, residents juggling multiple priorities, mistrust of the Utilities, and not having easily accessible, on-the spot information.

Our team looks forward to being at community events, forums, doing door to door outreach, and working with local, trusted community partners to identify the best ways to meet residents where they are and make participation easy.



"We help residents learn about no-cost energy efficiency services that will help them save money on energy bills, make homes more comfortable, and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions."

— Sharod Blizzard
Energy Justice Organizer
Clean Water CT

RHODE ISLAND

Unfinished Business: The Bottle Bill and Plastic Pollution

The plastic pollution problem isn't going away, and neither are we. A Rhode Island bottle bill is still the only proven solution that will not only improve recycling rates but also reduce litter. At the close of the 2024 legislative session, here is an update on how far we have come and what our next steps will be to get a bottle bill passed.

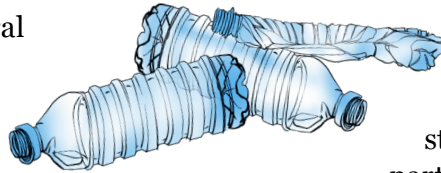
In 2023, the Rhode Island General Assembly voted to create a study commission to examine plastic waste and bottle bills. Clean Water Action has been at every commission hearing since last fall as expert after expert came before the members to testify. The common thread? Bottle bills work. The bottles collected are better sorted and cleaner than bottles collected by single-stream curbside recycling programs, so a higher percentage are recycled into new bottles. And the deposit on each container creates a financial incentive to properly return the bottles, or even collect discarded bottles for cash, so litter is reduced.

The study commission is going well, and its work has been extended through next year. A basic bottle bill was even released in June and had a productive hearing. Great news: This bill contained many of our must-haves including putting a 10-cent deposit on containers, covering all beverage containers

— even nips, keeping unclaimed deposits in the system, and setting strong reuse and recycled content goals. We are getting closer to consensus.

What are the next steps? First, Clean Water Action will continue to serve on the study commission alongside our allies and push for key components like ensuring that every neighborhood has access to convenient bottle return options. Additionally, we will be asking candidates where they stand on bottle bills and plastic waste as part of our candidate questionnaire. And throughout the summer, we will work with our grassroots friends to build the case for bottle bills and microplastics legislation with the public.

You can help! See plastic bits, bottles, and trash on the beach this summer? Post it to social media with #RIbottlebill and tag our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts! Let's make the problem of bottle litter visible. We know that litter laws and educational campaigns haven't solved the plastic litter problem. And while updating our recycling facilities with new tech might improve the rate of recycling for the bottles that make it into the facility, that won't recover the bottles floating down streams and breaking into microplastic bits in the Bay. Bottle bills do both. We're not done fighting for one in Rhode Island.



◀ Rhode Island's State Director, Jed Thorp, poses with the 2024 honorees at the Breakfast of Champions

World Asthma Day. Air pollution was responsible for over 15,000 cases of childhood asthma, and over 2,700 deaths in MA in 2019, and its distribution is unequal. Residents in lower income communities, communities of color, and language-isolated neighborhoods are more likely to experience poor air quality. On May 6th, elected officials, grassroots leaders, and concerned neighbors gathered in Roxbury to rally for clean air for all in honor of World Asthma Day. [Read more!](#)

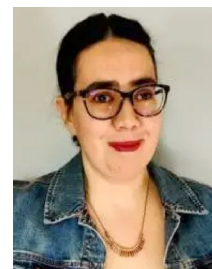


▲ *Left:* Massachusetts State Senator Liz Miranda addresses the crowd at the May 6th World Asthma Day Rally. *Right:* Clean Water Action’s Massachusetts staff and Youth Action Collaborative students at the World Asthma Day Rally.

New Leadership in New England. In case you missed it, we have two new members in our Clean Water Action New England leadership team. Cynthia Mendes is now sharing Co-Director responsibilities with Elizabeth Saunders in Massachusetts. Check out [this Q and A](#) with Cynthia! And [Emily Howe is stepping in as the Interim State Director in Rhode Island](#). We wish RI’s outgoing State Director, Jed Thorp, all the best and look forward to continuing to stand with him against plastic pollution in Rhode Island.



Cynthia Mendes



Emily Howe

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PO Box 83, Dorchester, MA 02124
X@cleanh2oma CleanWaterMA

PO Box 92, Cromwell, CT 06416
X@CleanWaterCT CleanWaterActionCT

134 Thurbers Avenue, Suite 118, Providence, RI 02905
X@cleanwater_ri CleanWaterActionRI

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