

Winter 2024 • The Clean Water Action Newsletter

## *New England Climate Action WILL Continue, No Matter Who is President*

The incoming administration ran on promises to dismantle clean energy projects. But wait — they can't. States across the country have passed laws setting strict clean energy and emissions targets, money from the Inflation Reduction Act is already being distributed and spent, and the first offshore wind turbines are up and running in New England. With states and regions in the lead, America can still be a climate leader. Here's how:

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) authorized massive spending on clean energy projects. And despite universal Republican opposition to the law, Republican districts represent 85% of the clean energy and EV investments and 68% of jobs created by the IRA, according to a report from E2. Now that they're in charge, Republicans aren't going to return the money or cancel these job-creating projects. That progress will continue!

Here in New England, Massachusetts passed a massive Climate Omnibus bill just days after the election. The new law responds to concerns from Environmental Justice communities while still expanding and supporting Massachusetts' transition from fossil fuels to clean renewables. With enthusiastic labor support, **Massachusetts** is creating family-sustaining jobs in offshore wind and building examples of a just climate future.



▲ *Clean Water Action and allies celebrate the signing of the 2024 Climate Omnibus bill with Governor Maura Healey.* PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

**Rhode Island** is also continuing to follow the road map set by its 2021 Act on Climate law, making mandatory greenhouse gas emissions targets more enforceable, adding a goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, and requiring actions to promote equity and environmental justice. And **Connecticut** is gearing up for an effort to pass its own strong climate legislation in 2025, with Clean Water Action advocating specifically for more energy efficiency funding.

We know we don't have a partner in the White House. But that doesn't mean the climate fight is lost. It just means we have more work to do at the state level, which is exactly what Clean Water Action is set up to do. Stand with us!

## MASSACHUSETTS

# Climate Justice: Making Sure Every Neighbor Can Access Energy Efficiency Upgrades!

To fight the climate crisis, we need to develop new sources of renewable energy AND reduce energy consumption across the state, and we can't afford to leave any community behind. That's why Clean Water Fund Massachusetts is a Mass Save® Community First Partner! We are working in five South Coast communities (Fall River, New Bedford, Taunton, Attleboro, and Westport) to expand outreach to the Mass Save programs — connecting neighbors to no-cost and low-cost energy efficiency upgrades by fostering relationships with grassroots organizations, city officials, and residents.

The Mass Save Sponsors offer neighbors an opportunity to lower carbon emissions and cut down on the cost of their energy bill. Residents who participate receive a no-cost Home Energy Assessment where an energy efficiency expert offers on-the-spot improvements that can save them energy and money. These professionals also prepare a list of additional no-cost and low-cost upgrades offered by the Sponsors of Mass Save ranging from swapping to more efficient devices like programmable thermostats to improving home insulation to keep warm air in and cold air out this winter.

Everyone in Massachusetts is already paying for these benefits through their utility bill. Our goal is to make sure that the benefits reach every community, not just the wealthier neighborhoods already participating at higher rates.

Step one is making sure neighbors KNOW about the programs. Our Energy-Efficiency Outreach Specialist, Shay Brooks, has been tabling at community events over the last year, finding unique ways to grab residents' attention such as our energy-efficient dollhouse. While the kids explore



the dollhouse's insulated walls and LED light bulbs, their parents explore the different rebates and incentives offered by the Sponsors of Mass Save!

Shay is also working closely with local organizations like Community Economic Development Center and Mujeres Victoriosas, who already have the trust of many English-Isolated residents.

In addition, Clean Water has sent mailers to residents in partnership with city officials, and our partner, HomeWorks Energy, will soon be canvassing in Taunton and New Bedford to remind residents about the Mass Save Programs and assist them through the sign-up process. We've already been able to reach hundreds of families!

By working at the grassroots level, Clean Water is ensuring that climate justice is centered as our state moves towards a clean energy future!

To sign up and make your Home Energy Assessment appointment today, follow the link: [hwe.works/cleanwater](https://hwe.works/cleanwater) or call (781)-305-3319.

*Clean Water Fund is participating in the Mass Save® Community First Partnership, sponsored locally by Eversource, Liberty Utilities and National Grid, to increase participation in energy efficiency programs.*

## MASSACHUSETTS

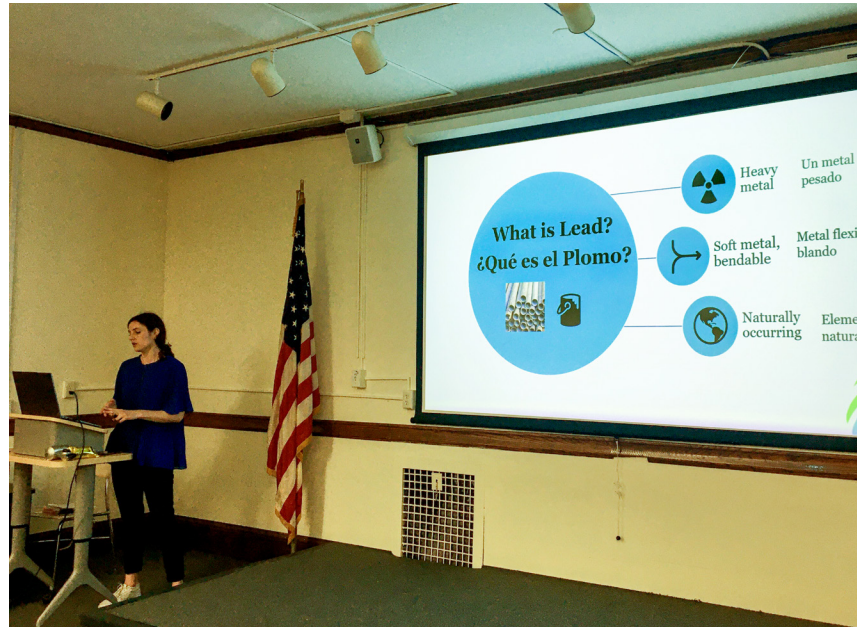
# Getting the Lead Out of Drinking Water in Massachusetts

Access to safe, clean drinking water should be a right, not a privilege. This fall, Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund continued our grassroots public education campaign to “Get the Lead Out” in Malden and Chelsea. Through a series of free information sessions, we worked to uplift the voices of community members and elevate the issue of lead in drinking water. We discussed how to protect health on the individual and structural level, and we offered interpretation, translated materials, free childcare, food, and free giveaways for NSF/ANSI 53 filters for lead. We are so grateful for everyone who took the time to learn about lead, build community power, and share their environmental health stories.

In Chelsea, we began the fall season with an event for childcare educators planned in collaboration with state, city, and community partners. We hosted over fifty attendees, more than half of whom were childcare educators in Chelsea. After the presentation, many signed up to have the water in their childcare facilities tested for lead through MassDEP WaterSmart.

During National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, we hosted a presentation at the Chelsea Public Library for the parents of children in childcare centers. Attendees brought their children for an evening of empanadas and bi-lingual lead education. We offered another presentation at the Chelsea Senior Center, at the request of the seniors, many of whom were concerned about the impacts of lead on their grandchildren. Everyone left with tangible protective actions, and water filters, for their families.

We also launched our door-to-door outreach in Chelsea this fall. We teamed up with Chelsea GreenRoots to conduct a weeklong canvass on the free lead service line replacement program offered by the City of Chelsea. The canvassers connected



▲ Clean Water Action’s Environmental Health Organizer, Kiera Alventosa, presents at a lead in drinking water info session at the Chelsea public library.

PHOTO BY FRAN ROZNOWSKI

*Through a series of free information sessions, we worked to uplift the voices of community members and elevate the issue of lead in drinking water.*

with neighbors, in English and Spanish, and helped them take steps to get the lead out of their drinking water.

We also expanded our outreach in Malden. At the Malden Community Health Fest, children pulled their parents to the Halloween-themed Clean Water table for the candy, and we reached over eighty parents. We also gave a presentation at the Malden Public Library in partnership with the Mystic Valley Area chapter of the NAACP. Community members looked up their addresses in the lead service line dashboard, and we distributed information translated into six different languages.

Our strategy thus far has been giving neighbors information to protect their families. But there is still more work to be done to make sure that everyone can access full lead service line replacements in 2025!

## CONNECTICUT, RHODE ISLAND

# ReThink Disposable Campaign Helps Schools Stop Waste Before It Starts

This holiday season we have a lot to celebrate! Clean Water's ReThink Disposable campaign has converted restaurants, cafeterias, and community kitchens across New England to reusable dining ware — keeping tens of thousands of disposable cups, trays, and forks out of landfills and incinerators — and now we have great news to report from our work with schools across the region!

Our long-awaited launch of **reusables at all 10 public schools in Middletown, Connecticut** is underway. After over a year of planning, purchasing, and preparation, we have begun the first phase of introducing reusable plates and bowls in school cafeterias. The cost-savings for the district are approximately \$100,000 per year, with additional savings on potential reduced waste hauling costs of another \$30,000 annually.

The switch to reusables will prevent the use and disposal of over 3.5 million pieces of single-use disposable foodware items each year, the equivalent of 15.5 tons of diverted waste! With the ongoing dedication and support from the Director of Food, Nutrition, and Wellness, Randall Mel Jr., and the Middletown Recycling Coordinator, Kim O'Rourke, we are on track to full implementation for the 2026-2027 school year.

In **Rhode Island**, we are toasting the application of our **state-wide polystyrene foam ban!** No longer will Ocean State school children be using non-recyclable and toxic expanded polystyrene cafeteria food trays. The Rhode Island Department of Education teamed up with several local non-profits, including ReThink Disposable, to offer funding through their Get the Foam Out Grant. We're helping several schools make the transition to reusable trays including Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School which is using grant funds to renovate an existing space in the kitchen to a fully functioning dishwashing room.

We're also working with the **Rhode Island School's Recycling Project** on two schools in the town of Johnston, which hosts the state's sole landfill:



▲ Clean Water Action's Amber Schmidt (L) and Anne Hulick pose at the launch of ReThink Disposable in Middletown, CT Public Schools.

*The switch to reusables will prevent the use and disposal of over 3.5 million pieces of single-use disposable foodware items each year, the equivalent of 15.5 tons of diverted waste!*

Brown Avenue Elementary School and Ferri Middle School. Brown Avenue Elementary School switched to stainless-steel reusable trays and sporks this fall along with a seven-step sorting station and reusable return system. Students volunteer to be Green Rangers and help other students sort waste properly. Plus, thanks to support from Plastic Free Restaurants, we have donated stainless-steel sporks to the schools mentioned above as well as Segue Institute for Learning in Central Falls and Wilbur & McMahon Schools in Little Compton.

We will have more good news coming in 2025 as more school partnerships come to fruition. The future is reusable, and we are building examples of the Zero Waste future we want to see!

## ***This Holiday Season, Beware of Black Plastic!***

Are you serving mashed potatoes with a side of toxic flame retardants? If you have Black Plastic kitchen utensils or food containers, the answer is probably YES. How did this happen and what can we all do about it? Let us explain.

Plastics are bad for our environment at every step in their lifecycle from the extraction of fossil fuels to produce to them to the mess they make as litter, waste, and microplastics. And while the vast majority of plastics will never be recycled, incredibly, some of that small amount of plastics recycling is the source of this toxic Black Plastic mess. Bad news — [a study released this fall by our friends at Toxic Free Future](#) confirms that items made from recycled Black Plastic are chock full of horrific cancer-causing, hormone-disrupting chemicals.

Why? When companies manufacture plastic components for electronics, they often include a toxic soup of flame-retardants. These chemicals shouldn't be used in these products either, but at least you weren't planning on serving cranberry sauce on your flatscreen TV. But when the plastic in these electronics is recycled, those same toxic chemicals can show up in surprising places from spatulas to children's toys to those plastic take out containers — anything using that Black Plastic that was once an electronic component.



The [health impacts of these toxic flame retardants](#) are well-established and scary. Among the substances discovered in items in the study was deca-BDE which has been banned in the EU and the United States (although, [sadly, the ban did not extend to a ban of deca-BDE in recycled plastic](#)). These chemicals can cause cancer, disrupt hormones governing critical processes in our body, and can harm the developing brains of children.

So, what do we DO? The answer is getting these toxic chemicals out of the plastics manufacturing process and ending the practice of shrouding plastics' ingredients in mystery. Consumers shouldn't have to wonder what chemicals are lurking in the TV!

Clean Water Action and our partners are fighting for the policy changes we need to get these toxic flame retardants out of everyday products. But if you have Black Plastic items in your home that come into contact with food or are designed for children, the best thing to do is throw them away. This holiday season, send those leftovers home in a glass or metal container, and encourage your guests to contact their elected officials and demand changes to toxics and plastic policy to protect families.

## ***We Won Huge Toxics Victories in 2024! In 2025, We Defend and Expand Them***

Across New England, we've got toxic PFAS on the run! Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts all passed laws restricting these dangerous chemicals. In 2025, we want to defend the gains we have made and press forward to protect our water and our health from toxic substances.

In 2024, New England joined a national wave of legislative actions against toxic PFAS. In Rhode Island and Connecticut, the legislatures passed sweeping bans on a wide range of products containing PFAS including juvenile products, carpets and rugs, cookware, cosmetics, and menstrual products, among others. In Massachusetts, last minute organizing at the State House last summer led to passage of legislation protecting firefighters by banning the manufacture, sale, and distribution of PFAS-containing firefighter personal protective equipment as of 2027.

But we're not done! In 2025, we will continue to fight in Massachusetts for a wider ban on toxic PFAS as well as for legislation protecting children from other toxic substances. In Connecticut, we will push state agencies and the governor to implement next steps in our state's PFAS plan including funding testing for private wells. And in all three states, we will fend off coming industry attacks on the new PFAS restrictions. Stay tuned for ways to help!

## RHODE ISLAND

**Honoring Labor Leader George Nee:** Clean Water Action honored retiring Rhode Island AFL-CIO President, George Nee, at Electoberfest on October 1st. “We are so excited to honor George Nee. He has been a force for environmental, worker, and social justice from his efforts in the early 1980s to ensure that Rhode Island’s beaches were cared for to his advocacy with the Rhode Island AFL-CIO for family-supporting clean energy jobs in our state. We are creating an award named in his honor, to connect young, rising social justice leaders in Rhode Island to that legacy,” said Emily Howe, Clean Water Action’s Interim Rhode Island State Director.



▲ Rep. Gabe Amo, Anne Sliney, George Nee, and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse at Electoberfest

PHOTO: CLEAN WATER ACTION

**Bottle bill is back! Take action before the new session starts!** After a full year of hearings at the Bottle Bill Study Commission, including hours of expert testimony, it has become increasingly clear that bottle bills work to improve recycling, fight litter, and build a Zero Waste economy. In 2025, we will be pushing for the General Assembly to draft and pass a bottle bill! You can help: [Send a message to your state legislators!](#)

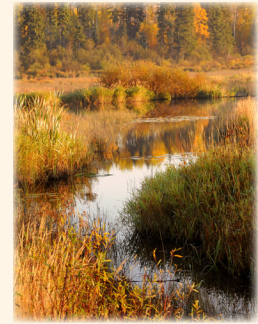


▲ CT State Representative Geraldo Reyes Jr. (L) poses with community members and Clean Water Action staff (far R) at an energy efficiency event in Waterbury PHOTO: OFFICE OF REP. REYES

**Updates from our energy efficiency campaign in Waterbury:** We’re working in Waterbury to ensure equitable access to Connecticut’s energy efficiency benefits. Helping working families access energy efficiency upgrades helps build a livable climate future for every family. We recently co-hosted an event with State Representative Geraldo Reyes Jr. to spread the word. [Learn more about the program and sign up on our website!](#)

## 2024 Election Results and Our Work

We're proud of our work to motivate clean water voters in the recent elections. See our state updates in this issue. The impact of the election on our national level work will, unfortunately, be dramatic. The new administration has committed to gutting federal agencies, rolling back health and environmental protections, and to taking us backwards on addressing the climate crisis. Among its priorities are further weakening the Clean Water Act's stream and wetlands protections, despite the devastation already caused by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Sackett v. EPA*. Both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate will be controlled by a party now seemingly hostile to strengthening environmental and health protections. Many members are committed to extreme federal budget cuts. We know that despite this rather dire reality, people's voices matter and our work can make a difference. We will be working to oppose anti-regulatory initiatives, to protect the clean water and clean air protections that the public supports, and to stand up for effective government that implements our landmark environmental laws to make people and our communities healthier.



### **The Safe Drinking Water Act:** **50 Years of Progress — But the Work is Never Finished**

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) was signed into law by President Gerald Ford on December 16, 1974. The goal of the nation's first comprehensive drinking water law was to reduce risks to public health from drinking water. The law ushered in remarkable improvements and technical innovation in drinking water treatment and distribution. Still, the task is never complete. Clean Water's work around drinking water is focused on ensuring that we maintain the collective commitment to ensuring safe drinking water for all. Priority issues include:

- Making sure SDWA's contaminant limits keep up with health science around long-known contaminants like nitrates and arsenic and that regulations address "emerging" contaminants like microplastics
- Ensuring ongoing federal water infrastructure investments to support local drinking water system improvements and robust budgets for federal and state agency implementation of the law
- Elevating the need to keep pollutants out of our drinking water systems in the first place so that drinking water systems and their customers don't bear all the costs of removing contaminants like the notorious PFAS chemicals

### **A Win for Our Water: Progress On Getting Lead Out Of Drinking Water.**

On October 8, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized the *Lead and Copper Rule Improvements*, regulations which require full replacement of lead service lines in drinking water systems. Putting lead service lines behind us has been a goal of Clean Water's work.

The vast majority of lead service lines, which bring water from the large water main into the home or building, will be replaced within ten years of the new regulation's implementation. The effort is supported by targeted funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, including \$2.6 billion in funding announced in October. "Because of lead's health impacts on children and adults, even at low levels, it is critical to reduce lead exposure wherever we can. We welcome the Biden-Harris administration and EPA's bold action. We can get lead out of drinking water and redouble efforts to eliminate lead exposure from paint, food, and other sources," National Campaigns Director Lynn Thorp said in our press release heralding the announcement.

## NEW ENGLAND CURRENTS

Winter 2024

PO Box 83, Dorchester, MA 02124  
[X@cleanh2oma](https://twitter.com/cleanh2oma) [f CleanWaterMA](https://facebook.com/CleanWaterMA)

PO Box 92, Cromwell, CT 06416  
[X@CleanWaterCT](https://twitter.com/CleanWaterCT) [f CleanWaterActionCT](https://facebook.com/CleanWaterActionCT)

166 Valley Street, Building 6M, Suite 103, Providence, RI 02909  
[X@cleanwater\\_ri](https://twitter.com/cleanwater_ri) [f CleanWaterActionRI](https://facebook.com/CleanWaterActionRI)

CURRENTS is published by Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund.  
 Reproduction in whole or part is permitted with proper credit. © 2024 All rights reserved.