

Toxinformer

Environmental Health Coalition

Special Issue

Fall 2002



Toxinformer

Environmental Health Coalition
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Environmental Health Coalition

Promoting Environmental Justice in the San Diego/Tijuana Region

Environmental Health Coalition is dedicated to environmental and social justice. We believe that justice is achieved when empowered communities act together to make social change. We organize and advocate to protect public health and the environment threatened by toxic pollution. EHC supports efforts that create a just society which foster a healthy and sustainable quality of life.

The Border Environmental Justice Campaign (BEJC) works in solidarity with social justice groups in the border region to promote worker and community right-to-know about the chemicals used by the maquiladoras, to increase their capacity to influence conditions that directly affect their health, and to demand cleanup of abandoned and contaminated sites.

The Clean Bay Campaign (CBC) unites workers, bayside communities, and conservationists to clean up, restore and protect San Diego Bay as a clean and healthy multi-use water resource capable of supporting a diverse range of activities.

The Community Assistance Program responds to the needs of residents by providing scientific, technical, and policy information and assistance, and empowering residents with appropriate and effective strategies.

The Toxic Free Neighborhoods Campaign (TFN) works with affected residents to promote land use and planning reforms, the relocation of hazardous industries to industrial zones, the reduction of toxic air contaminants released by industry, and the abatement of lead hazards in the home.

The Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Lead Poisoning (CeCLP) works with community residents, housing advocates, health officials, and government agencies to eliminate the sources of lead exposure in San Diego County.

We did it!

As Frederick Douglass said, "if there is no struggle, there is no progress."

There has been plenty of struggle for the residents of Barrio Logan who fought, demanded and agitated and now finally have succeeded in closing down a highly toxic polluter in their neighborhood. Master Plating, long known to community residents, EHC, and government agencies to be a source of dangerous air emissions has closed its doors. The community can breath a sigh of relief.

Progress has been made and we're celebrating! EHC has dedicated this issue of the Toxinformer to this special and significant event. You'll see the glorious smiles and almost hear the cheers of the people who worked so hard to make this dream a reality. Listed in the center section are the hundreds of community residents, EHC members, government agencies, elected officials, foundations, and many others who all helped to make this a win. The Master Plating story is one of organizing and protest that led to collaboration and cooperation. In the end, state, county, and city officials stepped up to the plate and took on this issue, and we thank them and recognize their important efforts.

In the beginning, though, it was a much different story. You'll read about the years of neglect and discrimination that led to putting homes and toxic polluters together. You'll hear about the deaf ear that officials turned when confronted with complaints and demands for enforcement.

Justice certainly has been delayed in Barrio Logan, and our fervent hope is that it won't be denied any longer. The Master Plating closure sets the stage for stronger laws to reduce air toxics, a new community plan, and zoning that prohibits industries and residences to be side by side. We mustn't squander the momentum this victory brings – Si se puede!

Diane Takvorian
Executive Director
Environmental Health Coalition

STAY INFORMED! BECOME A MEMBER OF EHC TODAY!

Yes, I want to become a member of EHC. I am enclosing my tax-deductible membership contribution of:

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VICTORY!



Photo by Clint Steib

On October 15, 2002, Barrio Logan residents and Environmental Health Coalition celebrated a monumental victory for public health as one of the most notorious polluters in Barrio Logan closed its doors for the last time. The shutdown of Master Plating - a metal-plating shop that had been operating within several feet of homes on the 2100 block of Newton Avenue since the late 1970s - ended an infamous, toxic history that included more than 150 violations of environmental and health regulations, and two prosecutions of the business owner.

Since the late 1980's EHC and Barrio Logan residents have targeted this plating shop as a critical problem. The latest round of protests came in January 2002, when EHC and Barrio Logan residents demanded the shutdown of Master Plating after the California Air Resources Board (ARB) and the San Diego Air Pollution Control District detected extraordinarily high levels of chromium 6 near the plating company. Chromium 6 is a toxic air pollutant that can increase the risk of cancer even at very low levels. Levels of chromium 6 detected during the ARB's chromium monitoring program conducted in December 2001 were up to 28 times higher than typical levels found in large urban areas.

In March 2002, San Diego County took legal action against Master Plating, calling the company a "chronic violator" of laws for toxic waste handling. The owner of

Master Plating agreed to the shutdown on September 12, 2002. The company also is required to remove equipment, clean and decontaminate the facility, and completely remove all hazardous waste and materials by November 15, 2002.

What does all of this really mean? For the residents of Barrio Logan, it means an estimated 75 percent reduction in cancer risks from chromium 6 at the most exposed residence. It also means a commitment from the San Diego City Council to revise and update the area's zoning and 1978 community plan. EHC is using this local victory as a model for statewide advancements. EHC and ARB used the Master Plating experience to successfully advocate for Environmental Justice guidelines for the ARB. This victory also has influenced the state to work on establishing Environmental Justice guidelines for all CalEPA agencies, and to evaluate and amend the California Air Toxics Control Measure for chrome plating to make sure this situation is never again allowed to happen.

Unfortunately, there are dozens of facilities like Master Plating in Barrio Logan's residential neighborhoods, and the health of local residents can't wait for problems to be addressed one by one. This problem must be addressed from a broader perspective, and EHC is committed to making sure that the closure of Master Plating is the kickoff to the elimination of toxic pollution from this community and other disproportionately affected communities.

'This is the way it's supposed to work. . .when a community works together to make its neighborhood a better place to live.'
Elvia Martinez, Barrio Logan resident

WHY



US?

The historic Logan neighborhood lies immediately to the southeast of downtown San Diego, a once-sleepy Navy town that has grown into California's second largest city. By the early 1940s, Logan had become one of the largest Mexican-American communities on the West Coast. Now, its restaurants, mercados, bodegas, and the multicolored murals of Chicano Park reflect the rich culture of the area's 29,000 residents, eighty-six percent of whom are Latino.

The median household income in Logan in 2000 was less than half that of San Diego County as a whole, and the community is plagued by problems that are all too prevalent in low-income communities of color: substandard housing, overcrowded schools, a lack of social services, and poor jobs. Couple this with a preponderance of polluting industries mixed in with and adjacent to residential and commercial neighborhoods, add in severe air pollution and lead contamination from the aging housing stock, and you have a recipe for environmental racism.

Historical and systematic environmental racism have shaped the development of this community since the turn of the century.

- **1870-80s:** Logan community (Sherman Heights, Logan Heights) first opens as a predominately Anglo housing development.
- **1890s:** African Americans and Latinos begin settling in the Logan neighborhoods.
- **1910-20s:** Anglos begin leaving Logan for newer housing. Logan area begins to become predominately African American and Latino.
- **1920s-30s:** More than 13 percent of San Diego's Latino population lives in the Logan area. In 1926, the bayfront area south of Market Street to the southern city border become marked for prime industrial development. Industry begins its steady creep into Logan area's residential neighborhoods. As the area is targeted for manufacturing and fishing industries,

restrictive covenants in other areas limit housing for non-whites. Prevailing winds carry odors and emissions directly over Logan.

- **1940s:** Logan has become one of the largest Mexican-American communities on the West Coast.
- **1950s:** Changes to city zoning laws permit an influx of Anglo-owned junk yards.
- **1960s:** Interstate 5 is constructed in 1963, bisecting the Logan community. Residents with homes in the freeway's path are forced to move. The part of the community to the west of the freeway becomes known as Barrio Logan. In 1969, the Coronado Bay Bridge opens with its on-ramps and support pylons towering over the barrio.
- **1970s:** The community organizes and a community plan is developed causing many junkyards to relocate but much of the plan for zoning changes and redevelopment is never implemented.
- **1980s:** Community residents demand zoning changes and relocation of polluting industries near homes and schools. The City Council passes resolutions that are never implemented.

- **Present:** A new baseball stadium directly to the northwest of Logan is causing property values and rent for residents to skyrocket. More than 500 diesel trucks travel through Logan each day and proposed increased cargo activity at the 10th Ave. Terminal may double the traffic.

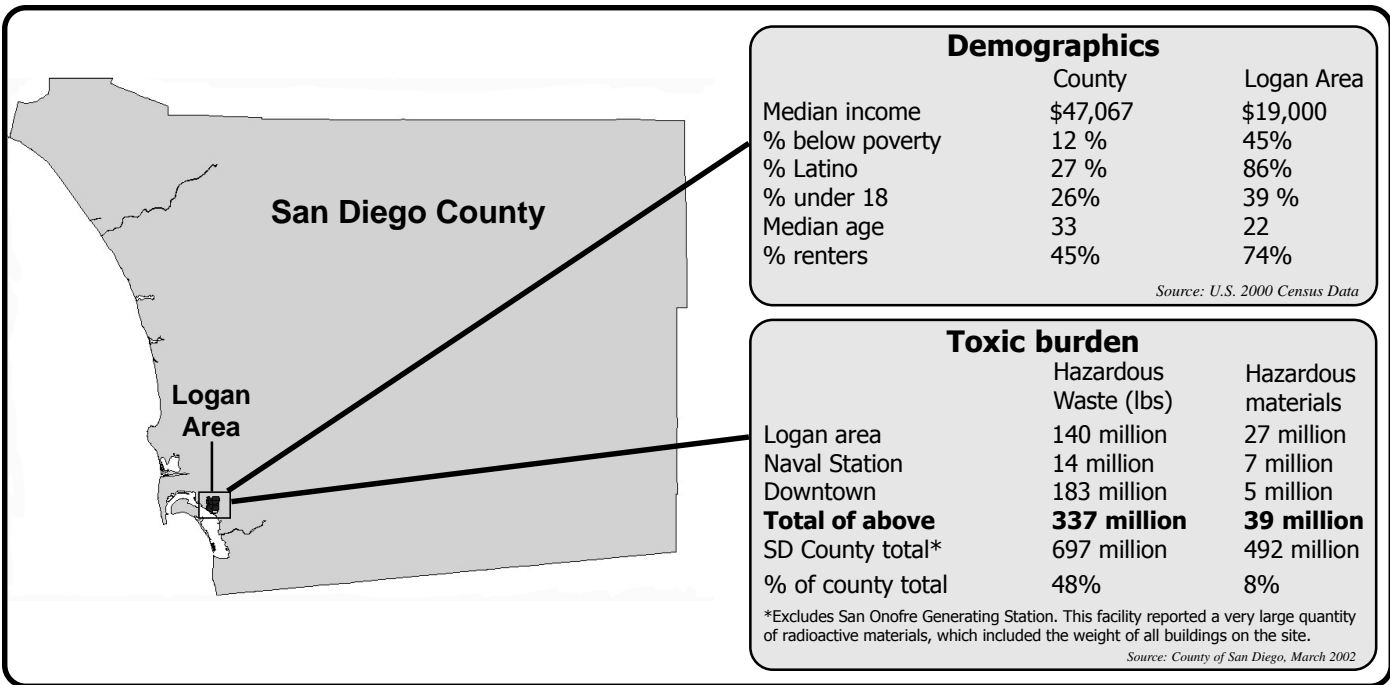
Master Plating: Part of a larger problem

To the west of Interstate 5 lies the community known as Barrio Logan. Like many inner-city neighborhoods, Barrio Logan has an unplanned mix of land uses.

For a snapshot of the problems residents face, take a walk down the 2100 block of Newton Avenue. Houses, apartments and a youth center stand side by side with a wood-working facility and metal plating shops. Stroll a few blocks south and you encounter shipyards and naval installations, large sources of toxics. The community's proximity to San Diego Bay yields both cool breezes and tons of diesel exhaust from ships and

“EHC’s TFN Campaign is a vehicle developed by Barrio Logan residents to build a common vision of what constitutes truly healthy and sustainable communities.”

Charles Lee,
U.S. EPA Office of
Environmental Justice



truck commerce from the Port of San Diego. Walk to the north side of Logan Heights and you will encounter a chemical supply company, housing tons of extremely toxic and hazardous chemicals, just a few steps from the nearest home. Some 210 industries with regulated hazardous materials or wastes coexist with the Logan area's 29,000 residents in about 3 square miles. Of these industries, 129 are located in Barrio Logan, an area less than 1.2 square miles and home to 5,440 residents. Barrio Logan accounts for only .07 percent of the total land area of San Diego County, but is host to 7 percent of the County's air toxic "hot spots". Industrial operations in Barrio Logan account for 90 percent of the total emissions of chromium 6 in the County.

Health effects

EHC has worked in the Barrio Logan community since the mid-1980s, with concern about air quality developing over a 15-year period of information gathering and organizing. As EHC documented the results of the mixed use zoning in Barrio Logan, it became aware of the probable health hazards from toxic air emissions.

EHC analyzed the data from the US Environmental Protection Agency's Cumulative Exposure Project and found that the area of highest cancer, reproductive and respiratory risk centers in the Logan area. These risk estimates are consistent with available health information from the community. A study by the Scripps Research Institute in 1996 found a total of 28 percent of Latino children in the Logan area and adjacent Southeast San Diego with probable or possible asthma. By comparison, the national prevalence of asthma in children is about 7 percent.

In Spring 1997, EHC conducted a community-based health survey in Barrio Logan, Logan Heights, Sherman Heights, and National City. Surveyed children from the target area reported nearly twice the number of symptoms of respiratory illness than a control group. The survey confirms that up to 20 percent of children in these areas may be asthmatic.



Photo by Antonin Kratochvil

Five-year old **Robert Martinez** has lived next door to Master Plating for most of his life. Robert is one of hundreds of children in the Logan area who suffer from asthma, a debilitating lung disease closely associated with air pollution. Often when the wind blows, chemical fumes fill the house leaving Robert gasping for breath.

Asthma is the leading serious chronic illness among children. For some children like Robert, asthma becomes a formidable problem causing numerous visits to the hospital emergency room and multiple hospitalizations. In the U.S.:

- Asthma is the number one cause of hospitalization among children under age 15.
- There were close to 658,000 pediatric emergency room visits in 1999 due to asthma.
- Asthma accounts for 10 million lost school days annually. It is the leading cause of school absenteeism attributed to a chronic condition.
- The estimated annual cost of treating asthma in those under 18 years of age is \$3.2 billion.

Source: American Lung Association

Barrio Logan's fight for



Chicano Park mural designed by Mario Torero

1970: Community Reclaims Barrio Logan: Barrio Station, Chicano Free Clinic, and Chicano Park are born

1978: First Barrio Logan community plan

1982: EHC's Community Right to Know law requiring industries to report their toxic chemicals is enacted by the County of San Diego

1984: Elimination of incompatible mixed-use zoning called for by Councilman William Jones' resolution, passed by the San Diego City Council

1990: "Communities At Risk: Your right to know about toxics in San Diego County" published by EHC — Barrio Logan consistently tops the list for toxics

July 1991: EHC's buffer zone ordinance is introduced by City Councilmember Bob Filner to separate industries from homes

1992: Crosby Street Park opens – Community gains access to San Diego Bay

1994: Mercado Apartments open on Newton Avenue. First new housing in 50 years

1994: Chrome-plating shops and chemical supply companies are slated for relocation by City Council committee resolution

1997: Methyl Bromide fumigations at 10th Ave. Terminal stopped by the Port District after five years of EHC and community protests

1997: EHC health survey reveals that 20% of Logan children have diagnosed or probable asthma

1998: Councilman Juan Vargas allocates \$400,000 to complete the relocation/redevelopment of the Master Plating site; efforts fail when the property owner refuses to accept a fair market offer and City refuses to invoke eminent domain

1998: San Diego County Air Pollution Control District announces, "There are no problems with air quality and toxics in Barrio Logan"

December 2001: California Air Resources Board starts air monitoring in six locations near Master Plating and a second chrome-plating shop, Carlson & Beauloye, due to community protests

Environmental Justice

January 2002: Monitoring shows levels of chromium 6 up to 28 times higher than typical levels detected in large urban areas

February 2002: EHC and Barrio Logan residents demand that the County take action, demonstrating in front of the State of the County address

March 7, 2002: San Diego County announces legal action against Master Plating

April, 2002: Crosby Street in Barrio Logan is renamed Cesar E. Chavez Parkway

June 2002: Councilmember Ralph Inzunza announces support for a community plan update

October 15, 2002: Master Plating closes its doors forever

Community dreams for the future

2003-04: An updated community plan

2003-04: New zoning - separation of industry from residential areas

2003: A Representative planning group or committee is elected to oversee the implementation of the plan

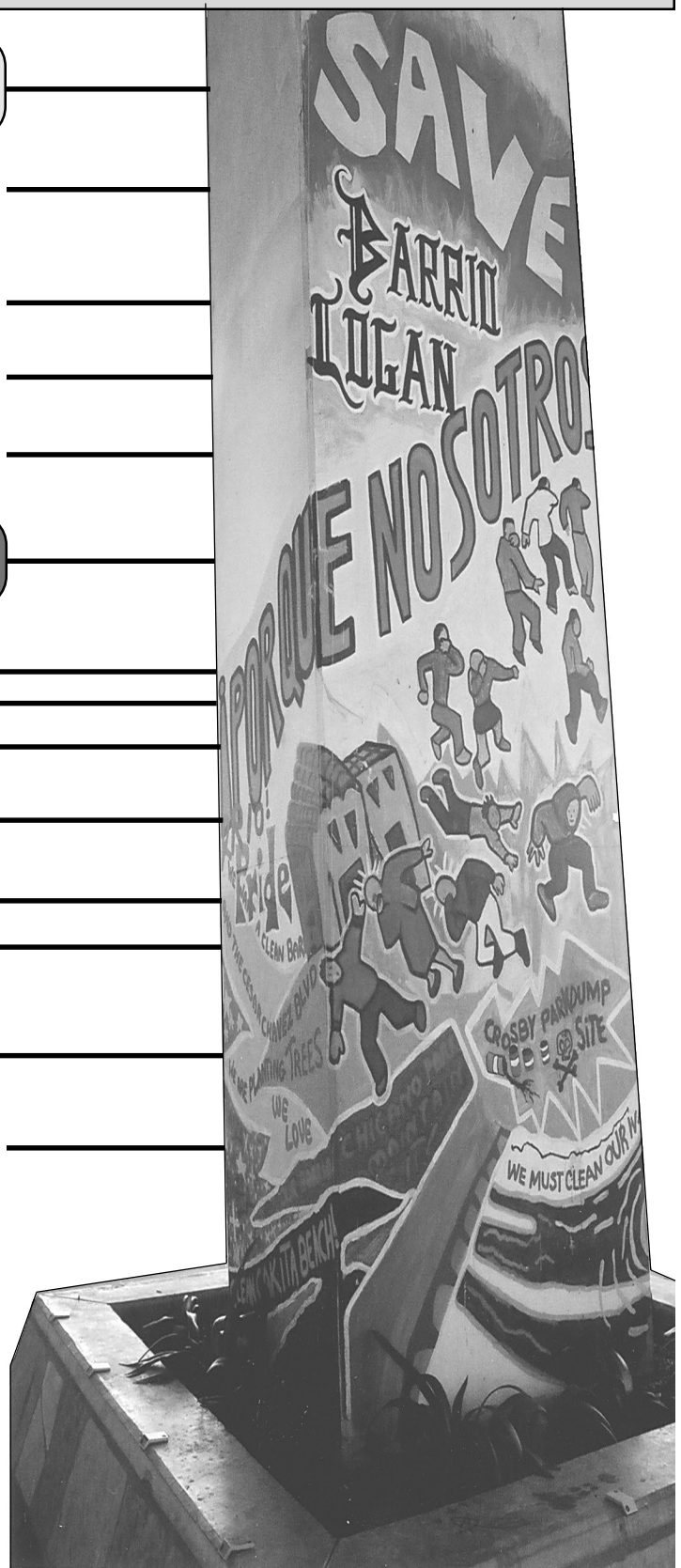
2004: Mercado Commercial Center opens

2005: Diesel pollution from trucks and boats is significantly reduced and an alternative route for trucks from the 10th Avenue Terminal is constructed

2005: New library and cultural center opens

By 2010: Quality of Life for Barrio Logan residents improves

- relocation or closure of all plating shops, chemical supply and other industrial uses in residential areas
- large industries implement stringent pollution prevention
- adequate parks and recreational facilities
- new affordable housing
- Cesar Chavez Parkway links Chicano Park to the bay
- all housing is safe from lead and other contaminants



We Did It!

EAC and the residents of Barrio Logan wish to thank the individuals, organizations, foundations and government agencies who have supported us throughout the years in our fight for a cleaner, healthier community. This victory would not have been possible without you!

J. E. Abbott • Abelard Foundation • Dennis Abrams • Daniel Hernandez, Access Center • Theresa Acero • Jorge Acevedo • Monica Aceves • Valeria & Saul Aceves • Juana Acosta • Evangelina Acuna • John & Laurel Adam • Chris Adams • Chuck Adams • Dawn & Robert Adams • John Adams • Lissa Adams • George J. Adrian • Maria Esther Aguayo • Patricia Aguayo • Piedad Aguilar • Carlos J. 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Si Se Pudo!