

# COMMUNITY CONVERSATION SUMMARY TEMPLATE

Convener contact information:

NAME: Lisa Arkin

EMAIL ADDRESS: larkin@oregontoxics.org

PHONE: 541-465-8860

ADDRESS: PO BOX 1106, Eugene, OR 97440

Convening organization(s) (if applicable): OREGON TOXICS ALLIANCE

Meeting location (city, state): Eugene, Oregon

Meeting date: 6/07/2010

Number of participants: 29

## **Brief description of participants and community:**

Eugene, Oregon is the second largest city in Oregon with a population of approximately 160,000. The premier Oregon institute of higher education, the University of Oregon (home of the Ducks!) is located in the heart of the city. Eugene is the gateway to the McKenzie River Watershed with skiing, fishing, hiking and camping opportunities. Eugene is surrounded by natural resource land, including intensive agriculture and forestry. The city is known for its arts and culture, particularly the Bach Festival and the Eugene Symphony. The participants were mixed college-aged, middle-aged and seniors. They included retired people, students, real estate agent, teachers, a sculptor, farmers, a nurse, a computer technician along with others whose professional lives were not identified. We broke into three groups for discussion.

## **Topic 1: Concerns**

An intense level of concern was expressed from all participants about pollution in the environment. Each of the three discussion groups had a rich palette of ideas to contribute. Participants unanimously expressed their perception that toxics were despoiling the environment and wreaking havoc on human health. Many felt that diseases such as Parkinson's and cancer were directly linked to exposure to industrial toxic chemicals.

The primary concerns that were most commonly expressed by a majority of the participants were:

1. BIOMASS: Participants felt that biomass (burning woody debris in boilers/incinerators) is a polluting and inappropriate an energy source
  - a. Concern about impacts of toxic air emissions from this source on human health;
  - b. Concern that using Oregon's forestry to burn for energy will have lasting negative impacts on the health, the very existence of forests.

2. PESTICIDES: Many participants had experienced pesticide exposures from the practice of aerial spraying of pesticides by timber companies in rural Lane County
  - a. Pesticides harm rural residents due to drift, volatilization and contamination of drinking water
  - b. Pesticides are killing native fish and other aquatic species through bio-accumulation in rivers and streams.
  - c. The Department of Transportation overuses pesticides for weed control on the highways to the detriment of people, streams and fragile native vegetation;
  - d. Extreme concern regarding pesticide “ready” crops, crops; government must require that these have to be registered as pesticides themselves, and labeled as such.
3. GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS (GMO): GMO is believed to be a source of toxic exposure
  - a. The rights of organic and non-GMO farmers to farm without exposure to GMO seeds, crops, methods are being violated;
  - b. GMO is not safe for consumption and the public should be protected
  - c. All products (food and non-food) made from GMO must be labeled
4. AIR QUALITY: The government must do more to protect Oregon’s air quality and significantly reduce pollutants and toxins
  - a. Indoor air quality as well
5. TOXICS IN CONSUMER PRODUCTS: Contaminants such as BPA in soda cans, other food containers, cleaning products, food itself, toiletries, personal care products, baby products, pharmaceuticals, etc. are a human health hazard, especially for our children.
  - a. The government must have safe products standards that protect the healthy and normal childhood development
6. AGGREGATE, CUMULATIVE EXPOSURES - we must acknowledge that we don’t understand cumulative exposures and have underestimated the health effects. Regulations must take into account cumulative exposures and make health standards more stringent.

The recurring theme throughout the evening meeting was the need to reduce pesticides in the built and natural environment. A number of participants live in rural Oregon where they are repeatedly exposed to pesticides from both aerial forestry and agricultural uses. The problem of forestry pesticide spray delivered by helicopter over hundreds of thousands of acres is unique to the mountainous areas west of Oregon’s I-5 corridor. Participants felt strongly that their domestic and irrigation well water, organic gardens and their very homes were at high risk for pesticide contamination.

The complete list of concerns expressed by Community Conversation participants is as follows:

1. Oil spill and other contaminant disasters causing illness in cleanup crews (esp. BP Gulf spill, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, etc.); we need to be tracking this to prevent future repeats
2. Biomass burning as an energy source
  - o Concern about impacts of emissions from this source on human health and forestry impacts
3. Aerial spraying of pesticides, esp. in forestry, timber companies
4. Roadside spraying, esp. by Dept. of Transportation
  - o Citizens spraying public medians on their own
  - o Drift
  - o Accidental exposure
5. Air quality due to pollutants and toxins
  - o Indoor air quality as well
6. Toxics in consumer products (soda cans, other food containers, cleaning products, food itself, toiletries, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, etc.)
  - o With pharmaceuticals: disposal education, marketing of the drugs themselves, and government regulation of prescriptions are all problematic
  - o Contaminants in vaccines
  - o Plastics, lack of good consumer protection and information on what they're made of and why they should be avoided, concern over their toxicity; PCV
  - o Adhesives
7. Chemicals in buildings materials, additives in wood products
8. Cancer causing and endocrine disruptors chemicals
9. Water quality, monitoring for toxics in the waterways
10. Transportation systems and infrastructure problems (built for greed and economics, rather than human and environmental health)
11. GMO, lack of labeling laws; GMO crops used in biomass energy production
12. Other food contaminants (esp. pesticides)
  - o Extreme concern regarding pesticide "ready" crops, crops that have to registered as pesticides themselves
13. Agricultural chemicals in general
14. Chemicals crossing the umbilical cord
15. Breast health and exposure to toxic chemicals
16. Nanotechnology concerns
17. Chemical herbicides and pesticides (individual and agency use)
  - o Concern about the need for better testing and sampling (not monitoring in areas known to not be hot spots, where no toxics will be detected, etc.)
18. Pesticide use in the household, household products (Raid, pet treatments, etc.)
19. The effects from the military industrial complex
  - o Hanford, other nuclear waste sites
  - o Depleted uranium
  - o Nuclear cycle
  - o Military bases have significant contaminant levels
  - o Military population illnesses, looking at military and war sources of poisoning
20. Aggregate, cumulative exposures – we must acknowledge that we don't understand cumulative exposures and have underestimated the health effects. Regulations must take into account cumulative exposures and make health standards more stringent.

## Did participants disagree about certain issues:

There was no disagreement amongst the participants. If anything, the wide-ranging conversations raised the level of awareness amongst all participants. For example, some people had never thought of GMO food as a toxic product. However, after examining the issue, there was consensus that GMO food products and GMO seed may well be one of the most pressing concerns we face as a society today.

## Topic 2: Values

List several values that participants thought were important:

This is a full list of the values that were discussed, taken from the notes taken by the participants and the convener.

1. **CONSUMER SAFETY:** Widespread safety testing of all consumer products for contaminants and potential harms before sale and continued monitoring after sale
2. **ELIMINATE CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** Separation of duties between government regulators and industry/companies
  - Government appointments in Dept. of Ag./EPA/FDA/etc. should be neutral scientists
  - Government should hold corporations accountable
  - Penalties should go beyond just fines for offending companies
  - Stricter/more stringent conflict of interest laws
3. **HEALTH AND SAFETY IS HIGHEST PRIORITY:** Making public and environmental health safety and concern a higher/the highest priority in all areas (esp. over profits)
  - Health standards should be more important, toxics should be banned from consumer products
  - All citizens have a right to clean air, water and land; the natural world has these intrinsic rights as well
4. **TRANSPARENCY:** Increased transparency in government, business and media
  - Media must be publicly-minded, honest, transparent
5. **PUBLIC TOXICS RIGHT-TO-KNOW**
  - Easy access to information on toxics/pesticides/etc. should be available to the public
6. **PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE:**
  - Corporations must prove their products are safe
  - Err on the side of overprotection
7. **ORGANIC AND NON-GMO:**
  - Promote natural and local foods;

- Increase regulation on manufactured, processed foods
8. COMMUNITY: Develop a sense of community
  
  9. WE ARE ONE WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT: Value the idea of interconnection:
    - human, children, wildlife, environmental health are all one, highly related

### Topic 3: Roles and responsibilities

Participants noted key steps that the federal government must take, including:

1. Stringent, MANDATORY toxics reduction (not just monitoring)
2. Implementation of Toxics Right to Know laws nationwide
3. Increased implementation of the PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE, using children's health as a standard
4. FIFRA overhaul to ensure that local governments can enact laws to protect the public from pesticides, ability to create protective buffer zones and no-spray zones.
  - a. Verifiable Integrated Pesticide Management programs should be required under FIFRA, including regular reductions in toxicity and amount of pesticides used in commercial settings and sold over-the-counter to consumers.
5. Our nation must establish higher organic standards as well as eliminating pesticides in all food.
6. Ban toxics from consumer products
  - a. List side effects in advertising and other media if they are used (similar to drug side effect warnings and the warnings on tobacco products)
7. Remove double standards for toxicity in consumer products; institute the same regulations for American markets as European markets.
8. Environmental economics and environmental justice should be better and more widely incorporated
9. Clean up of military bases
  - a. Reduce military industrial reliance on chemicals, esp. at bases; this is the biggest source of pollution

Local and state governments could also help by:

1. Educate the public on chemicals through the school systems and student projects; incorporate successes into curriculum
2. Increased access (and funding) to and for non-profits to the community, esp. schools and school programs
3. Subsidies for local organics, not mega-corporation monocrops; local and organic agriculture promotion through policies and actions

## Topic 4: Learning from accounts of success and failure

Participants cited the successful EU labeling policies and the EU REACH program that protect the public from toxic chemicals through precautionary, comprehensive standards.

There is a great respect for local agencies and small communities that have reduced pesticides in both urban and rural environments. Canada has a number of towns and provinces that have banned lawn care products with pesticides. This makes their cities healthier places for children and for all communities members.

Other countries and some US cities and schools have taken the necessary step of requiring safe alternatives to pesticides and herbicides through Integrated Pest Management.

Oregon has a few Pesticide Free Parks that were created through neighborhood empowerment. (However, it should not take angry residents to convince city park administrators to reduce dangerous chemicals in public places!)

### **Did the group make any plans for a follow up meeting about local action?**

The group didn't make a specific plan to meet again as a distinctive group, however some participants thanked Oregon Toxics Alliance for holding this meeting (and other public information meetings we have hosted) and asked us to continue to do the important work of public education and building awareness. Some people signed up to volunteer with OTA. There was discussion about using websites and Facebook as a way to keep in touch about the issue of reducing toxic chemicals.