



# TOXICS ACTION CENTER

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## The 1997 Dirty Dozen Awards



### TLT Construction Corporation Wakefield "Rotten Apple Award"

#### THE DIRTY DOZEN

Associated Industries of Massachusetts  
Boston

W.R. Grace  
Cambridge

Chelsea Waterfront Polluters  
Chelsea

ChemDesign  
Fitchburg/Westminster

NESWC Trash Incinerator  
North Andover

General Electric  
Pittsfield

Laidlaw/Allied Landfill  
Plainville

Pilgrim Power Station  
Plymouth

Modern Electroplating  
Roxbury

Brayton Power Station  
Somerset

Environmental Compliance Corp.  
Stoughton

TLT Construction Corp.  
Wakefield

#### DIRTY DOZEN SELECTION COMMITTEE

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MASSPIRG

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*Awareness is increasing that "sick building syndrome" is a problem in many Massachusetts schools. Asthma, chronic respiratory problems, chemical sensitivity, and attention difficulty among both students and staff can be attributed, in part, to poor indoor air quality. Problems are occurring in existing schools and in instances where schools are being renovated while still occupied with students and teachers. There are a host of factors which can contribute to the problem – pesticide use, lack of dust control, leaky roofs, and carpets, among them.*

*One construction company stands out, however, as the cause of a long and growing list of health and safety problems at schools across the Commonwealth: TLT Construction Corporation, a company which specializes in public projects, and is in fact one of the most aggressive school contractors in the Commonwealth. While its low bids win contracts for the company, children and school staff are paying the price.*

• **Brookline High School** is undergoing a \$43.8 million renovation project scheduled to be completed during the summer of 1999. On October 3, 1997, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a citation to TLT for three "serious" health and safety violations – failure to implement precautions to prevent worker exposure to silica, a known human carcinogen. School staff and students were forced to evacuate one floor of the building because of the silica. Only a few weeks later, another school evacuation occurred due to a "cloud of smoke," quickly identified as the same dust from saw-cutting of concrete. TLT had promised that this work would not be conducted during regular school hours.

• TLT's work at the **Georgetown Middle and High School** was temporarily halted in November 1996 when the building inspector issued a cease and desist order due to air quality and health and safety violations. The reasons cited included:

- lack of sufficient barriers to prevent contaminated airflow from the construction area to the occupied area;
- dust and strong odors emanating from the construction area;
- construction debris blocking exit routes;
- fire alarms not being heard because of construction noise; and,
- sewer gas problems.

-more-

- **Gloucester High School** is undergoing a \$28 million reconstruction due to be completed before 1998. Fumes from installation of a gym floor by a subcontractor hired by TLT, forced the school to close the area off for almost a month and add an additional week to the Christmas break. Excessive levels of isocyanate, a chemical linked to asthma and other respiratory problems used in sealants and adhesives, was found in the school air. Over 200 reports of illnesses have been attributed to the school renovation. The town spent \$175,000 ventilating and cleaning the gym and conducting air quality tests.
- **Parker Middle School in Reading** was in session during much of this two-year multi-million dollar demolition/construction/renovation project from 1995-1997. Problems included:
  - faulty fire alarm installation;
  - flooding of classrooms due to burst pipes;
  - lack of availability of information about toxic materials being used;
  - the collapse of an exterior wall; and,
  - failure to ensure stability of the structure during asbestos removal
- In 1991, the **Harrington School in Lynn** was renovated while school was in session. School staff and parents documented multiple health hazards during the project, including fumes and dust and flooding. Most serious was the use of a toxic metal primer which infiltrated throughout the school building. The Department of Public Health conducted a site visit in June 1992 and instructed officials to keep the school closed until air sampling was completed and ventilation exhausted the fumes.
- TLT's work on **Haverhill's two new elementary schools**, scheduled to be "substantially" complete by December 12, 1997 has been plagued by deadline problems, poor quality of work, and missed deadlines to comply with wetland replication and erosion control projects resulting in \$100 per project per day fines levied by the conservation commission.

### **Solutions**

State law requires that communities award school construction projects to the lowest "qualified" bidder. The Massachusetts Department of Capital Planning and Operations (DCPO) certifies general contractors. Once a company is certified, it is difficult for a community to not select the lowest bidder, despite any concerns about its safety record.

The state needs to develop guidelines that mandate health and safety and air quality standards for all school construction and renovation projects. These standards and costs should be included and enforced through the entire life of the building – from the design phase through the building phase to occupancy and maintenance. Communities must be allowed to use health and safety issues as a factor in determining who they hire to build and renovate their schools.

Municipalities also need to be more vigilant in overseeing construction and renovation projects. Contracts must clearly state health and safety expectations and oversight committees must be established to keep contractors accountable.

- Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station, Plymouth, "The ValuNuke Award." Just as the airline Valujet cut corners to offer cheaper flights, the drive to compete under deregulation could transform the already dangerous Pilgrim plant into a "ValuNuke," further threatening the health and safety of workers and residents.
- The NESWC Trash Incinerator, North Andover, "Most Unnecessary Pollution Award." The NESWC trash incinerator is the state's largest mercury polluter and a major source of dioxin. And, because Massachusetts could reduce and recycle more trash than NESWC burns, Wheelabrator's "dioxin factory" is also unnecessary.
- Associated Industries of Massachusetts, Boston, "The Hot Air Award." Though it has no smokestacks or discharge pipes, the Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM) is arguably one of the biggest polluters in the state. AIM has consistently opposed strong environmental and public health legislation and ballot initiatives. AIM co-wrote the bill to eliminate one of the nation's most effective pollution prevention laws the Toxics Use Reduction Act. AIM has also opposed the Citizens Right-to-Know Act and the Pesticides Disclosure Act, two bills that would protect the public from being unknowingly exposed to dangerous toxins in commonly used products.
- W.R. Grace, Cambridge, Winchester, Kingston, etc., "Lifetime Achievement Award." W.R. Grace's toxic legacy did not end with Woburn. In Acton, W.R. Grace recently completed cleanup of groundwater contamination which threatened drinking water supplies. At W.R. Grace's facility in Cambridge, toxic-contaminated soil may pose risks to an adjacent residential neighborhood, a tot lot, a large playing field, and employees in the Alewife "T" Station. Moreover, toxic sludge from the site has been dumped throughout the state.
- Chelsea Waterfront Polluters, Chelsea, "Contaminated Cluster Award." As the region's residents enjoy the newly-cleaned Boston Harbor, a committed group of Chelsea residents are working to reclaim their own waterfront from a cluster of polluters which threaten not only this natural resource, but the health of the neighborhood. These threats include the Chelsea Yacht Club, which has been cited by the Environmental Protection Agency for discharging raw sewage into a creek, and the Atlantic Petroleum Company, on Broadway, which submitted a proposal to the city to store asphalt at its facility, in addition to petroleum.
- Laidlaw / Allied Landfill, Plainville, "Least Clever Polluter." Laidlaw's futile efforts to "greenwash" its image cannot cover-up pollution at the state's largest landfill. Although Laidlaw has agreed to close its current landfill space, existing groundwater contamination and a possible expansion pose a threat to residents and the water supply for five communities.
- Brayton Point Power Station, Somerset, "The Rolex Watch Award." A Rolex watch is a traditional gift for faithful employees going into retirement. The aging Brayton Point Power Station is the state's biggest air polluter and does not have to abide by current clean air standards. This award is given in the hope that it will be retired.
- TLT Construction Corporation, Wakefield, "Sick Building Award." As awareness grows about the hazards of poor indoor air quality and "sick schools," one construction contractor stands out as the cause of a long and growing list of health and safety problems at schools across the Commonwealth: TLT Construction Corporation. While its low bids win contracts for the company, children and school staff are paying the price.
- Environmental Compliance Corporation, Stoughton, "Bad Neighbor Award." When most people complain about a bad neighbor, it's usually someone who throws the occasional loud party or doesn't mow their lawn. Imagine a neighbor, though, who dumps hazardous waste, drives 18-wheel trucks up and down your street, and threatens to poison your drinking water. That's a bad neighbor!
- General Electric, Pittsfield, "Rock of Gibraltar Award." Like the famed Rock of Gibraltar, General Electric has remained steadfast in its resistance to cleaning up its PCB contamination. The news continues to grow worse about the site – PCBs have been found not only in the Housatonic River, but in the fill which the company gave away to city residents – but General Electric remains resilient to the concerns of residents and city officials.