

Summer 2023 • The Clean Water Action Newsletter

## Getting to Zero Waste: ReThink Disposable Launches in New England



ReThink Disposable, a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund, is coming to New

England! ReThink Disposable prevents waste before it starts and fights marine litter by working with local governments, businesses, institutions, and consumers to minimize single-use disposable packaging in food service. After many successful years in California, this program is expanding to New England with a grant provided by the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Recycling is important, but “reduce” and “reuse” come before “recycle” in waste management. Single-use materials are resource and energy intensive to produce, manufacture, and recycle. Plus, as reliance on single-use disposables has increased, recycling rates have not been able to keep up. A report from Greenpeace last fall concluded that only about 5% of plastic is recycled in the United States. ReThink Disposable helps shift the focus back onto “reuse” and “reduce.”

Reducing single-use items not only prevents waste and marine debris, but it also saves businesses and institutions thousands of dollars each year. In Palo Alto, ReThink Disposable helped transition 12 elementary schools away from single-use foodware, resulting in an annual savings of \$25,000. In Alameda, 80 local businesses partnered with



ReThink Disposable to collectively eliminate over 6 million single-use items a year which saves them about \$140,000 annually.

Since launching locally this spring, ReThink Disposable is already working with 10 Middletown, Connecticut public schools to continue their transition to reusables for school dining. We will soon begin outreach to restaurants. If you know a restaurant or school that is interested in making the switch to reusables, contact our New England representative, Amber Schmidt, at [aschmidt@cleanwater.org](mailto:aschmidt@cleanwater.org).

Our goal is to create a cultural shift away from the “throw-away” lifestyle, but you can also make personal choices that make a difference. Carry your own reusable utensils, water bottles, and coffee mugs. When you order take out, “skip the stuff” and note in your order that you don’t need disposable utensils and sauce packets. And share ReThink Disposable as a resource to local restaurants! Together, we can move towards a zero waste future.

# States in the Lead: Our New England Team is Taking on Toxic PFAS Pollution

Clean Water Action's New England offices are rallying to protect residents from toxic PFAS, joining a nationwide movement of states and retailers. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our members and our coalition partners, we recently won our campaign to pressure the outdoor retailer REI to phase out items containing PFAS in their stores. Now, Clean Water Action is working locally for policies and funding to further protect our waterways and our bodies from these harmful chemicals.

PFAS are human-made chemicals that can accumulate in the body and have been linked to many health risks, including certain cancers and reproductive issues. In children, exposure to PFAS can weaken their immune systems and even affect their learning capabilities. Despite these harmful effects, PFAS can still be found in many consumer products we use daily.

Our Massachusetts team is working on [three bills](#) to protect people from PFAS contamination in consumer products, water systems, children's products, and farmland, including a comprehensive ban on these toxic chemicals (H.2197/S.1356). That bill also sets up a process to restrict PFAS discharges to groundwater and surface water, requires manufacturers to disclose if they add PFAS to products, and establishes a fund for testing and remediation.



▲ Many children's products currently contain PFAS.

In Rhode Island, Clean Water Action successfully passed legislation to ban PFAS from food packaging and set limits for PFAS in drinking water in 2022. Now, the Rhode Island team is working to pass a comprehensive ban on PFAS in common products. While the comprehensive PFAS ban didn't pass before the 2023 session ended, there was strong legislative support, and the Rhode Island team will continue to work on this effort in 2024.

Our Connecticut team is excited to report that, thanks to U.S. Senator Blumenthal and the federal delegation, Connecticut is receiving \$18.9 million for monitoring and remediation work in addition to \$73.5 million for public water utilities to assure these utilities

meet [the newly proposed guidelines for six PFAS in drinking water](#). Connecticut Director Anne Hulick notes, "The federal dollars are significant and will go a long way to protect health and our environment, but ultimately, we need to hold polluters accountable."

Our campaign has momentum! [Minnesota just passed a comprehensive PFAS ban](#), and the chemical company 3M announced they would "[exit all PFAS manufacturing by the end of 2025](#)." Now is the time to join the fight. Take Action! Contact your legislators in your state today — [Massachusetts](#) or [Rhode Island](#).

## Victory! Rhode Island is Getting the Lead out of the Water!



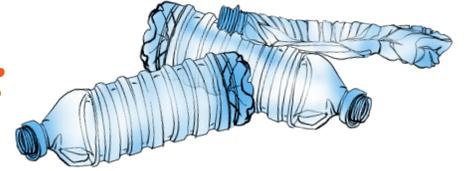
Good news from the final day of the 2023 legislative session! The Rhode Island General Assembly passed the Lead Poisoning Prevention Act that will create

a replacement program for both public and private lead service lines, with a requirement that all affected lines are identified and replaced within 10 years. Clean Water Action is part of the Lead Free RI coalition which worked to get this passed. Finally, there is a plan to remove the last lead service lines in Rhode Island's drinking water system!



## RHODE ISLAND

# Less Litter, Less Waste, More Recycling: The Rhode Island Bottle Bill



Empty beverage bottles are everywhere — littering our beaches, discarded in parks, and scattered along curbs just waiting to be swept down a storm drain and into a nearby waterway. Decades of anti-littering efforts and access to single-stream recycling programs have not stemmed this tide of trash. And much of what we think is being recycled actually isn't. For example, all of the glass currently captured by Rhode Island's recycling programs is actually buried at the landfill, and most of the plastic isn't turned into new bottles but is "downcycled" into lesser materials. Rhode Island needs a better plan.

Ten states, including Massachusetts and Connecticut, are modeling a real solution: a recycling refund system or "bottle bill." In states with a bottle bill, customers pay a small deposit on each container they purchase which is returned to them when they bring the empty bottle back to a participating retailer or redemption center to be recycled. The costs of handling the empty containers are paid for by the beverage companies or distributors.

Why do bottle bills work? The deposit creates an incentive to make sure every bottle is properly recycled. Littered bottles have value, so people collect and return them. But that isn't the only way bottle bills improve recycling! Because the bottles are being collected separately from general recycling, they are already properly sorted, and they are less likely to be contaminated. This is important! When we carelessly toss things into the curbside

recycling bin, including messy items or items that can't actually be recycled like plastic bags, the whole load can end up in the landfill. Bottle bills ensure that the bottles are sorted and ready to be made into new bottles!

Clean Water Action is a leading member of the Rhode Island Zero Waste Coalition, a group of organizations working together for the Rhode Island bottle bill. Member organizations like Friends of the Saugatucket and Save the Bay collected tens of thousands of littered "nip" bottles to illustrate the problem. Thank you to the hundreds of folks who contacted your legislators, showed up at the State House, picked up nips and bottles, and fought for a strong bottle bill all winter and spring.

As the 2023 legislative session closed in June, [the Senate and Assembly created a joint House and Senate study commission to examine a bottle bill](#), and Clean Water Action will be on it. While we are obviously disappointed that the bottle bill didn't pass outright, this is the next best outcome. We will be spending the summer and fall at the table with the various interested parties to craft a bottle bill that works for everyone including retailers and municipal recycling programs. Everyone wants less litter and less material ending up in the landfill. We are ready to work together to pass a bottle bill that makes Rhode Island a zero waste leader.

People power makes positive change. Thank you Clean Water Action members!



◀ Key leaders of the bottle bill coalition toured the RI materials recycling facility together. L-R: Topher Hamblett, Save The Bay; State Senator Alana DiMario; State Representative Michelle McGaw; Jed Thorp, Clean Water Action; Kevin Budris, Just Zero; State Representative Carol Hagan McEntee; State Senator Bridget Valverde; State Senator Joshua Miller; State Representative David Bennett.

## MASSACHUSETTS

# “We Still Can’t Breathe” On the Ground at the Rally for Asthma Justice

On May 2nd, Clean Water Action recognized World Asthma Day by rallying with the Green Justice Coalition and other organizers to call attention to the problem of poor air quality in Massachusetts. 1 in 11 Massachusetts residents (higher than the national average) struggle with asthma. We all suffer from daily exposure to toxic emissions. Generating stations, transportation pollution, and sources from within our own homes, all expose us to air particulates that can cause a host of health problems, including respiratory failure, asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and strokes. And this pollution burden is not evenly distributed. In Massachusetts, residents of color are exposed to up to 36 percent more pollution from vehicle emissions than white residents .

Throughout the event, people shared their personal experiences with asthma and air pollution in their communities. Surrounded by rally-goers holding up signs chanting “We still can’t breathe,” Alexis Walls, the Assistant Campaign Director at Massachusetts Public Health Association, stated plainly, “These environmental exposures are not by coincidence; they’re by design.” The solution we’re fighting for? Clean Air Justice.

At the rally, organizers called for policies that would alleviate air pollution and improve air quality. The Green Justice Coalition advocated for a Just Transition to a Sustainable Economy, so that EJ communities can achieve environmental and economic justice by investing in clean energy job pathways. Organizers from the Fairmount Indigo CDC Collaborative called on legislators to support a bill to electrify the Fairmount rail line by 2024; reducing transit pollution in communities along the train route. And Clean Water Action organizers spoke about the importance of passing one of our top priority pieces of legislation: [An Act to improve outdoor and indoor air quality for communities burdened by pollution – H.2131/S.1382](#). This bill requires new air monitoring stations in high pollution neighborhoods to establish a baseline of



▲ Clean Water Massachusetts staff at the Rally for Asthma Justice: L-R: Catherine Middelmann, Cindy Luppi, Paulina Casasola, Elizabeth Saunders.

air pollution, and follow up with goals to reduce that pollution over time. The bill also requires the installation of air filters, mandates advanced HVAC filtration systems, upgrades state codes to improve mold enforcement, and prohibits the installation of gas stoves in certain eligible buildings.

Everyone has the right to clean air. Unfortunately in Massachusetts this is not yet a reality. On World Asthma Day and every day, we continue to advocate for policies that reduce pollution in overburdened communities so that everyone can breathe cleaner air in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.

[Check out our live recording of the rally!](#) Want to know what you can do to support clean air for all? Take action: [Tell your MA state legislators to support H.2131/S.1382.](#)

### Live in Western Massachusetts? Worried about your water? Contact us!

Clean Water Fund is investigating threats to drinking water sources in Hampden and Hampshire counties and working with local stakeholders to envision long term plans to address the most pressing issues.

If you live in Hampden or Hampshire counties, and:

- You have received notices from your water department warning about potential water contamination
- You avoid or are suspicious of your tap water
- You are aware of local pollution threats to a local water source — [we want to hear from you!](#)

## CONNECTICUT

# Energy Efficiency Campaign Launches Round 2!

Reducing emissions from buildings is a critical step in mitigating climate change. In Connecticut, emissions from energy use and heating and cooling residential buildings contribute 18% of our state's greenhouse gas emissions. Clean Water Action's Waterbury Home Energy campaign was successful last year, and we're gearing up to launch round 2 of our outreach program in Waterbury. Helping residents access programs to make their homes more energy efficient can make a big difference in energy consumption and the amount of emissions released into our atmosphere.

Clean Water Action's Waterbury Home Energy campaign is an effort to conduct outreach to low-income and BIPOC residents who may not be aware of the support available from our state's energy efficiency program. This program provides a very low or no cost evaluation of areas in the home that can be made more energy efficient by, for example, sealing up leaks, ensuring proper insulation, shifting to energy efficient sources for heating and cooling, and using energy efficient appliances.

Making homes more energy efficient not only fights climate change, it also has the benefits of saving residents money on energy bills and making homes more comfortable. This is a priority particularly for those residents living in older housing that may be drafty and poorly insulated. Residents in low-income communities and environmental justice communities have a higher energy burden, meaning that they pay much more for energy bills, due to poorly insulated homes. In 2022, we achieved our goal of assisting in a 10% increase in participation in the energy efficiency program in Waterbury. That means 310 residents are now on their way to saving energy and money!

While Clean Water Action may be hitting our local goals, the state still needs to ramp up their outreach. Connecticut set a goal to weatherize 80% of homes by 2030 as part of the state's efforts to mitigate climate change. Despite having good programs in place, Connecticut is nowhere near the 80% weatherization target. Clean Water Action has advocated for more funding to support

energy efficiency programs and urged the utilities and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, who oversee those programs, to fund more local outreach campaigns to increase participation in energy efficiency services.

With support from UCONN's CIRCA program, Clean Water Action is hiring a part-time energy justice community organizer to build our local capacity in Waterbury and lead by example. We look forward to participating in even more community events and forums as well as partnering with local leaders, faith-based groups, and the Mayor's office to meet residents, answer questions about the program, and help them sign up! We're proud that Clean Water Action is fighting for a clean energy future in Connecticut, to protect our health, reinvest in our communities, and reduce climate-changing pollution.

## We Won! Strengthening Connecticut's Environmental Justice Law



We're thrilled to announce that Connecticut just signed into law an act to strengthen our state's environmental justice law. The Connecticut Clean Water Action team was proud to work with environmental justice leaders and coalition partners to give authority to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to examine the cumulative impacts of pollution in communities when considering a new permit. Community residents will also have more opportunities to weigh in on any permitting decisions for affecting facilities. While we have more work to do, this is a very significant step forward — and in line with the landmark Environmental Justice law set by Clean Water Action leaders in New Jersey.

# Celebrating New England's Environmental Champions!

It has been a time of celebration for Clean Water Action in Massachusetts and Rhode Island! Each state office recently held events recognizing local environmental leaders.



▲ Massachusetts' Annual Celebration keynote speaker, María Belén Power, having a great time with, from L-R, Clean Water's Cindy Luppi, Mary Wambui of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, the Archdiocese of Boston, and Clean Water's Paulina Casasola.

◀ Massachusetts honors their awardees at the 2023 Annual Celebration

The **Massachusetts** Annual Celebration, held May 23rd, featured keynote speaker María Belén Power, Undersecretary of Environmental Justice and Equity for Massachusetts. Her prior work with GreenRoots and continued push for environmental justice is both paramount and inspirational. One of many notable awardees was Beth Kontos, President of the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, executive board member of the North Shore Labor Council, and a Vice President of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. Beth, in all of her work, supports offshore wind, green schools, environmental justice, and equity.

**Rhode Island** held their 21st Annual Breakfast of Champions on May 12th to celebrate numerous legislative victories and those who made them possible. Awardees showcased extensive dedication in the environmental fight from Rupert Friday who has fought for the environment since the 1970s, to Zachary Pinto who at only 18 is the Vice President of the Black Lives Matter Rhode Island Political Action Committee and advocating to improve the urban environmental landscape. Equally thrilling was the honoring of four legislative champions bringing an environmental focus into the 2023 session: Senator Meghan Kallman, Representative Terri Cortvriend, Representative Carol Hagan McEntee, and Representative June Speakman.



▲ Rhode Island's 2023 honorees at the Breakfast of Champions.

## NEW ENGLAND CURRENTS

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PO Box 83, Dorchester, MA 02124

🐦 @cleanh2oma 📘 CleanWaterMA

PO Box 92, Cromwell, CT 06416

🐦 @CleanWaterCT 📘 CleanWaterActionCT

134 Thurbers Avenue, Suite 118, Providence, RI 02905

🐦 @cleanwater\_ri 📘 CleanWaterActionRI

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