

2024 Elections in PA: Every Vote Matters

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Thanks for being a Clean Water Voter! We're grateful to our Pennsylvania team and volunteers for their hard work in 2024 reaching out to nearly 200,000 PA voters, and who had direct one on one conversations with over 14,000 voters during the election's closing months.

But above all in a year with record turnout in Pennsylvania and a very evenly divided electorate, it seems like every vote matters even more. Trump passed Harris by 1.7% state-wide, continuing a trend where no candidate for President has won Pennsylvania by over 5% since 2008. Three U.S. House seats in PA were won by Republicans by around 1% (4-5,000 votes each). The Democrats maintained their 1 seat majority in the State House, winning multiple races by less than 1,000 votes. Your vote does indeed matter!

Trump has signaled prioritizing swift deregulation, to pair with his previous record of dismantling nearly 100 federal rules focused on clean air, water, and toxic chemicals. Already there is talk of how to dismantle groundbreaking programs from the Biden Administration to promote environmental justice and take action to stop climate change. More than ever, we will need you to be engaged to ensure our rights to clean air and water are not trampled on.

In Pennsylvania, however, we bucked election trends to maintain a narrow pro-environment majority in the State House. Plus, we still have an ally in Governor Shapiro. This will allow us to build upon the strides we made for our environment and health in 2024 and help counter any national fallout.

No matter how you voted, it's up to all of us to hold the winners accountable.



▲ *Environmental champions State Rep. Mandy Steele (Allegheny) and State Rep. Brian Munroe (Bucks) both successfully won re-election to the State House.*

Protecting Fire Fighters

Clean Water Action is proud to have partnered with representatives from the International Association of Fire Fighters and allies in the environmental community to help better protect our fire fighters from exposure to toxic Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).



Together we reshaped Senate Bill 144 so that it prohibited the sale, manufacture and use of PFAS laden firefighting foam rather than simply limiting its use and added a requirement for firefighting gear containing PFAS to include a warning label. Exposure to PFAS can lead to severe health effects like lower antibody response to some vaccines, immune system suppression, increased cholesterol levels, pregnancy-induced hypertension, reduced fertility, liver damage, an increased risk of thyroid disease and the potential for cancer.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has identified 39 sites across 19 counties that have been contaminated by PFAS, with the biggest cause of contamination among these sites being from the use of PFAS-based firefighting foams. There are reliable PFAS free foams already on the market which along with the desire to better protect the health of our fire fighters has led to similar policies being passed in 15 states and approved by the Federal Aviation Administration and the U.S. Department of Defense.

A University of Notre Dame study found that fabric used for firefighter turnout gear tested positive for the presence of PFAS and that some of these chemicals have the ability to migrate off the moisture barrier and outer shell could potentially migrate off of these materials and contaminate the thermal layer and ultimately come in direct contact with skin. Unfortunately, the market for alternative PFAS free gear is not as far along. But as it works to catch up, the requirement of a warning label on PFAS laden gear will at least arm fire fighters with the knowledge they need to understand their exposure risks and take what precautions they can to limit that exposure.

Our collaboration led to getting this improved and strengthened bill passed out of the House Veteran Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee along bipartisan lines. But sadly, backdoor politicking prevented the legislation from being considered for a final vote before the chamber.

Everyday our fire fighters put their lives on the line to protect us and our communities. We should be honoring that service by doing everything in our control to protect them. We look forward to resuming this fight when the new legislative session starts in January.

Clean Water Action's 24th Annual Philadelphia Auction and Fundraiser

We resumed our Annual Auction and Celebration in Philadelphia for the first time since the pandemic. The event was held at Fairmont Park's Discovery Center where we celebrated our accomplishments in 2024 with good company, food, and music!

We punctuated the event by honoring Philadelphia City Councilmember Mark Squilla and Kingsessing Residents, Victoria Chambliss and Deanna Coleman. Councilmember Squilla received the Florence Neilson Environmental Leadership for his tenacity in shepherding the passage of Philadelphia's Plastic Bag Ban. Victoria Chambliss and Deanna Coleman received the Jerry Balter Environmental Justice award for their community leadership and accomplishments around Environmental Justice.



▲ CWA staff with awardees *Dianna Coleman and Victoria Miles-Chambliss.*

Funding Allegheny County's Air Quality Program

The Allegheny County Health Department's Air Quality Program (AQP) faces significant funding shortfalls that will lead to operational challenges which will prevent it from adequately addressing air pollution. A proposal currently before Allegheny County Council would increase air permit fees on industrial operators in order to fully fund the program.

The AQP currently has a projected deficit of nearly \$2 million. The program has repeatedly tried to change the law in order to further dip into Clean Air Fund (CAF) coffers for its operating expenses. However, the CAF should not be a "cash cow" for the program, but preserved for its primary purpose which is to support community projects that directly reduce pollution or educate residents about air quality issues and their health impacts. Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato has also raised concerns about the murky future of the county's taxpayer funded general fund which makes this an unlikely and unreliable source to bridge the AQP's financial gap.

Pollutants emitted by industrial operators in Allegheny County are toxic chemicals like benzene, lead, mercury and naphthalene. This has resulted in some Mon Valley communities having higher rates of asthma than other parts of Pennsylvania and elevated cancer risks. Earlier this year a group of residents

from the Mon Valley released updated 2020 – 2022 findings from a report, "Fine Particulate Matter and Mortality in Allegheny County, PA," that soot pollution kills between 640 – 1,373 people each year in Allegheny County. Low-income communities had 33% higher proportions of these deaths than higher income communities. Communities of color had 18% higher rates of these deaths than other communities.

The underfunding of the AQP isn't going away and neither are the county's air quality issues, yet both need to be addressed. That's why increasing fees on permits for industrial operators is the best approach. It'll provide a sustainable funding source that ensures the program can maintain and improve its air quality monitoring and enforcement capabilities as well as comply with federal standards. This will also lead to public health benefits, reduced healthcare costs, and improve the overall quality of life for residents. If Allegheny County Council believes clean air is an important issue and that our agencies need the necessary resources to effectively protect clean air, but opposes this proposal, then they should offer an alternative solution.

If you live in Allegheny County take action and [urge your county councilperson to vote YES on the proposal to increase permit fees](#) on industrial polluters in order to fully fund the Air Quality Program.

Greening Philadelphia: Clean Water Action is part of the Resilient Community Stormwater Initiative (RCSI) which seeks to address stormwater issues by transforming vacant, blighted properties and impervious surfaces into green spaces that'll benefit Philadelphia's undeserved communities.

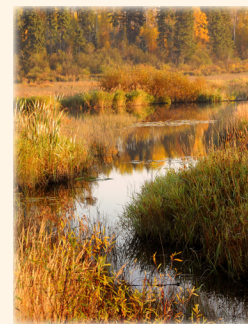
We were honored to be part of a ceremony in August announcing the opening of Ms. Verna's Garden in the Kingessing neighborhood. This was the first community green space completed under RCSI. The garden is run and managed by Dianna Coleman, a community leader and Block Captain. Dianna wanted to provide everyone on her block, especially children, with a safe space to play, learn, and connect, so she started converting an empty plot next to her house into a green space. Now, the space has a beautiful archway built by our friends at the Hinge Collective, a swing set and beehives donated by the National Pollinator Network, vegetables and trees grown with the Bartram's Tree Crew, and support from the Black Farmers Cooperative. With help from connections she made through RCSI and her corporate sponsors, Dianna paired the opening ceremony with a massive block party, complete with games, food, bouncing castles, horse riding, and the whole neighborhood.



► *Ms. Verna's Garden in the Kingessing neighborhood of Philadelphia.*

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.