

## We all have a role in changing our environment

**M**aybe, finally, 2016 might be the year Portland creates real progress for the environment.

The year has certainly presented a trifecta of environmental alarms, in soil, air and water, for the Portland metro area.

First came the discovery of high levels of cadmium, chromium and lead coming from the glass manufacturers, poisoning the soil and atmosphere. Then came word of lead in our schools' drinking water.

### EDITORIAL

And just last week a train loaded with crude oil derailed in the Columbia River Gorge, spilling oil, igniting a fire and reminding everyone of the high-stakes gambles we take every day on our environment.

And all the while, the Portland Harbor Superfund Site has been coming to a head, with the proposed clean-up plan revealed this week. Our fair city has one of the most polluted rivers in the country running through it, and we dump more into it every day.

Arsenic, PCBs, dioxins, crude oil, coal dust – the list goes on.

All of this while our state Department of Environmental Quality – underfunded and understaffed – stepped out from behind the curtain revealing an anemic version of the oversight we thought we had.

And battles over industrial development and land use continue to pit environmental preservation against future pollution management.

There's no question that Portlanders have a rich history of environmentalism, one that we should be proud of. But taken for granted, that environmental reputation has calcified into a green veneer. Individually, we may be exemplary in our consideration for Mother Nature. As a city, we have big problems and a lot of work ahead.

This is no time for hand-wringing, finger-pointing and resignation over the horse that left the stable. We have to get back in our saddle.

We are fortunate in our town to have so many accomplished groups – local and nationally affiliated – organizing around cleaning up our environment

and championing more responsible alternatives. Join the action: The Audubon Society, Neighbors for Clean Air, Groundwork Portland, Bark, Columbia and Willamette Riverkeepers, Sierra Club and many more organizations are here to help you get engaged.

The unveiling of the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund Site proposed plan starts a 60-day period for public input. This is the time for all of us to have a say in what is to become of our river.

We can't take this work for granted any longer.

In addition to the impact on animals and our environment, our polluting habits are costing us in terms of our health.

In 2008, the Oregon Environmental Council compiled a study to quantify the economic cost of the environmentally-attributable components of asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, lead exposure, birth defects and neurobehavioral disorders in Oregon. The conclusion was that the total costs of environmentally attributable disease and disability in the state of Oregon for adults and children is at least \$1.57 billion annually with a range of \$1.25 to \$2 billion. The estimate of the total cost of environmentally attributable disease in the state of Oregon for children alone is \$1 billion each year, with a range of \$984.40 million to \$1.29 billion.

Some of the recommendations should sound familiar: Create a lead-abatement program (including testing in schools), reduce pesticide exposure, properly fund the DEQ, and reduce exposure to diesel and gasoline exhaust.

And when it comes to devastating impacts of pollution, everyone is not created equal. There are places you can go to escape it. There are places where you cannot.

That report was eight years ago. In the time since, we can't claim ignorance, just apathy.

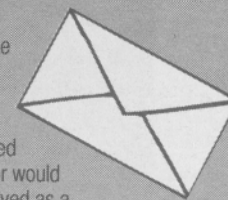
It's important to have national, even global actions to demand change. But it's equally important to go to work on our own backyard.

Whatever your concern, whether it focuses on your livelihood, the health and wellbeing of your children, or the future of our environment at large, there is a local organization of like minds, working to move the ball forward.

There is no time but the present.

### Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, [joanne@streetroots.org](mailto:joanne@streetroots.org). We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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