

## Labor's Edge Blog : Environmental Health Coalition and San Diego Labor: 30 years of building power together

Tags: Labor

URL: [http://www.calaborfed.org/index.php/page/environmental\\_health\\_coalition\\_and\\_san...](http://www.calaborfed.org/index.php/page/environmental_health_coalition_and_san...)



### LABOR'S EDGE

Views from the California Labor Movement

## Environmental Health Coalition and San Diego Labor: 30 years of building power together

By Diane Takvorian, Environmental Health Coalition



“Why do you care about jobs, you’re an environmental group?” I wish we had a dollar for every time someone said that to us.

EHC improves the health of children, families, neighborhoods and the natural environment in the San Diego/Tijuana region by confronting the unjust consequences of toxic pollution, discriminatory land use, and unsustainable energy policies. EHC’s efforts focus on low-income communities of color in urbanized areas where economic and environmental justice go hand-in-hand.

Empowering people, organizing communities and achieving justice are the guiding principles of our grassroots campaigns. EHC holds, and has always held, economic justice as part of our mission.

So why do we care about jobs? Because we know that a good paying and safe job is important to a good life and good health of families and our communities. And we know that the same people and powers that destroy our environmental health are also exploiting working people. We see that we are bound together and that, even though we may disagree now and then, our interests are the same.

Right from our very beginning, EHC has held good and safe jobs as a tenet of our work. Our early days included supporting Anthony Mazzochi's Just Transition for workers, as well as the efforts of one of our founders, Dr. Ruth Heifetz who, as part of a coalition of union members and health professionals called the San Diego Committee on Occupational Safety and Health, worked to educate workers about high cancer risk due to work-related exposure to toxic materials at a local South Bay industry. We also successfully championed the Worker Right to Know and Community Right to Know laws, which required employers and polluters to disclose the hazardous materials workers and communities are exposed to.

In addition, we have had joint efforts with labor like the Apollo Alliance and Clean and Safe Shipyards Campaign; we've supported grocery, metalworkers, hotel workers, janitors, and many others on the picket lines; we always use union printers; and we've fought alongside labor in favor of Fair Trade but against Free Trade agreements like NAFTA. We have also backed many project labor agreements, including on the Chula Vista Bayfront development, at San Diego Unified School District, and at Southwestern College, and we were proud to recently support the City of San Diego's prevailing wage ordinance.

EHC also has a history of including labor in our highest decision-making body—our Board of Directors. Jerry Butkiewicz and Lorena Gonzalez sat on our Board of Directors when they were the Secretary Treasurer of the Labor Council of San Diego and Imperial Counties. Molly Rhodes, with Unite HERE was also an active Boardmember.

We are proud to have a long history of working with the Labor Council and all of its member unions to bring economic, social, and environmental justice to San Diego, and we look forward to a long and successful future together. Most recently, we are proud to stand side by side with the labor community on the Barrio Logan Community Plan, to protect the rights of the community as well as workers' jobs at the shipyards.

We are also proud to have building trades like IBEW 569 and others standing with us to advocate for an innovative and enforceable climate action plan at the City of San Diego that will bring investment in local clean energy and energy and water efficiency, and along with it good paying, skilled local jobs. In fact, the Center on Policy Initiatives estimates that if San Diego put its draft climate plan into action, it could create 5,608 local "job years" (years of full time employment)

for installing solar alone by 2020, not even including the additional jobs created to supply equipment and services, or for upgrading our buildings to make them more energy and water efficient.

We're excited these kinds of projects can make our environment and communities cleaner, while also creating jobs for many of the building trades. We look forward to continuing to work with labor to ensure a strong climate plan is approved by City Council and the Mayor, that local clean energy and green building projects get built, and that local, trained and skilled, well-compensated workers are doing the work.

Our history shows us that together we win. We win for workers, for the community, for environmental and economic justice.

*Diane is one of the founders of EHC and has been its Executive Director since 1982.*

*This blog was originally published by [IBEW Local 569](#)*