

Toxic Exposures in Your Community: Strategies and Successes

PART II

*Moderator: Chloe Winnett**

*Panelists: Bradley Angel** & Kamillah Ealom****

Chloe: We're going to close out with our final presentation of the day, which is going to feature two representatives from Greenaction, Bradley Angel and Kamillah Ealom. Bradley Angel is the Executive Director of Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, which he co-founded in 1997 with grassroots urban, rural, and Indigenous community leaders. For over thirty-seven years, Bradley has been a local and national leader in the environmental health and justice movement.

Prior to co-founding Greenaction, Bradley was the Southwest Toxics Campaigner for Greenpeace USA and the co-director of the San Francisco Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. In 1990, Bradley helped bring together grassroots Indigenous leaders in the first Protecting Mother Earth: Toxic Threat to Indian Lands Conference, which led to the formation of the Indigenous Environmental Network. Bradley co-founded the Bayview-Hunters Point Environmental Justice Response Task Force, and in 2015, Bradley and Greenaction worked with grassroots groups across the state to form the California Environmental Justice Coalition. In 2021, Bradley worked with community partners to form the San Francisco Bay Shoreline Contamination Cleanup Coalition.

Kamillah Ealom is Greenaction's Bayview-Hunters Point Community Organizer and Program Coordinator. A San Francisco native, Kamillah was born and raised in the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood. Kamillah resides in the Bayview and advocates for health and environmental justice. She received her bachelor's in sociology from Dillard University and is currently studying for her master's in public health at San José State University.

Suffering from asthma her entire life, Kamillah is passionate about informing and mobilizing her community regarding the toxins that impact them.

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Kamillah works with Greenaction's many community partners on campaigns, including advocating for full cleanup of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard Superfund Site and ending industrial pollution that impacts the air residents breathe. Kamillah is the coordinator of the Bayview-Hunters Point Environmental Justice Response Task Force that brings together residents, community, environmental justice groups, and government agencies to respond to community complaints about pollution.

Kamillah is a strong community organizer on the front lines, galvanizing and actively getting the community involved regarding health and environmental justice issues in the Bayview-Hunters Point community. Kamillah is vested in the community where she grew up, believing that change comes from those most impacted. Please join me in welcoming Bradley and Kamillah.

Kamillah Ealom: I simply just come humbly as a community resident of Bayview-Hunters Point. You guys just heard most of the impacts from, similarly, to, West Oakland. I'm thankful for Sarah from Communities for a Better Environment mentioning Oakland Airport in the previous talk because Bayview-Hunters Point sits closely in the backyard of SFO Airport. A lot of folks don't acknowledge us as being one of the closest residents, absorbing not only the industrialized sites, but the overburdened exposures from SFO.

As a resident, I'm just extremely compelled to keep our fight and to honor everyone that has fought before me as we highlight our overburdened exposures in Bayview-Hunters Point because, just simply put, we are dying. I'll go into what we're dying from, but not only are we dying, but we have a projected shortened life expectancy of fifteen years. Not comparatively to our regional Bay Area neighbors, such as UC Berkeley, no, comparatively to our San Francisco neighbors that live right across the city from us.

It is imperatively important that we highlight that Bayview-Hunters Point is surrounded by some of the largest standing sources of pollution and mobile pollution, diesel pollution, and our air, water, and soil. I just wanted to give you guys some facts about Bayview-Hunters Point after that wonderful presentation from one of my mentors, Ms. Margaret Gordon. We have—and my fellow neighbor, of course, she's from Bayview-Hunters Point as well—we have been impacted by gentrification as well as we went from 15 percent of the population being Black to less than 5 percent.

Within that 5 percent population, about 86 percent of our children, of our babies born in Bayview-Hunters Point, are born with asthma. It's so sad for me to highlight that because I was born with asthma. I was born in 1978. To see the most recent studies in 2006 state that, it just lets me know that as far as San Francisco and even our neighbors at UC Berkeley have come as being the leaders of environmental justice, we've been left behind. I'd like to tell you why we've been left behind. Bayview-Hunters Point is also not really considered a community of residents, but a community of industrialized operations and sites.

Of course, you guys must know about the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard Superfund site, but we also have industrialized sites such as animal rendering

plants and concrete plants. We are also neighbored by Highway 101 and Highway 280. We have small mom-and-pop industrialized sites that come and set up shop right in our neighborhood and our community on a daily. We have fake equitable folks that represent themselves as recycling plants, which folks like you think that they're doing a great job, recycling compost and recycling all these things, but they're doing it in our backyards.

Like Ms. Margaret, and again, I just want to just highlight, this is my testimony, as neighbors, West Oakland, my father lives right on West Oakland as he was one of the first pushed out of Bayview-Hunters Point through one of their community opportunities through Section 8 and their being able to buy a home. He bought a home right on 9th and Willow. I traveled back and forth. As I told my dad with my daughter, and I'll tell you more about her, I said, "You got to help me. I'm still in Bayview-Hunters Point. You done moved to West Oakland in a home. You got to help me with my kid."

Not knowing that as I crossed the bridge in the middle of the night after work, I'm seeing the most deadliest clouds of smoke. We forgot to mention the Oakland Port. That exposure is free of charge. All you have to do is get on the freeway, at about midnight, and you will see the clouds of smoke that are not only exposing West Oakland and the East Bay but also Bayview-Hunters Point, as we are right on the other side of the Bay. Again, we also fight for equitable living as we have to go against future developments in industrial operations.

We are in the fight of our life now with Prologis, wanting to set up shop and build. Some folks would be like, "Oh, wow, heroes." You are consolidating industrialized sources, diesel sources. Again, you have to remember that there are lies on the other end of this decision-making.

I wanted to also just kindly answer a question on what can you guys do. I'm thankful. I really am thankful for one of my ultimate leaders, you will hear from him in a moment, Bradley Angel, for welcoming me, not only welcoming me into Greenaction, but also acknowledging all of my growth and hard work and supporting me in leading one of those groups that the announcer mentioned, All Things Bayview.

He is definitely a hero in Bayview-Hunters Point as he not only helped develop the Bayview-Hunters Point Mothers and Fathers Committee, but also All Things Bayview. The reason why is because it takes folks like us to reach folks like us. That's in any BIPOC community. Why? Because the lights have been shut off. We are not invited to the table for generations. Today's time is one of the most times that we've been able to come together. The word BIPOC gave us a seat at the table, giving us a platform for all of us to come together as well as represent our individual communities and races.

What I ask is for the environmental justice—shoutout to Steve Castleman, he's definitely been more help than you know for Bayview-Hunters Point—I would like for the Berkeley Environmental Law Clinic to work with and encourage the admissions at UC Berkeley to build their capacity in recruiting

high school students from San Francisco Unified urban schools and urban communities, and help recruit some of these students to UC Berkeley. I really wanted my kid to go to UC Berkeley. Now she's Ivy League, she's graduated from Columbia, highest honors, and she will be a doctoral candidate in the beginning of the fall at Emory University in Public Health.

I wish that there was some equitable opportunity for our students from San Francisco, from Bayview-Hunters Point, right here. As much as I love meeting and greeting, and I'm thankful for a question from the previous panel being honest about the transient students, I really wish that we could bridge the gap in having students from Bayview-Hunters Point. We have a lot of scholars. I graduated in 1996, and I was one of a graduate from Wright-Philip Burton, and went straight to an HBCU, Dillard University. There are scholars right in our communities. I really wish that we could recruit more and have this type of representation right here at UC Berkeley, right here at the Environmental Law Clinic.

That's the main thing that I would like is just continue allowing us and inviting us to come to these type of forums where we can share our story, as we have our communities on our backs. We fight, again, not only asthma, but because of industrialized sources, we have the highest numbers of breast cancer. We have the highest numbers of lung cancer. You're looking at someone who grew up thinking that cancer and folks dying from cancer was normal. Funerals, after funerals, after funerals. Again, we need equitable planning.

We need equitable support in zoning. We need equitable support in enforcement, in regulations. We need equitable support in funding. It just goes on and on, as it is intergenerational impact. You don't get here overnight with having a fifteen-year shortened life expectancy. You don't get here overnight. I'm so thankful for the newer faces, the younger faces. I'm so thankful for the help that we do have from the Environmental Law Clinic. I'm so thankful for Steve Castleman working with Bradley and working with us regarding our lawsuit.

Bradley will hit on that a little bit more. Expand on that. That gives us hope. That gives leaders like me the opportunity to advocate to and motivate neighbors and community residents that have simply given up and they're just waiting to die. Again, because post-gentrification, we've been beaten to where it worked. A lot of the residents are just happy to be here, happy to be survivors. They're praying that they survive the next round of gentrification. With that being said, their heads are down and their mouths are shut. They just wait for their turn to die.

We really need to level up the support and the outreach. I'm indicating again, like Ms. Margaret, come into the community. Do some community outreach with us. Do some tabling with us. Share your resources with us. Lastly, I had seen you guys dedicated this building to the EPA. I get it because I'm on first-name basis with EPA, CalEPA, California Air Resources Board, the Air District, DTSC. Just like Ms. Margaret said, here are all those CalRecycle, I can

go on and on and on, and nothing has changed. We allow them to check the box of civic engagement. We're helping them. It should be a two-way street.

We're really calling you guys to look at the CalEnviroScreen. You will see the impacts of Bayview-Hunters Point. Look at the EJScreen. Look at the EnviroScore, you will see the poor permitting process, on why it's so popular to set up shop at Bayview-Hunters Point. We need legal representation on several levels. Not only just with the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, but for future folks that want to come in and set up shop for those unpermitted industrialized operations that have been able to get away with operating in our communities. Also, we need legal representation to hold these government agencies accountable.

Lastly, I want to give you guys a compliment. I've seen you all had a department for students of African-American descent. Lift those folks up. I didn't see any other, but lift your BIPOC students up. Lift them up. They have several different challenges outside of coming here. Here, they made it, but they still have to go home. Their moms, their dads, their family members, they still have family members that are still dealing with the issues of systemic racism. I truly thank you guys again for this time, and I'd like to call my boss out, Bradley. He hates when I say that, but he's definitely more than that. My community partner, my mentor, all of the sorts, Bradley Angel. Thank you.

Bradley Angel: Thanks, Kamillah. My name is Bradley Angel, Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice. Once upon a time, about twenty-eight years ago; actually, before that, so I've been working with communities across the country, from Bayview-Hunters Point to East and West Oakland, to Richmond, to farmworker communities, to East Los Angeles, Indigenous communities for thirty-eight years now. Sometimes it seems like fifty years, sometimes it seems like three years. I worked at first for one of those large environmental organizations.

I fit in really good as a white guy, helped them diversify, start their Indigenous lands campaign, environmental justice programs. It went great for ten years, till their international decided that actually working with communities wasn't really relevant to saving the planet. I told them where to go, and I quit. It was at that point that people from West Oakland and East LA and South Central and farmworker communities, Richmond communities, Indigenous communities, decided, "Hey," and I was drafted to work with them to form Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, not as a community-based organization, but as a community-led organization.

Our mission is to help communities win, because that's what it's about, saving lives and winning, and fighting for justice, and bringing about systemic change in both industry and government policies and practices. I want to just give some examples and build on what my colleagues from Communities for a Better Environment shared and really salute CBE. I've had the privilege of working with them since I started doing this work, and it was called Citizens for

a Better Environment, once upon a time. Same with Ms. Margaret and Janice back there.

I really wanted to do a shout-out also to the Berkeley Law Clinic, the law students, and staff attorneys here, including Steve Castleman, also the Golden Gate Law Clinic, which has been invaluable. We need, as we all know, and I don't want to dwell on the gangsters in the White House, but times are serious, more serious than in my entire life. Communities know it didn't matter if there was a Democrat in the White House, a Republican in the White House, it was the same. They don't serve justice. This is a whole other ballgame right now. We need all of us together, more than ever. We need to be smart, we need to be skilled, we need to be fierce and be brave as well in these times. Thank you all for doing what you do. We're based here in the Bay Area, but I also work in Arizona, in Utah, a lot of other communities, but in California, the state prides itself supposedly on being a leader in environment, in addressing climate change, in promoting justice, in Black Lives Matter. They hire people even out of the EJ movement. They have so-called environmental justice policies.

What has actually changed? In my experience, very little has changed. Today is as true as it's been from—I grew up when the United States was killing a million Vietnamese people. I was honored, by the way, to, as I walked from BART here through campus, past where I and hundreds of others were arrested forty years ago, protesting apartheid. I helped start the campaign against apartheid here with students and campus workers. Hey, the university had to divest from apartheid. We have to do the same with Palestine as well in Israel.

If you look at what's going on, just even talk about California, we see the long fight to try to get a better cleanup at the Hunters Point Shipyard. There have been victories at Bayview-Hunters Point. The PG&E Hunters Point power plant is no longer there. It took Mayor Willie Brown and the state, "Oh, yes, we'll shut it in five years. Oh, yes, did we say five years? How about another five years?" Finally, Greenaction and hundreds of new tenants from public housing gave a deadline: either close it in a few weeks, or we will close it down. That's exactly what happened after community blockades.

The last medical waste incinerator in the state of California used to be on High Street in East Oakland, despite when Jerry Brown was mayor and all the politicians. They had hundreds of violations there. Finally, the community coalition, CBE, was part of Greenaction [and was] a leader in all these amazing community groups of all different colors. We also said, you either shut it or transition to safe technology that doesn't involve burning the medical waste, which is deadly, or we will shut you down. They told us to take a hike, and they're no longer there. Not only is the air cleaner for that, but in fact, we helped transform the treatment of how medical waste is dealt with. Now in California, it's sterilized instead of burned, putting mercury and toxic metals into our lungs.

Environmental racism continues in California. There are two hazardous waste landfills. There used to be three. Guess where they are. In Spanish-speaking farmworker communities. They're operating the Buttonwillow Toxic

Waste Dump down the I-5 by Bakersfield. It's been operating on an interim permit issued with racially discriminatory English-only permit processes for twenty years.

I was actually thrown in jail for the crime of introducing myself in Spanish at the last county public hearing on that in 1994. They're pulling the same nonsense. Kettleman City, the same thing, where years ago, we documented a huge birth defect and infant death cluster. We see slow cleanups. We see continued dumping on communities of color. California is now sending a lot of toxic waste to garbage dumps near Indigenous communities in Arizona. Greenaction at least has worked with those communities for years. Now the State Department of Toxics wants—and we need lawyers on this—the State Department of Toxics wants to push through [the Hazardous Waste Draft Plan].

There's going to be a hearing on April 24th, I think at two o'clock in Berkeley. State Department of Toxics, their new so-called Hazardous Waste Draft Plan, recommends dumping toxic waste in garbage dumps around the state. Guess which types of communities they're going to do that in. I could go on for days. I'm not. It's getting late. I just wanted to lay out that some things have changed and some things have not. What has not changed is the environmental racism and justice of our government agencies and, of course, of giant industry.

What has not changed is the need for activists and advocates and community leaders, and EJ groups to use the whole toolbox. Educate community, build leadership, skills, and confidence in communities. One of the things that Greenaction does a lot, and I know some of our other colleague groups do the same in the communities, we have leadership academies for young people. We have leadership academies for adults. We don't just, "Okay, yes, this is a bad industry, now you know about it." It's how do we build the confidence that you can actually win.

One of the things that bums me out is some so-called environmental justice groups, they're in it for dollar signs nowadays. I call it "the nonprofit industrial complex." I would love if we went out of business. Of course, we have to connect the dots between environmental justice, social justice, racial justice, economic justice. They're all under attack more than any time in my life right now. I would assume for most of us, all of us, we're not going to let that happen. We have to use the toolbox of organizing advocacy, leadership development, communities, networking, movement building, coalition building.

We need law students and lawyers also to share your knowledge. We need more of you. We need to also share what's worked and what hasn't worked. It's going to become more challenging as the Trump administration tries to wipe out civil rights. Their idea of civil rights is white people getting discriminated against, supposedly. To hell with that. We don't want to see anybody discriminated against. That's not what's going on.

Quickly, just to wrap up, I want to touch on two things. One, currently in Bayview-Hunters Point, the same as Treasure Island, the Navy did reckless

handling of radioactive and toxic waste. At Treasure Island, they actually put formerly unhoused people of color literally, not figuratively, literally, on top of radioactive waste. Literally on top of it. We need lawyers to help deal with that. The community does. At Bayview-Hunters Point, thank goodness, both for the Golden Gate Law Clinic and now Steve here at the Berkeley Law Clinic, they offered to represent Greenaction pro bono on behalf of our community members. We're suing the Navy and EPA. The Navy and EPA, even under Biden, tried to get our case thrown out, and that didn't work. In fact, yesterday we filed an amended complaint, and the case is moving forward. The problem is that despite the rhetoric, the cleanup standards were never even good enough. They didn't even comply with their own cleanup standards. We're suing them. It's helping. They want to also do massive gentrification there. Think about it. For eight years now, the people of Bayview-Hunters Point, Greenaction, and other allies we've held up that gentrification. They want ten thousand rich people's homes. Kind of bizarre they would be on toxic and radioactive waste. We don't want to see anybody poisoned. Mostly, we want to see the long-term residents.

The other thing I just wanted to mention, and then I'll wrap it up, is that I mentioned a little farmworker town halfway to LA on I-5 called Kettleman City. It's one of the birthplaces of Greenaction. More importantly, one of the birthplaces of environmental justice. About eleven years ago now, after the state approved the expansion of the toxic waste dump, and again, used English-only processes, used police violence, police dogs, gave Spanish speakers half the time to testify as English speakers.

When people, one of our founders, in fact, who's a US citizen, but monolingual Spanish, when he objected, he was pounced on by eight cops and dragged out. We filed and wrote without lawyers, I'm glad to say, but we learned, a state civil rights complaint under California Government Code 11135, and a federal complaint under Title VI of the US Civil Rights Act. Unfortunately, then Attorney General Kamala Harris ignored the state civil rights complaint. There you go. Amazingly enough, the US EPA Office of Civil Rights, which I think is now wiped out, accepted our complaint within a couple of weeks.

After seven months of federal mediation, we—Greenaction and El Pueblo of Kettleman City, the community group—reached a landmark settlement, some of which has been complied with and put into effect, and others we're still battling over. The victories? Kettleman City had been drinking contaminated drinking water from old oil-benzene-contaminated wells from the oil industry for decades. They now have clean drinking water, thanks to our civil rights complaint. That's pretty huge. The state was required by state law, which they ignored, to adopt regulatory criteria to consider cumulative impacts of pollution and socioeconomic indicators, Senate Bill 673.

It's now, I think, seven years, they've [been] in violation of state law and the civil rights settlement. They did comply with language access laws, and I could go on. It's going to be interesting, and we're going to need to brainstorm with our colleagues, our lawyer colleagues, law student colleagues, movement

colleagues, what are we going to do now in terms of federal civil rights laws and using this tool, which has been effective. We didn't get everything, but we're working on it. How can we still make the California civil rights law do what it's supposed to do? There's such a need for it, as I think most of you know.

Again, in closing, I just want to say, in these really horrible times, we've got to stand up. We've got to speak out. Go to the Hands-Off protests tomorrow. There are like one thousand of them in East Bay and San Francisco. Raise hell. Be smart. Be fierce. Be committed like you are. That's why you're here. Don't be intimidated. That's what the bastards in the White House want. We cannot be intimidated. It really is a matter of life and death. With that, thanks for the invitation. Thanks for all you do. Let's keep up the fight. Thanks.

Chloe: All right, everyone. After a long and lovely day of some truly phenomenal speakers, I'm happy to say that the 2025 ELQ Symposium is finished. Thank you so much for sticking around through the very end. I just briefly want to say, this has been my labor of love for the last year of my life. I'm just so tremendously grateful to have been able to work with such incredible, impactful, talented changemakers and advocates that have spoken here today.

I hope you all got my double meaning with the title of the event, *Toxic Exposures: Within and Without*. I hope you walk away with a deeper understanding of the exposures that we face, both indoors and outdoors, but that you're also able to appreciate the world we live in and also understand the horizon that we all see together, this safe, and just, and healthy future that we're striving to build without toxic exposures. Thank you.

