

# *Green Chemistry—* A New Vision for United Steelworker Jobs—

“Where Public Health and Workplace Safety Intersect”



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# Blue Green Alliance

- A partnership between North America's largest manufacturing union and the country's largest grassroots' environmental organization.
- 2.1 million members and supporters; 5 million family members
- General premise: Solutions to environmental problems create jobs.
- Focus on:
  - 1) Global warming, clean energy and job creation.
  - 2) Trade agreements that protect US jobs and environmental standards
  - 3) Transition to green chemistry—substances that make our workplaces and communities safe.

## USW—Making and Working with Chemicals

- USW has almost 50,000 members in chemicals industry, including industrial gases and inorganic chemicals; pharmaceutical preparations; paints; industrial organic chemicals and fertilizers; explosives; soap; petrochemicals; petroleum refining; asphalt refining; asphalt paving mixtures, felts and coatings; lubricating oils and greases; oil pipelines
- However, virtually every USW member is in a workplace with hazardous or potentially hazardous substances

# Our History of Environmental Health



# Good Jobs, Clean Environment, Safer World

- A miracle? Or common sense!
- Public health crisis in America
  - 45 million people without insurance
  - 8.7% of US children have asthma, double the rate in 1980
  - 6.5% of all U.S. women of child bearing age have levels of mercury above the EPA standards
  - U.S. now 18<sup>th</sup> in infant mortality rate
  - U.S. now is tied for 16<sup>th</sup> in life expectancy

# Green Chemistry

- What is it?
  - “The design, manufacture, and use of chemicals that are safer for biological and ecological systems.”  
–Green Chemistry in California
- The problem in one state, California—
  - Each month, an estimated 1,900 Californians are diagnosed with a preventable, deadly chronic disease that is attributable to chemical exposures in the workplace;
  - Another 540 Californians die as a result of a chronic disease linked to chemical exposures in the workplace.

# Advocacy for Green Chemistry

- “It is becoming clear that cleaner technologies will play an increasingly important role in industrial activity globally among both developed and developing nations. ***The E.U. government’s policies to motivate investment in cleaner technologies, though difficult for some E.U. producers in the short term, are expected to lead to a long-term E.U. competitive advantage in this arena.***”

--Green Chemistry in California

# Labor's Stake in Green Chemistry

- Involve our members and our communities in efforts to preserve our jobs and improve public health.
- Pollution = poison,  
but pollution also = inefficiency.
- Advocating for green chemistry in the workplace = long-term job security.

# Coke Oven Experience

- In 1990, Clean Air Act Amendments passed in U.S.
- Steel companies lobbied for coke oven exemption, threatening massive job loss.
- USW supported tighter restrictions.
- Results:
  - Massive investments, not layoffs, in clean-up, energy efficiency, and productivity.
  - Cancer-causing emissions reduced.
  - In 1998, coke production was at 98% of 1990 levels.
  - In 2002, when world coke prices rose 450%, US steel industry had a coke price advantage.
- Lesson:
  - Environmental investments resulted in efficiency improvements, long-lasting competitive advantage and job preservation.

