

Interview Terry Miller Chair, Michigan's Lone Tree Council

Terry Miller is chair of the Lone Tree Council, a grass-roots environmental organization in Bay City, Michigan, and a plaintiff in NELC's suit against Midland, Michigan's Dow Chemical for polluting Saginaw Bay. He is a teacher in the Saginaw City public schools, father of five and lifetime resident of Bay City where he has been an activist on environmental and public health issues including pesticide use, toxic waste, wetlands and incineration.

Why did you decide to become involved with the problems surrounding the Dow plant in Midland?

I became involved with the Dow issue a few years after Lone Tree was formed in 1978. After a successful six-year campaign against a nuclear plant proposed by Consumers Power Co. for Midland, we decided to focus on the problems of dioxin in the area. A long-time member, Diane Hébert, was instrumental in making the group aware of the threats posed by this type of pollution.

In your experience as an activist, and as a resident of Michigan, what environmental problems have you seen in the area?

Currently, the Saginaw Bay and Saginaw River are #1 on the Michigan list of toxic waste sites, in part because of dioxin-contaminated sediment—the result of the combustion of chlorinated organic compounds. The state has over 7000 sites and

these water bodies are on the top of the list. The Bay City State Park along Saginaw Bay used to be very well attended by local citizens, particularly since the park provides the only public waterfront access in the area. The park was nearly destroyed by all the algae and decayed organic matter washing up on the beach as a result of the high amounts of phosphorous dumped into the shallow bay.

In addition, wildlife in the area is being afflicted with developmental problems. We've seen cross-beaked cormorants and fetal chicks with their hearts outside their bodies. There have also been fish advisories for communities recommending only minimal eating of fish from the Saginaw Bay and River, as well as the Tittabawassee River downstream from Dow.

Back 5 to 10 years ago we saw epidemiologic reports that showed that Midland had real problems with soft tissue sarcoma, which may be due to environmental pollution.

How has it been working with NELC on this suit?

I first met Andy (Buchbaum, NELC Attorney) five or six years ago, working with him as a legislative advocate in Michigan. We worked at the state level on polluter pay legislation and achieved it, getting 3000 state sites cleaned up as a result. Both he and NELC have been great, ter-



rific. NELC has been very professional and very supportive and it's clear that we have mutual concerns.

One of the things we have left in terms of making positive changes to protect human health and the environment is the judicial system, and we're very thankful that NELC is there to support us. Since many Michigan laws are being violated by industry, we're glad to be able to use the legal system to pursue the correction of injustices that are happening in our state.

What are your goals in bringing this suit?

Our immediate goal is to stop the excess discharges of phosphorous and toxic compounds into the Bay which are making the state park unusable and endangering wetlands in the area. The state and city have been bulldozing the beach areas to push the contaminated soil out of the way and are looking into ways to dispose of the waste and clean up the park. ♦

"One of the things we have left in terms of making positive changes to protect human health and the environment is the judicial system, and we're very thankful that NELC is there to support us."