

News from the NJ Work Environment Council (WEC)

Six Major Labor Organizations Join Lawsuit Against Governor Christie's DEP; Says He Endangers Public Safeguards

Contact: Rick Engler (201) 389-3189
Moriah Kinberg (510) 452-7178

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The New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC), which includes major labor unions, as well as community, and environmental allies, announced today at a Trenton press conference that it was joining a lawsuit against the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's new "waiver rule". WEC issued this statement:

"Gov. Christie's administration is going one agency at a time to roll out new rules allowing corporations to violate state laws. **These new rules will jeopardize safeguards that protect all of us – at work, at home, and in our community.**

Maybe the idea is that working people won't care about letting big corporations violate clean air and water rules, and environmental groups won't care about letting them violate workers' rights, and there won't be any outcry when consumer fraud laws are "waived," and so on.

It's not too hard to figure out who is going to get these waivers and gain an unfair advantage over their competitors. It won't be small businesses. It will be the big companies that are bankrolled by Wall Street. They can give the big campaign contributions to gain favor with a governor. They've got the high-priced lobbyists and lawyers. **This further opens the door to Wall Street and corporate CEOs who already have too much influence and power.**

Working people need good jobs that support a family. We need affordable health care, housing, and education and a clean environment. That's what the Governor should be working on – not how to help corporate CEOs violate the essential safeguards that protect all of us."

Quotes from Labor Plaintiffs

John Pajak, a refinery worker and Vice President of **Teamsters Local 877**, which represents employees at the ConocoPhillips petroleum refinery and Infineum chemical plant in Linden, NJ, said, "I work with hazardous chemicals daily. DEP enforces laws, like one to prevent toxic leaks, fires, and explosions, that protect my safety, my co-workers, and the community. We will not allow Governor Christie to gut such vital safeguards." (Note: Pajak is also volunteer President of the NJ Work Environment Council).

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John Shinn, Director of **United Steelworkers (USW) District 4**, New Jersey's largest industrial union, said, "It's a fantasy that this rule to weaken environmental and other public protections will create jobs, as DEP claims. We're ready to sit down and work with Governor Christie when he gets serious about creating good jobs in New Jersey."

Adam Liebttag, President of **Communications Workers (CWA) of America Local 1036**, which represents scientists, engineers, planners, and other professionals at the NJ Department of Environmental Protection said, "DEP's staff enforce our environmental laws to protect our air, water, and open space. This waiver rule will put our members under unprecedented political pressure and will base environmental decisions on politics instead of science. Professional input to important environmental decisions must reflect strict enforcement to the law, not a subjective loophole waiver. The waiver rule must not stand."

Bernie Gerard, a nurse and Vice President of the **Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE)** said, "DEP regulates x-ray machine safety at hospitals and other health care facilities. We oppose this rule because waiving requirements could expose our members and their patients to unnecessary levels of radiation, which can increase the risk of cancer."

Lucye Millerand, President of the **Union of Rutgers Administrators (URA), AFT Local 1766**, said, "The Christie Administration's attempt to sweep aside so many environmental protections is unprecedented. Our members want to breathe clean air and drink safe water. They want use of pesticides and toxics carefully regulated. Our union joined this lawsuit because we care about the health of families and future generations."

Carol Gay, President of the New Jersey **Industrial Union Council (IUC)**, said, "This policy is like announcing that police will no longer patrol the streets or enforce drunk driving laws. What incentive will irresponsible corporations have to safeguard the public interest?"

Rick Engler, Director of the **New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC)**, said, "WEC joined the lawsuit because DEP's waiver rule jeopardizes safeguards that protect all of us – at work, at home, and in our community. Moreover, if other state agencies get to issue waiver rules, the Christie administration will be able to give an oil company, Wall Street bank, insurance company, or drug manufacturer a green light to break other laws."

Background

Gov. Christie's Executive Order #2 directs **every** state agency to develop policies to allow corporations to violate public safeguards established by the legislature. DEP is the first state agency to adopt a waiver rule. It was issued on March 7, 2012. The Division of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Law and Public Safety has issued a *proposed* waiver rule.

- **For more information about WEC, go to www.njwec.org.**
- **To read DEP's waiver rule, go to www.nj.gov/dep/waiverrule.**