
Starting a Stop Cancer Where It Starts Campaign Where You Live: You Can Do It Too!

The Five Steps to the Campaign

1. Assessment
2. Alliance-building
3. Adapting the resolution
4. Attracting the media
5. Follow-up and follow-through

1. Assessment: What do you want to accomplish?

The first step to any campaign is assessing the situation and defining your goals accordingly. We were able to get four cities/counties to declare October “Stop Cancer Where It Starts” Month, (SCWIS) but it was different in each city. We had to adjust to the connections we had in each city and the level of commitment we felt we could get from the city. San Francisco passed a Mayoral Proclamation, Oakland and Marin County did resolutions, and Berkeley adopted a resolution with specific action steps included.

What connection do you have in your local city council or governing body? Are there members of local legislature who have a history of commitment to environmental issues? Does your city already have some environmental laws that could be expanded or reinforced by a resolution? The answers to these questions may influence what it is you want to accomplish.

Is your goal to declare October SCWIS month, or to pass a resolution with some teeth (and that will require follow-up)? Do you want to have a press conference, rally, and/or demonstration? How much time and energy do you have to give? We were working within an already established coalition of groups (the Toxic Links Coalition) and we were able to write a resolution, organize a press conference, and pass the resolution in the span of three months and five or six meetings. How much you can accomplish depends largely on who you have working with you. If you're on your own you may want to start by forging

alliances with those who have established connections in government and a familiarity with the city's environmental record.

2. Alliance Building: Who can help you accomplish your goals?

The Toxic Links Coalition (TLC) is a coalition of health, environmental and community organizations, as well as concerned individuals. The Stop Cancer Where it Starts campaign was well suited for this coalition since it involved many issues: health related organizations became involved because of the need to bring attention to possible environmental causes of diseases, environmental organizations liked the focus on reducing toxins in our environment, and community groups and individuals saw it as a means to protect their community from pollution and illness.

What organizations in your area are concerned about these issues? Hopefully each group you contact will have ideas on whom else to include in the campaign. You can start by searching the internet for environmental groups in your state, or looking in the phone book under environmental organizations. If you have a Sierra Club in your area you've got a likely ally—the National Sierra Club endorsed a New York Times ad on the Stop Cancer Where It Starts campaign that was produced by TLC member-organization Breast Cancer Action.

It may seem hard to approach organizations, but fortunately this campaign has already been done successfully in other cities, and much of the leg-work has been completed. A sample resolution is written, press releases and fact sheets have been made and can be copied. You can begin by saying you're a member of the organization through which you first heard about this campaign, if that makes you feel like you have more legitimacy. You're simply asking organizations to help with any political or media connections

they have and fine-tuning the resolution's action steps. In return the organizations will get publicity and will have their concerns expressed in a resolution that can be used in the future to pressure government to act.

3. Adapting the resolution: Creating a broad based resolution.

The basic version of TLC's resolution asks that October be declared Stop Cancer Where It Starts Month "in order to bring awareness not only of the incidence of and possible cures for cancer, but also of the environmental links to cancer." You can stop there or you may choose to add action steps for the city/county to commit to. These additions will vary in each community. It may be proposing a new concept, like getting Berkeley to work with hospitals to eliminate PVC plastic medical products, or it can be reaffirming old commitments, like Marin County resolving to rededicate itself to the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program. Giving organizations the opportunity to add their special interest to the resolution will help you attract a broad base of support. And the more support you have, the better your chances of getting some media coverage for your work.

4. Attracting media attention

Whole workshops and manuals have been written on getting media attention (see: www.ruckus.org/man/media_manual.html), but the fact remains that it is still partially a matter of timing, some luck and personal connections. Nevertheless, having a set media committee to work out the details of your media strategy is essential.

Here are some of the media committee's responsibilities:

- Composing the simple message you want people to take away. (The sound bite.)

- Choosing the central image. (Think photo in tomorrow's paper, or highlight on TV.)
- Writing the press release. (It doesn't have to say it all—you want the media to come and get more info. Make sure the headline's punchy.)
- Making the media phone/fax list. (Don't forget the wire services!)
- Compiling the press kit. (Remember, the press can be snobs—if it looks unprofessional, they won't take you seriously and it will taint their coverage. The same goes for the release.) {A press kit is basically a folder with relevant fact sheets, background materials, organizational brochures, etc. to educate the press about the issue.}
- Practicing interviews. (Perfect your media message—partner off and practice in pairs.)
- Sending the press release. (This can be done the night before, but is best done early in the morning the day of the event.)
- Making follow-up calls. (Call the wire and TV stations first to ensure they got the release. Be prepared to say in 30 to 60 seconds what you're doing, why you're doing it, and why it will make a good story.)
- Interacting with the press during the event. (Ensure that the media folks are given a press kit and are introduced to the appropriate person for an interview.)

A timing tip: Weekday late mornings (especially Monday's) are the best time to have an event. Reporters are less likely to have other assignments first thing in the morning, and weekends have fewer staff and viewer/readership. Of course, if there's another event or story that you can play off of (like a city council meeting, or a conference or benefit) then you should time your event accordingly.

5. Follow-up and follow-through: Working together to make the changes happen.

There's a story whether or not the resolution passes. If it doesn't pass, you can send out a press release lamenting this fact. Figure out what changes need to be made in the legislation, the campaign or the policy environment to encourage future passage of the resolution. Strategize on what to do next.

If the resolution does pass, great! Now you need to make sure the resolution is more than just ink on paper, but that it leads to concrete changes. Those who helped write the resolution should also be those who help implement it. Meet with the legislators and go over the details and propose deadlines for the actions set out in the resolution. If the resolution did not have specific action steps, you can still use it as a symbol of commitment to environmental concerns and pressure legislature to act on these concerns by making concrete changes towards reducing toxins.

Good luck in your efforts to Stop Cancer Where It Starts in your community! Whether or not your campaign results in a resolution being passed, you will undoubtedly have made a few people think hard about the issues, and perhaps inspire others to take action. In this way, the resolution is both an educational and organizing tool. The Toxic Links Coalition thanks you for your interest in making the SCWIS campaign a nation-wide grassroots effort. Please don't hesitate to contact us for more information.

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August 2000

- Upon hearing that Berkeley is issuing a proclamation declaring October National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, TLC decides to approach the city to also declare October “Stop Cancer Where It Starts Month.” We shoot for getting a declaration passed in early October so that a press conference can be done at the beginning of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.
- A draft resolution is written, and TLC representatives meet with a sympathetic Berkeley City Council Member, Kriss Worthington. Worthington suggests that we add even more action steps to our resolution, specifically citing what we hope the city of Berkeley will do to reduce toxins in the environment. He also brings in the office of Council Member Margaret Breland who was diagnosed with breast cancer earlier that year.
- At the same time, calls are made in Oakland and San Francisco to legislators whom TLC members have worked with in the past, to introduce similar resolutions in those cities.

September 2000

- TLC members contribute more action steps to add to the Berkeley resolution. Another meeting between TLC representatives and Worthington fine-tunes the resolution, considering the politics within the City Council and what the City has already done on similar issues. Worthington forwards a copy to the City Manager to see

if there might be other obstacles to the resolution’s passage that we would want to know about before it is introduced to the full council.

- TLC meets to plan the Berkeley press conference. Speakers are approached and confirmed. TLC makes signs and a banner to be used at the press conference. A reporter at the main Bay Area newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle, is contacted weeks before the event, to encourage special coverage of our campaign. A press release is written and forwarded to Worthington, who has agreed to send it on City letterhead to their media contacts.

October 2000

- A press conference is held in Berkeley, and is covered by three Berkeley papers and the San Francisco Chronicle. The press conference is followed by a march to the City Clerk’s office to turn in the resolution (to be put on the agenda for the next City Council meeting).
- TLC members attend the Berkeley City Council meeting where the resolution is to be heard and voted on. TLC members sign-up for the public comment period and give testimonials in support of the resolution. The signs used at the press conference are held up during the meeting. The City Council unanimously passes the resolution.
- Similar resolutions are passed in Oakland and Marin County. San Francisco announces a Mayoral Proclamation declaring October SCWIS Month.