

cheers *to SEHN's 25 years*

Dear Friends,

Celebrate with us! It is our 25th birthday. 25 years ago, SEHN was created to address the misuse of science in public health and environmental policy. Join us as we map the big contributions SEHN has made over those years and tell you what lies ahead. We have been able to do so much because you have been faithful and generous in your support. We invite you to partner with us building on our legacy of achievement.



SCIENCE
& ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH
NETWORK



Love Canal

Our story at SEHN begins with one of the worst toxic chemical disasters on record, Love Canal.

In 1978, Lois Gibbs, a Love Canal resident, discovered that her son's school was built on top of Hooker Chemical's dump that had the motherlode of dioxin, contaminating the entire neighborhood, causing birth defects, miscarriages and cancers. Lois' efforts resulted in a relocation of the community, and fundamental changes in public policy.

In 1979, [the director of Region 2 USEPA said](#), "Quite simply, Love Canal is one of the most appalling environmental tragedies in American history. But that's not the most disturbing fact. What is worse is that it cannot be regarded as an isolated event. It could happen again--anywhere in this country--unless we move expeditiously to prevent it."

And that was the problem, [dioxin contamination was not limited to Love Canal](#), nor were the disastrous public health effects. Worse, dioxin wasn't the only toxic chemical that threatened human health and the environment. It is one of [many chemicals that are persistent, long-lived toxics](#) that [disrupt the endocrine system and can cause cancer, reproductive disorders, birth defects and more](#).

As you might guess, the chemical industry went all out to argue that the science on toxic chemicals was uncertain; the risks could be managed; and the chemicals were

necessary for economic growth. These same arguments were made for tobacco and cancer, and now for climate change.

When USEPA began investigating dioxin with an eye to regulating it, industry did a full-court press to undermine both clean-up of existing toxic sites and the manufacture of new toxic chemicals, like pesticides. They sowed doubt in the media, cherry-picking the science.

In fact, a 1991 NY Times article said that dioxin was as safe as sunbathing—back in the day when sunbathing was presumed safe.

It was out of this history that SEHN was born. In 1992–93, many groups including Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, Audubon and Lois' organization Center for Health and Environmental Justice, gathered to wrestle with the question of why the persuasive science on toxic chemicals like dioxin was not accurately reflected in major media outlets or in agencies that had the power to regulate them.

Those groups gathered for a year and then agreed to form SEHN and hire staff. I was hired in January, 1994. We did three things in those early years. We:

- recruited scientists to do pro bono work for grassroots groups working to prevent or clean-up toxic messes;
- investigated alternatives to risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis;
- and did a year-long survey of scientists who were doing public interest research and scientific public service.

The Precautionary Principle:

In 1997 I was invited to do a collaborative dissertation with Joel Tickner, a graduate student at Univ. of Mass., Lowell. His dissertation proposal described a new idea, the precautionary principle. As part of that collaboration, we convened a conference and issued the 1998 Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle.

The principle has remarkable power because it couples ethics with epistemology. The ethical dimension of preventing harm or suffering serves as a powerful reason for choosing to take action in the face of scientific uncertainty.

Many governmental bodies, businesses and health care facilities adopted the precautionary principle over the next years. A few examples. [The city and county of San Francisco](#) used it to frame their environmental code. [Kaiser Permanente](#) changed many of its purchasing practices to reduce or eliminate toxic chemicals. [The International Society for Ethnobiology](#) included the principle in its code of ethics.

Ecological Framework of Health:

Immediately after the Wingspread Conference, Dr. Ted Schettler joined the staff where he brought his public health and medical expertise to bear on applying the precautionary principle to public health. He developed the [ecological framework of health](#) which added a multi-faceted ecological dimension to our understanding of everything from breast cancer to healthy aging. Ted has had an out-sized influence on environmental public health with his work influencing everything from the research agenda to policy.

Future Generations and Climate Change:

Early in our work on the precautionary principle, our friends at the Indigenous Environmental Network told us that the precautionary principle was the 7th generation decision rule. That is, we needed to consider the impact of a decision on the next seven generations to come. This led to a joint project on the rights of future generations with Harvard Law School's Center for International Human Rights. This was opportune because the looming climate catastrophes brought a new sense of our impacts on the future. Just as the astronauts view of Earth from space gave us a sense of the fragility and beauty of our planet, so too, climate change gave us a sense of time and the long-lasting effects we could have on our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Pipelines, Fossil Fuels:

Our first major involvement in pipelines was over Dakota Access, the pipeline that gave rise to the massive Indigenous resistance at the Standing Rock Sioux lands in North Dakota. SEHN was the sponsor of the Iowa coalition that defended the water and lands of Iowa against Dakota Access. In addition, SEHN intervened on behalf of future generations in the hearings on the permit.

The pipeline struggles continue with three major pipelines across the upper Midwest, either trying to expand or build new stretches of pipeline. Since 2014, we've provided legal assistance to numerous tribes and grassroots groups trying to protect their water and lands.

The Work Ahead:

A few years ago, we began searching for the reason that government bodies would make decisions to permit toxic chemicals, mines or pipelines when all the evidence said that these were going to cause environmental degradation and human misery. We found an answer in the Powell Memo of 1978, a document written for the Chamber of Commerce that laid out a plan to defend corporations and free enterprise. Decades of effort had gone into shaping a philosophy of government that said government's major responsibility was to grow the economy. Environmental law became free-market, private property law and hence we buy and sell the rights to pollute.

We aim to challenge that fundamentally flawed idea in a bold new project to re-vision and re-define what government is for. And so we come full circle to our original charge, 25 years ago. Is science in service to public health, the environment and well-being or is it being used and abused by giant corporations to provide shareholder's profits at the expense of all of life on Earth? We invite you to join us in this challenging time and this unique project. Please make a generous gift today. We will do our best to use it wisely.

Carolyn Raffensperger, Executive Director

Our Board & Staff

the backbone of SEHN

"SEHN is all about relationships—our bodies' and communities' relationship to the earth, our relationships to each other and our little organization's relationship to each one of you."

"I hope that people can look at themselves with their writing, or their art, or their music, or their engineering; whatever it is—there will be a time for you to link arms and defend this Earth and protect what you love." *-Carolyn Raffensperger*

"Future generations will at least have one example of people who tried...and maybe they'll pick it up and do something about it." *-Peter Montague*

Meet the Team



Madeleine Scammell, Board President. Madeleine is an Associate Professor of Environmental Health at Boston University School of Public Health and a JPB Environmental Health Fellow at Harvard School of Public Health. Her expertise is in the area of community-driven and community-based participatory research and includes the use of qualitative methods in the area of environmental health and epidemiologic studies.

Bhavna Shamasunder, Board Member. Associate Professor, Urban and Environmental Policy at Occidental College. Bhavna teaches and conducts research at the intersection of environmental health & justice with a focus on inequalities faced by low-income communities and communities of color who live and work in urban and/or industrial environments.



SEHN has given me many opportunities to work with a diverse group of committed, creative, and respectful people on the staff, board, and in collaborating organizations on issues that we care deeply about and where we hope to make a difference. It is an institutional home with open doors and few rigid walls, allowing exploration of new and challenging territories. My kind of place. -Ted Schettler



Peter Montague, Board Member and Distinguished Fellow. Peter is a writer and environmental historian. He co-directed the Environmental Research Foundation in Annapolis, Maryland, and published Rachel's Environment & Health News.



Tom Goldtooth, Board Member. Tom is the executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. He is a leading spokesperson on environmental issues and Indigenous rights.

Rebecca Altman, Board Member. Becki is a sociologist and writer. She has developed an exceptional expertise in the history of toxic chemicals and plastics.



Benno Friedman, Board Member. Benno is a photographer, and a key advocate for grassroots groups as they work to protect their communities.

"Especially in these troubling times of undoing and rollback, more than ever, I look to SEHN's deep experience of holding space as emergent ideas needed in this moment gestate. Ideas that might move the needle — protect the public's health — and the possibility for future generations to thrive. -Rebecca Altman

"Whether you are protesting pipelines and mining, working on immigration reform, women and gender rights, Black Lives Matter, protecting the water through prayer and walking, economic or environmental justice—this is for you. The Women's Congress is that place where we can gather to reimagine a future that includes everyone." -Ann Manning



Ann Manning, Staff Member. Ann is the associate director of SEHN. She has a rich background covering many fields with an expertise in economics. She convened two of the Women's Congresses for Future Generations.

Kayhla Cornell, Staff member. Kayhla is SEHN's researcher, communications expert and IT guru.



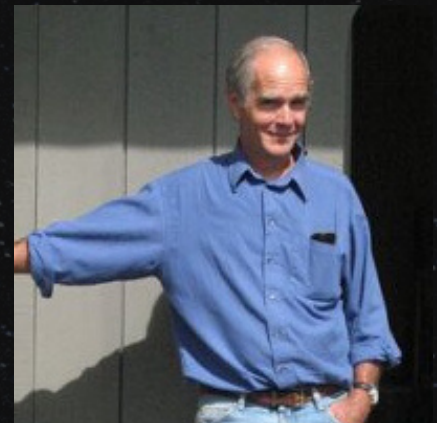
Sherri Seidmon, Staff member. Sherri is SEHN's finance director and queen of administration.



Carolyn Raffensperger, Staff Member. Carolyn is the executive director of SEHN. She is a lawyer and archaeologist by training.

The work ethic at SEHN is sprinkled with knowledge, wisdom, humor, respect and action for improving our quality of life now and for future generations. I appreciate the shared commitment to making the Earth a better place for my children and my children's children. -Sherri Seidmon

Ted Schettler, Staff member. Ted is the science director of SEHN. He is a physician and expert in public health.



"SEHN is small and mighty. Always pushing the boundaries of thought and action, always focused on root causes, and always identifying opportunities for change in both the hyper-local and planetary realms. The bottom line is that by serving on the board, I too am pushed to think more creatively about systemic problems and their solutions, and try them. We have nothing to lose, except the future." -Madeleine Scammell