

# THE PEOPLE'S POCKET GUIDE TO

# ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

HOW YOU CAN MAKE  
A DIFFERENCE  
IN YOUR COMMUNITY NOW

**MCE50**  
YEARS  
Missouri Coalition for the Environment  
1969  2019

PUBLISHED BY  
MISSOURI COALITION  
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

## ABOUT MISSOURI COALITION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Missouri Coalition for the Environment (MCE) is Missouri's independent citizens' environmental organization for clean water, air, energy, and a healthy environment.

Our mission is to educate, organize, and advocate in defense of Missouri's people and their environment.

MCE began in 1969 before there was an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or a Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Our environmental protection efforts predate many of our current environmental laws. Today, MCE works to enforce the laws that protect our natural resources, advocates for change at all levels of government to improve our environment, and empowers individuals to create change in their own communities.

Learn more at: [www.moenvironment.org](http://www.moenvironment.org)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to:

David Behrens, Emily Hahn, and Caitlin Zera.

*My Guide to Environmental Protection in Louisiana* by the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE 1	Introduction
PAGE 2	Be Informed
PAGE 3	Identify Environmental Concerns
PAGE 6	Using Government Sources
PAGE 12	Government Entities You Should Know
PAGE 17	Take Action to Protect Your Community
PAGE 20	What to Do When All Else Fails
PAGE 21	Organize and Involve the Public!
PAGE 22	Grassroots Organizing Tactics You Should Know

© 2019 Missouri Coalition for the Environment

All images copyrighted by their respective artists. No part of this guide may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without prior written consent from the publisher.



## INTRODUCTION

*Want to stop a polluter?*

*Want to take action to protect your community's health?*

*Want to raise awareness about threats to natural resources, such as drinking water and green space?*

*Want to protect Missouri's air, land, and water?*

*Want to learn more about local and state decisions affecting your health and environment?*

Then ***The People's Pocket Guide to Environmental Action*** is for you!

The stream running through your property is clean, but your well taps a contaminated aquifer. The contamination happens off of your property. What can you do?

You suspect a foul smell is coming from a local company. What can you do? The odor may be violating the company's operating permit. What is their permit and who issued it? What agency do you contact?

This pocket guide helps you find answers to your questions by telling you where to look and how to engage with the appropriate agencies and resources. MCE staff is available to help plan a campaign or answer questions. Please use us as a resource.

## **BE INFORMED**



*Stay informed about your community. Connecting with your neighbors is rewarding for future organizing work as well as creating a better, safer neighborhood.*

### **GET IN THE KNOW**

Get to know your neighbors, local business owners, and other active community members who belong to faith organizations, clubs, or volunteer organizations. Get to know your elected officials, from city council and mayor to our two U.S. Senators.

### **GET OUT AND ABOUT**

Attend neighborhood association meetings, ward meetings, school advisory committees, block parties, and other community gatherings. If your neighborhood does not offer these types of opportunities, consider organizing a community event or starting a group.

### **GET YOUR BEARINGS**

Check out local maps. Get to know where your local streams are, where development is planned, and the best places for wildlife habitat.

## IDENTIFY ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS



*Have you observed changes in your community that you think are caused by pollution or degradation?*

**When you notice a change or a problem, document it.**

*Take photos or videos of the problem and time stamp the footage for future reference. If possible, take footage that clearly indicates the scale of the problem and geographic surroundings. To indicate scale, include a common item, such as a pencil or a person.*

*Write down a summary of what you see and, if possible, have someone else verify it by recording their name or their comments.*



*Dead fish in algae. Photo by EPA.*

# CHECKLISTS FOR IDENTIFYING YOUR CONCERN



**Create a checklist with the who, what, where, when, why, and how.**

## **WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?**

### **EXAMPLES:**

- Chemical spill or hazardous waste activity
- Explosion
- Noise
- Raw sewage
- Green slime
- Dumping
- Bad smell
- Flooding

## **WHERE IS THE PROBLEM?**

- Street address, name or description of the water body (lake, river, etc.), longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates – a smartphone may be able to provide this information.

## **WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?**

- Date and time of the violation or incident
- How long did the incident last?
- Is it ongoing?

## **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE (IF YOU KNOW)?**

- Name or address of a facility, operator, individual, or corporation.
- Identify if the source of the problem has a permit to operate and from which government agency.

*Don't be afraid to reach out to your neighbors. This is useful for gathering additional information about your concerns and building up support for action.*

## **WHO ALSO SHARES YOUR CONCERNS?**

It is unlikely you are the only person who is concerned about an environmental issue. And if you are the only person, then it's even more important for you to engage nearby people to make them aware and to help in gathering information.

- Reach out to your neighborhood watch group or to individuals who organize neighborhood events.
- Approach leaders of community or faith organizations to meet members of the congregations or organizations who live near you.

Before reaching out to neighbors or approaching local groups, prepare a concise statement of the problem. Stick to the most egregious and relevant facts without exaggerating the condition. After your description, be prepared to ask for their help, either by making a phone call, sharing information, or suggesting additional contacts.

Be specific in your ask. Give people a question to answer or task to take on:

- Will you call our council member?
- Will you draft a letter to the editor?

## USING GOVERNMENT SOURCES



Finding all the applicable governing bodies involved in an environmental issue can be very challenging because a single issue may involve entities at local, state, and federal levels.

### **WAYS TO UTILIZE GOVERNMENT SOURCES TO ACQUIRE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CONCERN:**

- Look out for Public Notices (announcements)
- Review Permits
- Attend Municipal Councils/Boards of Aldermen Meetings
- Exercise Your Right to Know

*Missouri factory farm barns and lagoons. Satellite image.*



## LOOK OUT FOR PUBLIC NOTICES

Government bodies give notice ahead of time about the date, time, and location for public hearings, public comment periods, etc. To prepare ahead of time, sign up to receive emails by enrolling in government notification listservs on agency websites, such as *dnr.mo.gov*.

Emails often include information about public notices for hearings, comment periods, or permit applications.

To avoid being flooded with emails by multiple government agencies, join an organization like MCE that monitors the listservs and alerts you to the relevant ones.

*Notices are not always obvious.* Agencies may give notice in obscure ways like a notification in a weekly community journal. Meetings are often scheduled at inconvenient times with little notice, so be on the lookout.

Find out where your city or county posts meetings and mark your calendar to check that site regularly.

### LOCAL CASE STUDY

#### *St. Charles*



In September 2016, the St. Charles County Planning and Zoning Division gave notice of a rock quarry expansion permit application.

The notification letter was only mailed to landowners within 500 ft. of the potential quarry expansion property. Other residents were notified via public postings that were small signs at street intersections (see photo).

**REVIEW  
PERMITS**

The permit process gives environmental advocates several opportunities to stop, alter, or control the potential polluter.

A permit may be required to pollute. Permits are issued for a specific period of time. The public may have the opportunity to review (examine) and comment or testify during the permit application or permit renewal process.

You or your group may be able to testify at the permit hearing. Even if your testimony is not sufficient to prevent the permit, it may influence the final wording or scope of the permit. It is also helpful to create a paper trail of opposition for future tactics, such as litigation.

**ATTEND  
CITY  
COUNCIL  
MEETINGS**

Transcripts or meeting minutes about environmental issues can be great sources of local environmental insight. Find these on municipal websites or request them from local elected officials.

**DETERMINE  
SOURCES  
OF FUNDING**

It can be helpful to look up campaign finance records for elected officials to better understand how they are funded to run for office. The easiest way to do this for elected officials in Missouri is to visit the website of the Missouri

Ethics Commission at [www.mec.mo.gov](http://www.mec.mo.gov). On its website, search under the "Campaign Financing" tab. In this interface you can search by an elected official's name, election year, or committee name. Once you have selected the official, his or her information will appear. From this information page, select the "Reports" tab. Here, reports will appear by year. You can review quarterly reports filed by the official as well as reports right before election day (i.e. eight days before election, 48-hour notice for election). In these reports, you will see "Itemized Contributions Received." You can see which organizations and individuals made contributions to the official's political campaign as well as the amount donated.



*The Missouri Ethics Commission website provides detailed financial information about campaign expenditures and contributions and includes many publications, brochures, and web tutorials explaining Missouri's ethics laws, requirements and regulations.*

## **YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW**

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is the federal law that grants the public access to permits, meeting minutes, correspondence, recordings, maps, and other documents and materials published by the federal government.

## THE SUNSHINE LAW



*Learn more about Missouri's Sunshine Law through the Missouri Attorney General's office and website.*

The Sunshine Law is Missouri's state-level version of FOIA. It provides that any person can request information from the government without requiring identification of the requestor or an explanation of why the requestor wants the information. Depending on the government agency, Sunshine requests can be made online, by mail, and by phone. Once the agency receives a request, it has 20 business days to reply with its decision of whether it will comply, with no automatic extensions. Due to the high volume of requests, some offices take more than 20 days to fulfill requests. To save time, you may want to inquire in person. The Sunshine Law may apply to state legislators, thanks to the passage of Constitutional Amendment 1 in 2018.

*If your Sunshine request is to be used for the benefit of the general public, include a **request to waive fees**. Governments will often waive or reduce charges if your request states that it will benefit the general public.*



Missouri State Capitol. Photo by Jim Bowen.

There are a list of exclusions in the Sunshine Law, so you may not receive everything you want or some items may be redacted. In some cases, you may want to challenge the reason given for denying a request.

FOIA and Sunshine Law tips to expedite process and reduce costs:

- State that you are willing to accept documents electronically.
- Be as specific as possible.
- Follow up by email to clarify any questions and create a paper trail.

These tips will cut down on paper, costs, and time.

**LOCAL  
CASE STUDY**

*Watchdogging  
Floodplain  
Development*

MCE has successfully used FOIA to request permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and supporting documentation to watchdog compliance at development sites in floodplains.

## **GOVERNMENT ENTITIES YOU SHOULD KNOW**

*Once the General Assembly passes a law, it is up to agencies in the executive branch, under the authority of the governor, to write and enforce regulations implementing the laws.*

### **LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**

#### **MISSOURI LEGISLATURE**

*Check out **The Missouri Register**, the twice-monthly journal of the Missouri Legislature, containing Proposed Rules and Public Notices.*

The Missouri Legislature, also known as the General Assembly, is composed of a 34-member Senate and a 163-member House of Representatives. The General Assembly arguably has the most effect on our daily lives, including energy prices, water quality standards, healthy food access, public land, and so much more.

The secretary of state is responsible for publishing all Missouri state regulations, including those pertaining to the environment. Those regulations are all contained in the Code of State Regulations (CSR), available online at [www.sos.mo.gov/adrules/csr/csr](http://www.sos.mo.gov/adrules/csr/csr).

## STATE AGENCIES

### MISSOURI DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES (DNR)

Visit:  
[dnr.mo.gov](http://dnr.mo.gov)

DNR is the first state agency to go to when looking for information about environmental protection.

Most permits to pollute (e.g., air, water, soil) are issued by the DNR. Some businesses, such as a mining company, may have several DNR permits.

*To report an environmental emergency, such as an abandoned hazardous materials container or a spill, call the DNR at 573-634-2436.*

### MISSOURI DEPT. OF CONSERVATION (MDC)

Visit:  
[mdc.mo.gov](http://mdc.mo.gov)

This department licenses hunting, trapping, and fishing. MDC promotes Missouri's natural plant and animal wildlife. Outdoor sports and recreation enthusiasts can be good allies on environmental and conservation causes.

### MISSOURI DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE (MDA)

Visit:  
[agriculture.mo.gov](http://agriculture.mo.gov)

The MDA regulates pesticide use, animal health, and is responsible for food assistance programs.



Visit: [www.mo.gov](http://www.mo.gov) for a full listing of Missouri State Agencies and how to contact them.

**MISSOURI  
PUBLIC  
SERVICE  
COMMISSION  
(PSC)**

Visit:  
[psc.mo.gov](http://psc.mo.gov)

The PSC approves monopoly utility rates, including electric, natural gas, water, and telecommunications. The PSC has public comment periods, including public meetings, to solicit input when considering rate increases.

*The PSC has public hearings whenever a utility requests a rate increase.*

Information desks and testimony at these hearings can be a good source of information about current construction projects or renewable energy subsidies. Because rate hearings are slow, complicated processes, utilities may look for ways to bypass the PSC.

**MISSOURI  
DEPT. OF  
HEALTH AND  
SENIOR  
SERVICES  
(DHSS)**

Visit:  
[health.mo.gov](http://health.mo.gov)

The DHSS is Missouri's public health agency and collaborates with other state agencies, like DNR, to help interpret health data and risks for people near an environmental threat.

**CASE STUDY**

*Grain Belt  
Express*

In December 2016, MCE staff and supporters testified in support of the Grain Belt Express, a transmission line that would move wind energy from Kansas to Indiana, delivering 500 megawatts of clean wind energy to Missouri.



## FEDERAL AGENCIES

### THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

Visit:  
[epa.gov](http://epa.gov)

The EPA drafts regulatory programs to comply with federal legislation, such as the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. The EPA delegates to the Missouri DNR some of its authority to regulate air pollution, water quality, and beyond. The EPA retains oversight over Missouri's implementation and enforcement efforts. Missouri is part of the EPA Region VII office, located in Lenexa, Kansas.

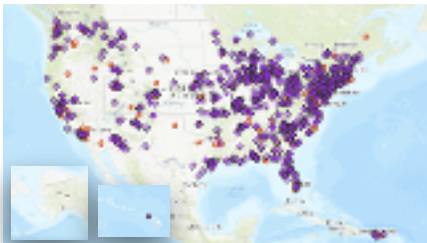
### THE EPA SUPERFUND PROGRAM

Visit:  
[epa.gov](http://epa.gov)

EPA's Superfund program is responsible for cleaning up some of Missouri's most contaminated land and responds to environmental emergencies, oil spills, and natural disasters.



See a listing of all the Missouri cleanup sites at: [epa.gov/mo/missouri-cleanups](http://epa.gov/mo/missouri-cleanups)



Map of U.S. EPA Superfund enforcement cleanup sites. Image by EPA.

**UNITED STATES ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (USACE)**

Visit:  
[usace.army.mil](http://usace.army.mil)

The Corps manages and maintains everything involving the nation's big rivers including floodplains, watersheds, dams, levees, locks, and navigation. The Corps is also responsible for the cleanup of radioactively contaminated sites related to the processing of uranium for nuclear weapons, called the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program (FUSRAP).



*The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers River Resources Action Team Meeting on the Mississippi River. Photos by MCE.*

**DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR (DOI)**

Visit:  
[doi.gov](http://doi.gov)

The DOI manages the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and National Parks Service (NPS). The USGS provides science on land use, water quality, and other natural resources. The NPS manages our national parks, monuments, and provides environmental impact studies on those sites.

## TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY!



Once you have gathered information about your environmental concern from your own observations, others in your community, and government sources, make a plan to address the problem.

### ***MAKE A PLAN***

- Develop a concrete goal.
- Determine the metrics.
- Identify the person or body that can make the change.
- Assess the available resources.
- Seek support and evaluate the best option for action.



*(Left) West Lake Landfill Teach-In. (Right) Environmental Justice Convergence. Photos by MCE.*

- DEVELOP** a specific concrete goal.
- DETERMINE** the metrics – how will you know when you've reached your objective, and how will you measure progress?
- IDENTIFY** the person or body that can make the change you want to see.
- Determine who has the legal authority or jurisdiction over your issue.
- Identify the specific people who make the decision (e.g., commissioners, council members, regulators, or judges).
- Understand the specific steps in the decision-making process, including deadlines.
- ASSESS** the resources available to you.
- How many people can volunteer to work on the issue?
- What financial expenses do you have? Do you need to crowd-source funding from your community to work on this issue?
- Do you have investment from the broader community, i.e., outside of yourself and other activists?

**SEEK SUPPORT** to identify and reach out to potential allies and opponents. This can be helpful for understanding existing community assets as well as anticipated challenges.

## ***YOUR OPTIONS FOR ACTION***

**REPORT** the problem to the appropriate government agency.

**ISSUE** a press release or seek media coverage to raise awareness. If you have attempted to reach a government agency, describe the response.

**FILE** an official complaint through the appropriate channels.

**NOTIFY** your local and state elected officials at the local and state levels. Then they can apply pressure on, and get the attention of, government officials.

**SUBMIT** written comments (at a hearing is best; you can often submit comments online as well).

**TESTIFY** at a public hearing if there is one. In many cases, the public must request a hearing before one is scheduled. Check the deadlines for making a request.

# WHAT TO DO WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS



## Take your story to the press

Contact members of the media to cover your environmental problem.

*Reach out to investigative reporters at your local news outlets, including television, radio, and newspapers. Contact information is available online for a reporter's office phone or email.*



*Use social media to follow reporters' professional accounts.*

## Seek assistance from an environmental law center

*In Missouri, Great Rivers Environmental Law Center is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to providing free and reduced-fee public interest legal services to individuals working to protect the environment.*



*Your local legal aid service may also be able to provide you with reduced-rate counsel.*

**"The environment can't protect itself; somebody's got to do it."**

– Lewis Green, environmental lawyer

Co-founder of MCE; Founder of Great Rivers Environmental Law Center

# ORGANIZE AND INVOLVE THE PUBLIC!



When organizing a community-action group, it's important to be sensitive to the social and cultural norms of your local area, the political climate, and the needs of underrepresented community members. Be mindful of these factors when you are engaging with people one-on-one or coordinating a community meeting. Be aware of language and mobility-access needs. This may mean preparing materials in multiple languages and choosing a location that is centrally located, accessible, and near public transportation. Be actively equitable and inclusive so all community members feel welcome.



*Kay Drey provides testimony at the EPA's public hearing on March 6, 2018.*



*West Lake Landfill teach-in to raise public awareness.*

## **GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING TACTICS YOU SHOULD KNOW**

*Grassroots organizing puts power back in the hands of the people. It can build support within your community and incite action for your environmental concern.*

### **CREATE A PETITION**

*and gather signatures in support of or in opposition to a measure or project.*

Some petitions, such as those to place a person or item on a ballot, require a formal petition with specific criteria. Check the appropriate elections authority for those requirements.

Petitions to express public opinion can be useful to influence elected officials. At a minimum, these petitions should include a place for a name, address, and signature.

### **MAKE A CALL TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Call appropriate government officials about your environmental concern. Lawmakers rarely hear from constituents by phone, so one phone call holds greater weight than several emails. Organize a phone bank to flood the office of a public official with calls of public support for your issue.

### **USE SOCIAL MEDIA**

Use social media networks to connect with community members about your concern.



**MOBILIZE  
A GROUP  
TO ATTEND  
A PUBLIC  
HEARING**

Outline talking points and assign specific points to specific people to make the most use of your time.

Create visuals that can be photographed and shared on social media and with the press.

**PLAN AND  
FACILITATE  
COMMUNITY  
MEETINGS**

Be sure to outline your most important talking points and keep the meeting agenda to no more than an hour. Provide snacks, a comfortable meeting place, and follow-up action items.

**ORGANIZE  
A PUBLIC  
ACTION**

A public action is when a group of supporters gather in a public place that is highly visible to voice a concern and/or to demand action. These tactics might include a rally with public speakers or a picket outside an elected official's office. Public actions should be strategic and clearly advance the goal of resolving your environmental concern.

**CASE STUDY**

*West Lake  
Facebook  
Group*



A group of concerned residents living near the radioactive West Lake Landfill started a public Facebook group to share information and keep the public updated about the radioactive waste situation at the landfill. The group now has over 21,000 members.

## MY NOTES

**BECOME A  
MEMBER OF  
MCE TODAY**

*Your membership allows MCE to  
watchdog polluters and advocate  
for policies that keep our air,  
water, food, and land healthy.*

---

Name

---

Street Address

---

City

State

Zip Code

---

Email

---

Card Number

---

CVV (3-digit code)

Expiration Date

Membership Levels (select) :

\$20 Young Friend

\$75 Defender

\$35 Basic

\$100 Supporter

\$50 Guardian

Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Mail to:* Missouri Coalition for the Environment  
3115 South Grand Blvd., Ste. 650 St. Louis, MO 63118

*Join or donate online:* [www.moenvironment.org](http://www.moenvironment.org) 25



## DISCLAIMER

Missouri Coalition for the Environment, hereafter referred to as MCE, seeks to ensure that all content in The People's Pocket Guide to Environmental Action, hereafter referred to as the Guide, is current and accurate. This Guide is for informational purposes only. This information does not in any way constitute legal or professional advice, and MCE cannot be held liable for actions arising from its use. In addition, MCE cannot be held responsible for the contents of any externally linked websites, links to websites are provided solely for the reader's convenience. MCE, its members, its board, its staff, its agents, Guide contributors or any other entity associated with MCE, accept no responsibility or liability for the content and views expressed within the Guide. Guide content may be changed, updated, or improved at any time without notice.