



# Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. Hotline



Summer 2009

www.gasp-pgh.org

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Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. (GASP) is a nonprofit citizens group in southwestern Pennsylvania working for a healthy, sustainable environment. Founded in 1969, GASP has been a diligent watchdog, educator, litigator, and policy maker on many environmental issues, with a focus on air quality in the Pittsburgh region.

## Local Physicians Help Pittsburghers "Make The Connection" Between Air Pollution and Health

by Rachel Filippini and Lee Szymkiewicz

Around fifty local residents braved hail and sacrificed watching a Penguins playoff game in order to educate themselves about the link between poor air quality and respiratory and cardiovascular health at "Air, Heart, and Lungs: Making the Connection" on May 11th. This information was quite timely in light of the recent American Lung Association State of the Air Report which ranked the Pittsburgh metropolitan area as having the highest levels of fine particulates in a twenty-four period.

The program featured two distinguished local physicians who share a special interest in the effects of air quality on our health. Dr. Donald Grandis, a cardiologist at the Jefferson Regional Medical Center, kicked off the evening with his presentation on the "Effects of Air Quality on Cardiovascular Disease." During his talk, he noted that a study done in Allegheny County in 2004 found that an increase in PM10 over 10ug/mm<sup>3</sup> increased the chances of admission for heart failure by 3%. Dr. Grandis concluded that, "The relative risk of cardiovascular disease due to poor air quality is less than that of conventional risk factors for the nation overall. However, the levels of PM2.5 that are seen in Allegheny County generate risks similar to those seen with conventional risk factors," and, "Unlike conventional risk factors which affect some of the population, air pollution affects everyone." Dr. Grandis' presentation outlined



PHOTO: MARLA FERRENCY

Dr. Grandis (left) and Dr. Holguin answer questions from the audience after their presentations.

some of the possible effects of air pollution on human physiology. These included:

- PM10 particles and smaller are small enough to cross from lungs into the blood stream.
- PM10 particles raise blood pressure.
- PM2.5 particles raise blood levels of C-Reactive Protein.
- Diesel Exhaust raises blood levels of Interleukin-6.
- PM2.5 particles raise activation of the nervous system which can lead to heart rhythm abnormalities.

continued on page 3

# Healthy School Bus Campaign Wins Strong Protections for Kids' Health

by Rachel Filippini, GASP Executive Director

In March the Allegheny County Partnership to Reduce Diesel Pollution held a rally outside the Pittsburgh Public School Board meeting to urge Pittsburgh Public Schools to pass a policy, or include in upcoming contracts with school bus contractors, language which would require a 90% reduction in diesel emissions from school buses serving their students. Our goal was to reduce emissions both inside and outside the bus. This can be achieved through the employment of a diesel particulate filter on the tailpipe and a closed crankcase ventilation system in the engine.

More than a dozen speakers testified that evening in front of the school board that they wanted these strict measures put in place to protect the health of students in Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh Public Schools responded in a proactive way to testifiers concerns. On Wednesday May 28th, the Pittsburgh Board of Education approved contracts with the school bus companies requiring them to drastically reduce diesel emissions inside and outside the buses. Their positive action will help protect our school age children and school bus drivers from the dangers of diesel emissions that have been linked to respiratory and heart ailments. The contracts had four key sections to reduce these dangerous emissions:



PHOTO: MARLA FERRENCY

- 85% of each company's fleet must be equipped with a Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) either through retrofitting or by purchasing a newer cleaner bus by the end of the five year contract.

- 100% of each company's fleet must have a Closed Crankcase Ventilation (CCV) System by the end of the five year contract. These CCV's prevent dangerous fumes from entering the cabin of the bus.

- Starting in the 2010 school year, preference for the after school, mid day and field trip work will be given to companies that have a higher percentage of their fleet retrofitted.

- The school district is allowing two extra years of use (from 10 years to 12 years) for buses that are equipped with DPF's.

This contract represents a huge step forward in protecting children, school bus drivers, and residents of the Pittsburgh area from dangerous diesel pollution and it wouldn't have happened without your help. Thanks to everyone who testified at the School Board hearings, circulated and signed petitions, wrote letters to the editor and passed the word about our campaign.



The **Hotline** is the quarterly newsletter of the Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc.

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## GASP Mission Statement

GASP will act to obtain for the residents of southwestern Pennsylvania clean air, water, and land in order to create the healthy, sustainable environment and quality of life to which we are entitled.

## Methods of Achieving Mission

GASP is a citizens' group based in Southwestern PA which focuses on Allegheny County environmental issues. When pertinent to these concerns, we participate in state and national environmental decisions.

We believe in the public's right to receive accurate and thorough information on these issues and to actively participate in the decision making process.

To achieve our environmental goals on behalf of our membership, GASP will advocate, educate, serve as an environmental watchdog, mobilize action, and litigate when necessary.

We will work both independently and in cooperation with like-minded individuals and groups as determined by the Board of Directors.

We will uphold GASP's reputation for scientific integrity, honesty, and responsible involvement.

**State of the Air:** For the second year in a row, the American Lung Association State of the Air Report ranked Pittsburgh worst in the nation for short-term particulate matter pollution. Unfortunately, the local response to the report has largely been to deny its accuracy rather than to take action to improve our ranking in 2010. While no one likes to see the place they call home criticized, and no study methodology is perfect, the ALA report reveals a genuine air quality problem in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Below is a letter to the editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette written by GASP Board Member, Walter Goldberg. It was published in the Post-Gazette on June 9, 2009.

## It's Clear That We Need to Improve Our Air Quality

by Walter Goldberg, GASP Board Member

John G. Craig Jr.'s May 25 letter ("Bad Info on Bad Air") takes the American Lung Association to task for relying on the highest-reading air monitor in each region to create its list of most-polluted metropolitan areas.

However, Mr. Craig appears to go on to side with the ALA when he observes "Pittsburgh's air compares unfavorably with national norms and is much worse than it should be." On this point Mr. Craig is correct. True, the ALA report spotlights air pollution generated by the Clairton coke works, but 25,000 people call this area home. That's 25,000 of our neighbors who cannot escape the increased mortality, asthma rates and other potentially grave consequences this air pollution poses.

Even if the Clairton monitor were removed from the ALA calculation, the Pittsburgh area would still rank 13th

worst out of the 221 metropolitan areas examined for particulate matter pollution. Mr. Craig's organization uses an entirely different methodology to rank Pittsburgh second-worst for particulate matter out of 15 cities studied.

The Pittsburgh metropolitan area has much to be proud of, but if we are to continue to better ourselves, we must also acknowledge our failings. The ALA provides a valuable service by drawing attention to our continued failure to achieve national health-based air quality standards. Whether we can be most accurately ranked No. 1, No. 2 or No. 13, the consistent conclusion is that we suffer from poor air quality. Rather than wasting any more time and energy arguing about the most painstaking method of ranking our air quality problem, let us resolve to focus on solving it. ♻️

### Air Pollution & Health continued from page 1

- PM2.5 particles raise blood levels of fibrinogen.
- PM2.5 particle exposure increases vascular resistance.

Our second speaker for the evening was Dr. Fernando Holguin, a nationally renowned asthma researcher who has recently been hired by Children's Hospital to head the Pediatric Environmental Medicine Center. Here, he is leading research in identifying how environmental risk factors affect children with asthma, so that education, prevention and treatment strategies can be developed to address the problems.

During Dr. Holguin's presentation, "Air Pollution and the Respiratory System," he stressed that who is breathing in air pollution and where and when they are exposed to it, may be even more critical than what they are breathing in. For example, if a child whose lungs are still developing is exposed to fresh (more potent) diesel pollution near a roadway it's more serious than a healthy adult who might be a few hundred yards away from the source.

He also noted that not just environmental, but socio-economic and racial factors play a major role in determining the rate of asthma prevalence and in explaining the frequency and severity of asthmatic exacerbations.



PHOTO: LEE SZYMENIUCZ

Janis Johnson and Martha Raak read to students at the Environmental Charter School in the week leading up to our education event, "Air, Heart & Lungs", that was held at the school.

Both speakers' presentations can be found on our website, [www.gasp-pgh.org](http://www.gasp-pgh.org)

Thanks to everyone who attended the event. We would like to recognize our event sponsors, Philips Respironics and Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, and our gracious host, the Imagine Environmental Charter School in Regent Square. ♻️

# 2009 GASPer Air Congress

by Lee Szymkiewicz, GASPer Education Coordinator

What's in the air? That was the question that students worked to answer this past school year with GASPer's air monitoring equipment. On Friday, May 8th, they had the opportunity to share their findings at our annual GASPer Air Congress. Special thanks go out to the Steinbrenner Institute for Environmental Education and Research on Carnegie Mellon University's campus, who hosted this year's event. The Air Congress is an opportunity for students to present the most interesting air quality investigations they collected while using GASPer's air monitoring equipment, to other local students.

Each year, schools in the area have the ability to use our air monitoring equipment along with a laptop computer to record data and produce reports and graphs of the various

monitored air components. Our larger air monitor measures ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, barometric pressure, ELF radiation, wind speed and wind direction, temperature and relative humidity. In addition, we have a SidePak Personal Aerosol Monitor. Weighing as little as 16 oz., this compact and quiet monitor comes with a built-in sampling pump allowing you to attach multiple size-selective inlet conditioners. We use this monitor to specifically measure particulate matter, or PM2.5.

The morning began with introductory comments from Tony Sadar, a Certified Consulting Meteorologist with more than 30 years of experience in atmospheric/environmental science and education.

Before the student presentations, David Holstius, Senior Research Programmer at the Robotics Institute at CMU spoke to the group about "Robotics for Healthy Homes."

Students from South Park High School gave the first presentation. They conducted two different experiments.

The students wanted to see if air quality differed within different areas of the school and they also compared emissions between hybrid and gasoline powered vehicles. They found out that SUVs emitted the highest amounts of particulate matter as compared to cars, even if they were hybrid SUVs. And in terms of the school's air quality, particulate matter levels fell within the acceptable range in all areas except near the school pottery mixer.

Next up was Kelly Conley from Robert Morris University. Every year, Dr. Dan Short borrows our hand held monitor to study fine particulates with his students. During their investigations this year, the students did not discover any concentrations of fine particulates that exceeded the EPA's 24 hour standard.

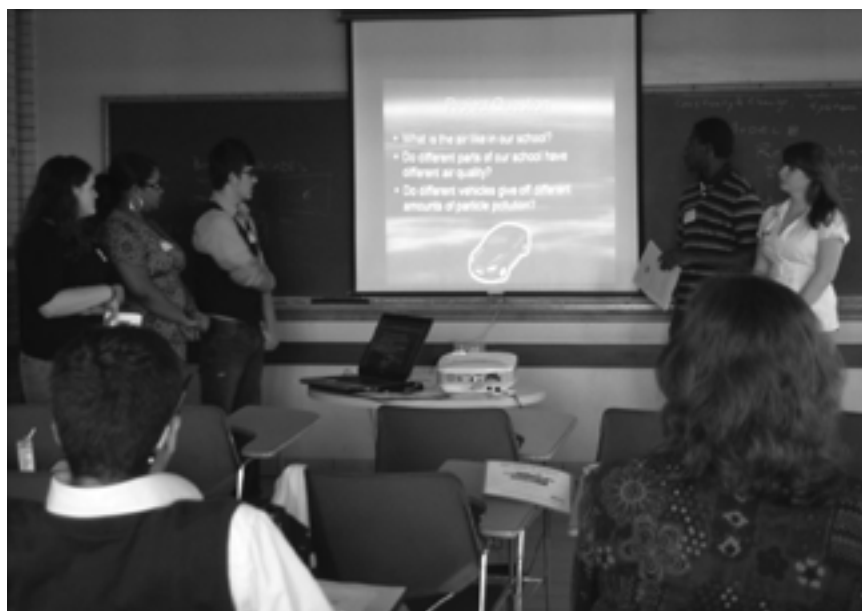
Lastly, students from Gateway High School spoke about "Greening Our School." They looked at ways to make their school more environmentally friendly through recycling, improving school lunches and examining air quality issues.

After lunch, Cliff Davidson, a professor in Civil and Environmental Engineering at CMU, spoke to the

students about "Air Quality Issues in Pittsburgh." And we were treated to a tour of the Carnegie Mellon Intelligent Workplace.

All of the presentations were really interesting and it was great to see the students interact with professionals in this field. The Air Congress wrapped up the 2008-09 school year but September will be here before we know it. If you are interested in learning more about the GASPer Air Monitor Program or if you'd like to use it at your school, contact Lee at 412-325-7382 or [lee@gasp-pgh.org](mailto:lee@gasp-pgh.org).

This year's GASPer Air Congress was sponsored by a grant from the Captain Planet Foundation.



Students from South Park High School presenting their project.

PHOTO: LEE SZYMKIEWICZ

# GASP Provides Comment on PADEP Proposed Guidance for Coal Ash Disposal in Mines

by Joe Osborne, GASP Legal Director

The Hotline frequently includes discussion of the environmental impacts of coal combustion waste, the solid, toxic metal-laden byproduct left over from coal combustion (see e.g. “Coal and Our Future” Winter 2008, “Federal Regulation of Coal Ash on its Way” Spring 2009). However, one piece of our coal ash work has avoided mention until now: since last October GASP has closely followed the Pennsylvania DEP’s efforts to update its guidance documents for coal ash disposal in mines.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, disposing of coal ash in mines would seem to have many advantages: the material can serve as fill to mitigate mine subsidence, the alkalinity of coal ash can theoretically reduce damage to streams from acid mine drainage, minefilling reduces the need for more costly landfill disposal, and the concept is intuitively satisfying: coal comes out of the mine, coal combustion waste goes back in.

Unfortunately, in practice coal ash minefilling creates more problems than it solves. Coal ash is, in part, a concentrated form of the toxic elements that are found in coal. Coal ash is one-third or less the volume of the coal that was burned to produce it, yet the volume of toxic elements such as mercury and arsenic remains nearly the same. Worse still, these toxins leach from coal ash far more readily than when they remain locked up in undisturbed coal deposits. This increased leachability results in contaminated ground and surface water. In a 2007 study of Pennsylvania coal ash minefills the Clean Air Task Force determined that 10 of 15 randomly selected coal ash minefill sites exhibited degraded water quality as a result of coal ash disposal.<sup>2</sup>

Concern over the potential health and environmental impacts of coal ash mine disposal prompted Congress to ask the National Academy of Sciences to prepare a report on the safety of the practice. The NAS report, “Managing Coal Combustion Residues in Mines” stated “little is known about the potential for minefilling to degrade the quality of groundwater and/or surface waters particularly over longer time periods. Additionally, there are insufficient data on the contamination of water supplies by placement of CCRs [coal combustion residues] in coal mines, making human risk assessments difficult.”<sup>3</sup> The NAS report went on to make multiple recommendations regarding the minimum standards necessary for safe mine disposal of coal ash.

GASP remains unconvinced that disposal of coal ash in the complex hydrogeologic and geochemical mine environment can ever be safe, but so long as the practice continues we would prefer to see any legal mine disposal options that do exist enacted as binding regulations rather than unenforceable “guidance documents.” We’ve communicated these

and other concerns—including recommendations from the NAS report—to DEP during a November 2008 comment period on the draft technical guidance and again in May when an “interim final” version was made available for comment.

From the draft version to the interim final version, DEP incorporated several of the changes we advocated for, including:

- a lengthier post-disposal groundwater monitoring requirement to provide additional assurance that contaminant plumes will be detected,
- the addition of fluoride to the list of toxic elements to be tested for prior to approving a coal ash source for disposal,
- a clarification that coal ash must be isolated from higher-elevation perched water tables, rather than merely the regional water table.

Because the DEP’s changes to the initial draft version were so extensive, the department chose to release the modified version as an “interim final” version subject to its own comment period. During this second comment period we once again advocated for more extensive protections, such as:

- a more rigorous leaching test to ensure coal ash leaching characteristics are well understood prior to disposal,
- a requirement that disposal site owners obtain adequate financial assurance to cover the long-term monitoring costs and all reasonably foreseeable remediation costs that could result from placement operations contaminating ground- or surface-water,
- a requirement that prior to mine disposal approval the coal ash generator must demonstrate that safer alternative disposal or reuse options are infeasible.

We remain hopeful that DEP will take note of our additional suggestions and ultimately produce a regulatory scheme adequate to protect public health and the environment.

1 PADEP, Interim Final: Certification Guidelines for the Chemical and Physical Properties of Coal Ash Beneficially Used at Mines, (DEP ID: 563-2112-224) (Apr. 6, 2009); and PADEP, Interim Final: Mine Site Approval for the Beneficial Use of Coal Ash (DEP ID: 563-2112-225) (Apr. 6, 2009)

2 Impacts on Water Quality From Placement of Coal Combustion Waste in Pennsylvania Coal Mines, Clean Air Task Force (JULY 2007) available at <http://www.catf.us/publications/reports/PAMinefill.pdf>

3 Managing Coal Combustion Residues in Mines, Committee on Mine Placement of Coal Combustion Wastes, National Research Council, p. 4 (2006) available at [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=11592#toc](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11592#toc)



# What's a Citizen Environmentalist?

by James Longhurst

*This is the first in a series of articles by James Longhurst, an historian and member of the GASP Board of Directors from 2000-2004. He received his Ph.D. from CMU in 2004, and is now an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. His book, Citizen Environmentalists: Planting the Grassroots in Pittsburgh and the United States, is due out from the University Press of New England in spring 2010. GASP thanks Dr. Longhurst for this generous contribution to our newsletter.*

The Group Against Smog and Pollution was founded 40 years ago this fall, in the midst of major changes in federal legislation, rewritten county codes, and transformations in the social fabric of Pittsburgh itself. I've spent some time researching and writing about these changes, and I'm happy to provide some brief summaries of that research here in the Hotline. Along the way, I'll mention a wide variety of history, both well-remembered and occasionally forgotten, including Article XVII, U.S. Steel, Duquesne Light, the Variance Board, the Bethlehem Bills, SIP hearings, the Jenkins Arcade, Tom Foerster, William Hunt, Esther Kitzes, Ann Cardinal, Jeannette Widom, Art Gorr, Bernie Bloom, Pat Pelkofer, Michelle Madoff, Lester Lave, Mort Corn, Pat Newman, Silvestri Silvestri, Tony Picadio and of course Dirty Gertie.

While it's interesting for GASP members to look back on the group's history, what is the larger meaning or significance? Should anyone from anyplace other than Pittsburgh care about this story?

In fact, events in Pittsburgh had great significance for the rest of the nation, both as an instance of a larger theme and, eventually as a model for solutions to industrial regulation. The larger theme is the increased importance of substantive public involvement in the process of policymaking and enforcement. The modern environmental movement was not just about the rise of environmental philosophy and organizing. I argue that the language and logic of citizenship was central to what happened; environmentalists had to argue first for expanded rights of citizen involvement before they could influence environmental policy. Hence, they were "citizen environmentalists," and the language of citizenship showed up in social and political activism across the nation in the 1960s and 1970s, not just in Pittsburgh.

There were many forces which increased the importance of the public in policymaking in the late 1960s, from the development of the legal philosophy of "citizen standing," to new requirements for public hearings in federal legislation, to the popular language of "people power" and participatory democracy, to the proliferation of local groups themselves demanding access. Government agencies were also involved: the predecessor to the EPA produced a pamphlet in 1970 to encourage citizen involvement. New federal and state environmental standards were expected, and "citizen groups can help see to it these standards are good and stiff." Public



1971 GASP meeting notice

hearings were key: "The law requires that the states hold public hearings . . . Citizen groups should make it their business to find out when the hearings will be held, and prepare for them."

When these types of hearings came to Pennsylvania, they catalyzed existing activism and organizing. After attending hearings across the state in 1971, Environmental Hearing Board examiner and Citizen's Advisory Committee member Norman Childs said that, "One thing that came through loud and clear . . . is that citizens now want to have a voice in any proceedings that are going to affect their health and welfare in the future."

GASP member Joan Hays repeatedly introduced herself to these hearings as a "professional citizen," causing the chair of one particular meeting to ask "what is the difference between a professional citizen and a citizen?" Hays had an answer: "A professional citizen is one who works at it full time and studies how to be one."

Hays' definition of "professional citizen" underlies much of what GASP would accomplish in the coming years. That story will continue in the next Hotline.

Next time: The Public Hearings of the Fall of 1969



# Stream Buffer Rule Key to Victory for Hays Woods

by Fran Harkins, GASP Volunteer

On May 21, 2009 Judge Renwand, of the state Environmental Hearing Board, granted "Summary Judgment as a Matter of Law" to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection thereby thwarting the Pittsburgh Development Group's aim to strip mine the 613 acres of Hays Woods.



In its strongly worded decision, the EHB based its support of the DEP's argument solely on the 100 foot stream buffer zone rule:

"The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act and supporting regulations prohibit mining within 100 feet of a perennial or intermittent stream unless the operator obtains a variance. In order to

obtain a variance, the operator must demonstrate 'beyond a reasonable doubt' that there will be no adverse hydrologic or water quality impacts resulting from the variance. The Department contends that since PDG's mining application proposes to eliminate 1.5 miles of intermittent and perennial streams by burying the streams under the overburden from the mining operation that PDG cannot possibly comply, as a matter of law, with the stream buffer zone requirement...The dumping of rock and other overburden so as to bury these streams clearly prevent PDG from demonstrating 'beyond a reasonable doubt' that there will be no 'adverse hydrologic impacts, water quality impacts or other environmental resources impacts...' On the contrary, there will be severe hydrologic, water quality, and environmental resources impacts on these streams. Thousands of feet of the streams will be destroyed."

To achieve their benchmark decision, the road has been long and complex. Nearly eight years ago, GASP joined with the Sierra Club, PennFuture, Clean Water Action, the Baldwin Citizens Alliance, CMU's Studio for Creative Inquiry and local citizens to protect these "woods hidden within a city." Three and a half years ago the DEP gave all Pittsburghers a gigantic Christmas present, as I like to think of it, by denying a permit to strip mine the largest undeveloped property in the City of Pittsburgh.

PDG's appeal of that DEP decision ignited a process of extensive discovery, the production of thousands of documents, multi-day depositions, a daylong site review and oral arguments before the entire EHB. So costly to all sides in both "time and money," Judge Renwand chided the DEP for not first filing its Motion of Summary Judgment before the initiation of discovery.

The unequivocal EHB decision to uphold strictly the buffer zone provisions of the surface mine regulation may well bolster environmental safeguards in other future cases. While PDG Land Development Inc. may yet appeal to a higher court, it now has two strikes against its Hays Woods venture.



## Join GASP Today!

- \$35 Grassroots Supporters (\$15 low income/student rate)
- \$60 Grassroots Contributors (includes recycled tote)
- \$100 Grassroots Patrons (includes recycled tote and umbrella)
- \$250 Clean Air Defenders (includes recycled tote and umbrella)
- \$500 Clean Air Protectors (includes recycled tote and umbrella)
- \$ \_\_\_ Other

Call GASP at (412) 325-7382 to learn about automatic monthly giving, deducted directly from your checking account or charged to your credit card. An easy, hassle-free way to support GASP all year round!

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## FINAL CALL FOR ENTRIES!



### A Green Eye on Western Pennsylvania

#### *Juried Photography Exhibit to Benefit GASP*

GASP invites all photographers to make their own statement on the western PA environment with an entry to our photography exhibit.

**Deadline for Entries: July 24, 2009**

Exhibition Opening: September 11, 2009

More details at [www.gasp-pgh.org](http://www.gasp-pgh.org)

## GASP is Seeking Environmental Heroes



This year **GASP** is celebrating its 40th year of working to clean up the air in southwestern Pennsylvania! We'd like to celebrate by recognizing 40 "Environmental Heroes" for the good work they've done for the environment in the greater Pittsburgh area.

To nominate an individual, send an email message to [hero@gasp-pgh.org](mailto:hero@gasp-pgh.org) with 1) Nominee's name, mailing address, and phone number/email. 2) A one-page summary of the nominee's contribution to improving southwestern Pennsylvania's environment. 3) The nominator's name, phone number and email address. Self-nominations are permitted. **Deadline for submissions: August 31, 2009.**

Winners will be announced at our 40th Anniversary celebration event in the fall.

**Going Greener**  
To sign up for an electronic version of this newsletter, send your request to [hotline@gasp-pgh.org](mailto:hotline@gasp-pgh.org) with your name, mailing address and e-mail address.  
**When You Are Done...**  
Please help spread the word about GASP's work by leaving this newsletter in a public place like a coffee shop, doctor's office, etc.

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