

**Environmental Justice Action in the San Joaquin Valley!  
Inspired by Cesar Chavez, Over 250 Local Residents and  
Environmental Justice Advocates March for Clean Air, Justice  
and the Closure of the Covanta Incinerator**

**“We Want Clean Air, Health and Justice, Not Toxic Pollution from Incineration!”**

Patterson, CA – On Saturday, April 1, 2006, local residents from the San Joaquin Valley communities of Patterson, Grayson and Westley were joined by environmental justice allies from around the state to rally and march against the Covanta garbage incinerator and for environmental justice. The lively march began with a quiet blessing from local community leaders, giving thanks to the contributions of Cesar Chavez to the ongoing struggles for justice everywhere. A diverse array of community residents including a large number of youth, along with environmental justice activists marched peacefully with roaring chants of “Si se Puede!”, “We Want Clean Air!”, “Queremos Justicia!” and “Close Covanta!”

The march and rally was organized by the Grayson Neighborhood Council and Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, with strong participation and support from local youth including Gente de Aztlan Networking a Solution.

At North Park in downtown Patterson, marchers heard speakers including Latino youth from the local community and social and environmental justice veterans such as Juanishi Orosco, founding member of the Royal Chicano Air Force and Henry Clark of the West County Toxics Coalition from Richmond. Speakers also included youth leaders including Francis Sanchez of Gente de Aztlan Networking a Solution, and youth from Youth United for Community Action (an East Palo Alto group). The rally event also included a skit presented by Los Hijos de los Campesinos from Cal State Stanislaus and art activities for kids.

Then over 75 people caravanned to the Covanta incinerator for an energetic protest, focused on the Covanta’s constant emission of dioxins and other toxic pollutants into the air and its threat to the health of local communities. “We are tired of shouldering California’s dangerous waste disposal practices in our backyards and breathing the dirty air those practices create, we have the right to live in a healthy community,” said John Mataka, long time resident and community leader to a vocal crowd standing in front of the Covanta incinerator sign.

Before the rally at Covanta ended, the crowd moved into the street and briefly blocked the entrance to the Covanta incinerator facility.

The Grayson Neighborhood Council and Greenaction have been working with community residents to raise awareness around this critical issue. For the last six months, we have been going door to door, educating residents about the connections between incineration, air pollution and our health. “Cesar Chavez fought for the health of farm workers, and in his name we will continue to do the same regardless if the threat comes from pesticides or incineration,” said Cruz Alcantar, long-time resident of Patterson and health educator for the Grayson Neighborhood Council.

The Grayson Neighborhood Council and Greenaction want to see the incinerator closed, and instead we support an increase in recycling and waste reduction. “We know the alternative to incineration will involve a complex solution, but we are marching because we think the health of our communities is worth it,” said Rosenda Mataka, long-time resident of Grayson and Director of the Grayson Neighborhood Council.

The presence of the Covanta incinerator in the primarily Latino and Spanish-speaking west side of Stanislaus County is a glaring example of environmental racism. All three of California's garbage incinerators are located in low-income communities of color, and all three of the state's hazardous waste landfills are in Spanish-speaking farmworker communities.

"We cannot rely on polluters or the government to end environmental racism and injustice," said Bradley Angel of Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice. "As we learned from the farmworker movement, the people have to organize and take action if we want justice for our communities."

For more information contact the Grayson Neighborhood Council (209) 895-3352 and Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice (415) 248-5010 <http://www.greenaction.org>

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