

A Citizen's Voice

Sandy Buchanan

Ohio ranks among the nation's most polluted states in every measure of toxic chemical releases to the environment. The state has a rich history of citizens organizing to clean up their neighborhoods and protect public health, including at some of the most notorious sites in the country (Fernald, WTI, Envirosafe among others).

Ohio politicians have rarely taken leadership to protect the environment, although some have responded to public pressure to enact important environmental measures. Since 1994, the Ohio legislature has launched an assault on environmental protections, voting to take away citizens' rights to claim damages and even their right to know about pollution in their communities. Ohio, whose cities were among the first in the nation to pass toxic chemical right to know laws in the 1980s, is now the focal battleground nationwide for the right to preserve the right to know in the face of environmental secrecy, or "audit privilege" laws. An examination of campaign contributions to Ohio candidates shows the influence of money in politics in environmental issues.

Ohio's first-ever database of contributions to all legislative candidates and candidates for statewide office is available on Ohio Citizen Action's website, www.ohiocitizen.org. This information can help citizens "follow the money" on important environmental issues and other issues facing the state. In addition, the website includes voting records on environmental and consumer issues for members of the Congress and Ohio General Assembly, e-mail links to legislators, and answers to candidate questionnaires on environmental and consumer issues.