

Paul Morse, Project Director, Retires After Two Decades with TNEC-CSEA

After nineteen years of managing and directing The New England Consortium, Paul Morse has retired. At the consortium's Advisory Board meeting on November 30th, we celebrated his service and leadership and presented the following information about the work that Paul has done over his long career of social justice work.

Prior to joining the team at the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UML), Paul had been recruited by New Hampshire COSH (NHCOSH) board members Dennis Martino and Dan Toomey in 1995 to be the part-time Director of NHCOSH. That was his introduction to TNEC. Paul had been teaching at Project Second Start, an adult basic education program in Concord, NH where he taught the GED level course with a popular education model. As NHCOSH Director, Paul began his participation in TNEC's Coordinating Committee and its Advisory Board.

At a 1996 TNEC Advisory Board meeting Mr. Martino and another board member, Dr. Mary Beth Smuts from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 1 office had a discussion regarding an Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) workshop that Steve Schrag, health and safety coordinator of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) had facilitated at a recent ConnectiCOSH Annual Health and Safety Conference. Dr. Smuts was in the process of implementing EPA's IAQ Tools for Schools program in the region and looking at ways to effectively expand outreach out to educators, workers, and communities.

Following that initial discussion, Paul, Dr. Smuts, and Dennis Martino planned for NHCOSH to lead a Tools for Schools program in N.H. The program developed a curriculum and implementation timeline and did pilot projects at schools in Portsmouth and Nashua. Each of these programs became EPA nationwide successful case studies. Assessing the NH projects and similar projects that the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH) had been doing with the Massachusetts Teachers Association, Dr. Smuts made it possible for the various COSH groups in New England to apply and receive funding to conduct these programs throughout New England. This was a great benefit to TNEC, as it helped provide additional funding to the member COSH organizations. The program became a model that was replicated in other parts of the country.

In October 1998 Paul became the Project Manager of TNEC, and later the Project Director. Paul has directed TNEC (and now TNEC-CSEA) longer than anyone else during its 30-year history. Paul has taken the lead in writing many of its grant proposals, directed the UML team, coordinated with both UML and NIEHS, and has kept us close with movement groups such as the Toxics Action Center, the Mass Teachers Association, and the American Public Health Association. He was largely responsible for two large supplemental grants - one for Weapons of Mass Destruction disaster preparedness, and another for work under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, during the Great Recession. One year he wrote the lion's share of our competitive 5-year proposal.

Prior to his work at NHCOSH Paul had spent two decades engaged in social justice work throughout New England. During those years, he made contacts with many individuals and organizations that later would also be involved in TNEC.

In 1977 Paul Morse began fourteen years of work in the Citizen Action network. From 1977 – 1983 Paul worked with the Connecticut Citizen Action Group. He came in as a canvasser and field manager on door-to-door fundraising and then worked to help build strong city-wide community organizations in Stamford and Waterbury. He worked on statewide election campaigns as part of the Legislative Election Action Program (LEAP). At each level of this work Paul got involved in campaigns about toxic chemicals. In Stamford he worked with communities who wanted stronger environmental remediation and pollution prevention efforts from Clairol who had their corporate headquarters there and worked with another neighborhood that was concerned about American Cyanamid potentially locating a major helicopter landing facility near a large housing project and neighborhood school. Also, in Stamford Paul worked as part of an environmental justice (EJ) struggle over a post office development in an African American neighborhood. He became allies with the Conservationists of Stamford and the Connecticut Fund for the Environment where he met Fred Krupp, a long-time environmental leader who now is the President of the Environmental Defense Fund. Coincidentally, Paul's daughter Amy works there now as a communications coordinator. In Waterbury, the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG) built an organization named SOC'EM (Save Our Children's Environment) which opposed a tire and waste recycling business in the center of the city. CCAG also helped to pass several laws providing community and worker protections against toxic chemicals.

Paul moved to New Hampshire in 1983 and was the Co-Director of the New Hampshire People's Alliance/ NH Citizen Action until 1988. One campaign there involved NHCA with

Citizens Organized Against Seacoast Toxics (COAST) in North Hampton near the Coakley Landfill. The effort resulted in getting the site listed on the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL). (To the present Paul follows issues on the NH Seacoast and particularly problems at the former Pease Air Force Base, now the Tradeport site. These concerns regard pollution from PFOA and PFOS, fluorinated organic chemicals that are part of a larger group of chemicals referred to as perfluoroalkyl substances.) Work with COAST and several other community groups fighting toxics led to the formation of the NH Toxic Hazards Campaign.

The coalition worked with John O'Connor and Citizen Action to co-host the founding conference of the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards in Concord, NH in 1984. Lois Gibbs was one of the keynote speakers. Another important partner in helping network with the traditional environmental community on the conference was Carol Browner who then worked for Clean Water Action (and later went on to become the Administrator of the U.S. EPA under President Clinton, and a then was the director of the White House Office of Energy and Climate Change Policy in the Obama administration from 2009 to 2011). Paul and NHCA organizers worked closely with affected community groups efforts in the NH 1st Congressional District which was represented by Bob Smith. Actions were taken at Congressman Smith's office and they lobbied him often. Later, Smith was elected to the US Senate and became the Chair of the Environment Committee following the death of Senator Lincoln Chaffee of Rhode Island. Senator Smith retained Chaffee's skilled and dedicated committee staff. Because of its work with Mr. Smith over the years and his decision to keep on the current staffers, he became more of an ally on these issues and no longer supported efforts to dismantle the EPA. The same kind of work was done with NH Senator Judd Gregg who was a leader in efforts to dismantle the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), helping to moderate at least some of the senator's positions about OSHA. Paul also had been active in the efforts to reauthorize the Superfund law. Industry was putting in a huge effort to do away with "joint and several liability." The NH groups were able to get both Senators Smith and Gregg to oppose eliminating that provision.

Between 1988-1991 Paul Morse was the Director of the Granite State Coalition, an electoral coalition made up of labor, environmental, women's, peace and justice, LGBTQ and similar groups. The coalition worked to elect progressive leaders to the State Senate. This is where he and Dan Toomey (a co-founder of NHCOSH) worked closely together. Then Paul worked as a Special Projects Organizer for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). This work resulted in a successful campaign to organize the largest hospital in RI. In 1994, Paul became the Field

Director for the Wayne King for Governor Campaign. Unfortunately, that was the year that Newt Gingrich managed the Republican sweep of the Congress which also brought about Republican state election victories and King lost the election to a well-entrenched incumbent.

And that brings us back to where this article began, with Paul becoming an instructor at Project Second Start in Concord, NH, and then becoming the director of NHCOSH. Which led to Dan Toomey advising Paul to apply to become TNEC's Project Manager of TNEC.

Paul Morse has always looked to find the very best in everyone he works with. He always makes a point of publicly acknowledging and giving credit to each TNEC-CSEA member for the work we do. Paul listens carefully to each of us, and he remembers what he learns about us. He has always tried to understand what's going on when someone is having a difficult time. When faced with one of TNEC's most difficult periods of organizational turmoil, Paul worked non-stop for a year to put in place and implement a solidarity building process. Few of us know Paul's commitment to this effort – the countless hours each week in which he thought through the process, and studied the notes from different meetings. All on top of the daily work of running the project, and all to help us understand one another and the contributions that each individual and member organization makes to achieve the project's goals. The results were mixed, but Paul's work helped us all move forward and work together better.

Paul Morse has devoted his life's work to achieving social justice goals. He has worked steadily over four decades to increase community empowerment, advance workers' rights and health and safety, environmental protection and environmental public health, and human rights broadly – civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights. He spent many years working to elect public officials who will advance social justice. He has put himself on the line to block corporate abuse of these human rights. And he has always done this with the deepest integrity, humility, and love and respect.

The central goal of Paul Morse's direction of TNEC-CSEA has been to help us work as friends, learn from each other, and to support each member and member organization of the consortium as we share in this valuable project. Paul Morse has been a dear friend and colleague. Hopefully we will be able to build upon his legacy for a long time to come.