

coming clean

Health Equity Impact Convenings Impact Story Campaign for Healthier Solutions

Across the U.S., “hot spot” communities are impacted by toxic industrial emissions, risk (and often reality) of chemical disasters, weak or non-existent local economies, poor public services and health care, and little access to affordable safer products and healthy foods. Roughly 134 million Americans live within these chemical disaster zones, which are disproportionately populated by people of color and low-income people, and are often targeted by industries, including those that use or emit toxic chemicals.



These same communities are also home to many discount retailers (“dollar stores”), which intentionally site stores in “food deserts” and areas with no alternative sources of essential household products. Discount retailers’ core customer base (42%) is lower-income people who make less than \$30,000 per year. 40% of

their customers rely on public assistance, and in many communities the only place to buy household goods and food is at a dollar store. By targeting low-income communities for their operations, dollar stores bear a special responsibility to protect community health.

Unfortunately that is not the reality. In 2015 Coming Clean launched the Campaign for Healthier Solutions to target the four largest dollar store chains; Dollar Tree, Family Dollar (now owned by Dollar Tree), Dollar General and 99 Cents Only, to move them from being laggards to leaders in taking toxic products off their shelves and passing internal chemicals safety policies that protect their workers and consumers.

Collectively these dollar stores operate close to 25,000 stores in the U.S. with total annual sales of more than \$36 Billion. These companies have the resources to enact chemical safety policies that will ensure safe products up and down the supply chain. However, the Campaign for Healthier Solutions tested 164 dollar store products in 2015, and found toxic heavy metals or hormone-disrupting phthalate chemicals in 81% of them. Another study of 200 canned food linings made public in April 2016, showed that, 75% of the products tested from these same 4 top dollar store chains tested positive for the chemical Bisphenol A. Unfortunately some of these products are exposing children

and pregnant women. That's not protection, and in fact falls behind other retailers who have existing chemical and sustainability policies.

Coming Clean launched the Campaign for Healthier Solutions, with leadership from the Environmental Justice and Health Alliance and other grassroots EJ organizations and support from The Sills Family Foundation, The Jonas Family Fund, The Overbrook Foundation, The Marisla Foundation, and The John Merck Fund, to protect communities already disproportionately impacted by toxic exposures and create access to safe food and products. We want dollar stores to act as pillars of community service and sustainability in a way that builds their businesses and community health and wellness. We don't want to shut down the only stores that serve residents and who provide local job opportunities; we want dollar stores to catch up to other corporate retailers serving more affluent areas and adopt policies that keep pace with scientific research showing the effects of toxic chemicals and fossil fuel dependency. And the timing is absolutely perfect for a market focus on dollar stores. The Presidential election season, the Black Lives Matter movement, the focus on disproportionate burden on low income people and people of color, all favor our intervention with dollar stores.

Building on grant seed funds from the New Venture Fund of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, we are beginning to integrate safe, sustainable locally sourced foods and clean energy into the campaign as part of the "healthy solutions" these communities need. We are scoping opportunities and planning partnerships between local safer product producers, sustainable farmers, and dollar stores to push them to carry local foods. We will reach out to local renewable energy co-ops and organizations in our Anchor communities (Houston, TX, Albuquerque, NM, Charleston, WV, and California's Central Valley) to jointly push dollar stores toward adopting solar panels on stores or distribution centers. (99 Cents Only capitulated to pressure from East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, which joined us at our 99 Cents Only educational demonstration outside LA, and put solar panels on their LA distribution site.) Food and energy solutions are directly connected to, and bolster, market and policy work to reduce toxics by addressing the multiple pathways through which we are exposed to toxic chemicals, and by engaging communities and new partner groups in analysis and action on the most comprehensive solutions to the adverse impacts of the chemical industry that we face.

We presented two promising new interventions in dollar store communities during a 90 minute presentation at CleanMed 2016 in May, which drew some 700 health care sector professionals from dozens of institutions. Several hospital systems already have healthy

food prescription programs and solar coops available to employees and patients. They set a good model for what corporate dollar store chains can do (Costco and Marriott also have solar coop programs) and we plan to leverage the community benefit requirements of hospitals to get them engaged in improving quality food access and reducing chemical safety concerns among the population where dollar stores operate. CHS is already organized on “the demand side” of safer products – solidly grounded in community campaigns, with 140 group allies, and 155,000 supporters nationally. We are in a good position to now begin to develop locally-appropriate “supply side” projects that engage local government, anchor institutions, small businesses, corporate retailers and community groups in activities.