



**Women's
Environmental
Network**

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WEN is a unique, vital and innovative campaigning organisation, which represents women on issues that link them, the environment and health. Formed in 1988, WEN is a registered charity and membership organisation that depends on its members, donations and limited grant support for survival.

WEN has achieved much over the years. We have a record of being the first to raise awareness on issues and of breaking taboos. We take up issues that other environmental groups don't or won't, especially those concerning women's health and reproductive systems. We have been asked to speak at many national and international conferences and are invited to respond formally to government policy and proposed legislation.

Central to WEN's approach is the belief that women have the right to information to enable them to make fair choices. We also believe a precautionary approach is healthiest for people and the planet.

- To educate, inform and empower women and men who care about the environment.
- To campaign on environmental and health issues from a women's perspective.
- To enable people to use their consumer power as a force for positive change.
- To carry out thorough independent research that allows people to make informed decisions on environmental issues.
- To offer positive alternatives and provide simple and effective ways to take action.
- To link individual women and organisations through sharing information and experiences and by creating strong international coalitions.
- To take and encourage action which prevents harm and enhances our environment.

- **Persuading manufacturers to reduce chlorine bleaching** in nappies and sanitary protection, which had lasting impact across the paper products industry.
- **Exposing measurable levels of the pesticide lindane in chocolate.** Major companies changed their purchasing policies and the government now regularly test chocolate for pesticide residue. WEN was a founder of the wider successful campaign to ban lindane.
- **Wrapping is a Rip Off** empowered women to protest about excess packaging and persuaded major supermarkets to rethink their packaging strategies.
- **Campaigning for greater awareness of Toxic Shock Syndrome,** a rare but serious illness that can be fatal. The campaign led to better labelling on tampon packets.
- **Initiating The Waste Minimisation Act 1998** which gives local authorities power to introduce waste reducing measures and promote waste preventing ideas.
- **Putting Breast Cancer on the Map,** involving women in mapping the link between breast cancer incidence and local sources of environmental pollution.
- **Organising Real Nappy Week** each year to raise awareness about the environmental impact of disposables and the availability of cloth nappies. Reducing nappy waste is now a government target and 75% of all UK councils have supported the initiative.

We work with community and educational organisations, local and national government and individual consumers to highlight the positive personal, social, economic and environmental impacts of reducing waste. WEN has been campaigning on waste prevention for 15 years and has seen the difference that consumers can make. By creating demand for and promoting goods and services that are less wasteful, WEN believes it possible to think beyond recycling to more long-term waste solutions.

Successes

- In 1990, **Wrapping is A Rip Off** empowered women to protest about excess packaging and persuaded a major supermarket to rethink its packaging strategy.
- WEN initiated the **Waste Minimisation Act**, which became law in November 1998. It allows local authorities to “do or arrange for the doing of, anything which in its opinion is necessary or expedient for the purpose of minimising the quantities of controlled waste, or controlled waste of any description, generated in its area”.
- **Shared Advantage** was a project designed to show councils and communities how to work in partnership and use the Waste Minimisation Act to reduce waste.
- The **Market Waste Prevention Project** at Old Spitalfields Market in East London looked at ways to green the market’s waste management. The project inspired similar activities around the country and was used as a case study for several publications.

Current activity

More From Less is a three-year project funded by the Bridge House Estate Trust Fund. The project is currently in its final year (2005) and focuses on waste prevention initiatives in the Greater London area. Current More From Less projects include:

- *Local Authorities*
We provide information and training to local authority officers so that boroughs are able to take a more sustainable approach to waste.
- *Give or Take Days*
WEN is involved in helping local communities to hold their own Give or Take Days. These are waste exchange events and a way of stopping items that can be re-used or repaired from going to landfill or incineration.
- *Empty Isn't The End*
In Tower Hamlets, six million milk bottles are thrown away and end up in landfill every year. This is a partnership project that encourages Tower Hamlets residents to take their milk bottles back to the shop so they can be re-used.

Contact:
Waste Prevention Officer
waste@wen.org.uk

WEN raises awareness of the environmental impact of nappies and ensures that parents, and adults with incontinence, have a fair choice. We encourage the use of washable cotton nappies to reduce waste and the impact on the environment. Co-ordinated by WEN, Real Nappy Week is the annual focus of the nappy waste prevention campaign.

Successes

- In 2003, after consistent lobbying, the government recognised the need to prioritise nappy waste in its **Waste Implementation Programme (WIP)**. Real nappies and home composting lead the government's waste reduction strategy with a target to convert an additional 155,000 households to real nappy use by April 2006.
- In 2004, Real Nappy Week was **supported by three quarters of all UK local authorities** as well as numerous community, environmental and parents' groups, health services and businesses.
- Each year the Real Nappy Project gathers a list of MPs supporting Real Nappy Week. In 2004, **over 100 MPs** signed the list. MPs put out press releases in their constituencies to help publicise the Week and champion the campaign in other ways. Early Day Motions have also helped to raise support for the campaign in Parliament.

Current activity

Co-ordinating an active and growing **network of real nappy supporters and partnerships**. Demand for cloth nappies and laundry services has created a new industry.

- The Project maintains a **network of contacts** to share information, support and ideas and spread the word about the economic, environmental and social benefits of using real nappies.
- We **advise local authorities** and health professionals and provide information to parents. We speak at conferences and seminars and run information stalls at festivals and other events.
- We can provide **advice and support to parents** on all aspects of napping. We produce and supply materials for individuals and organisations involved in real nappy promotion.

Contacts:
UK Nappy Line 0845 850 0606
nappies@wen.org.uk

WEN takes a holistic view of health. A wealth of research suggests that our environment – our homes, workplaces, the air we breathe, and even our food – is contaminated with a cocktail of risky chemicals. Little attention is given to occupational health risks and the hazards women face in the workplace, home and wider environment. WEN thinks that such research warrants implementation of the precautionary principle.

Successes

- In 1990, WEN was the first group to publicise the fact that dioxins from incinerators contaminate milk. The main findings of our report, *Chlorine, Pollution and the Parents of Tomorrow* are now widely accepted.
- WEN has consistently called for more emphasis on prevention to stop the epidemic of breast cancer. One in nine women in the UK are at risk and breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women. In 1995, we handed an **80,000-signature petition**, *National Action Plan for Breast Cancer* to the Department of Health.
- **Putting Breast Cancer on the Map** empowered women to map their experience of cancer and potential environmental links. It also aimed to help change the minds of government, the medical establishment and society about the way in which breast cancer is viewed, treated and politicised in the UK.
- We questioned potential health risks from **genetically modified (GM) cotton used in tampons** and called for independent testing and regulation. The EC took up and investigated our concerns.
- Founded the **Healthy Flooring Network** with Action Against Allergy and others concerned about links between flooring and health.

Current activity

- **Stopping Breast Cancer Before it Starts**
Campaign for a national strategy and framework for the primary prevention of breast cancer. The campaign places strong emphasis on the need for precautionary action to reduce human exposure to environmental factors linked to the disease.
- **Ending the Cosmetics Cover-up**
Highlights the presence of risky chemicals in many modern cosmetics and toiletries and campaigns for safer alternatives.
- **European health**
As the UK partner in Women in Europe for a Common Future we are contributing to debate about environmental risks to women and children's health and backing reform of legislation controlling the use of chemicals.

Contact:
Helen Lynn, Health Co-ordinator
health@wen.org.uk

WEN's Local Food campaign aims to make healthy, fresh, locally grown food more accessible to all, by establishing and supporting local food growing networks and educating people about the benefits of sustainable food production.

Successes

- **Marigold Pack** – information for groups, schools and individuals on how to grow your own organic food. The pack was translated into Bengali and Somali.
- **Taste of a Better Future Network** – developed a national network of food growing groups. Over the last few years, the 50+ groups across the country have brought new life to the most unlikely spaces on housing estates and un-used inner city plots. A directory of member groups was published in 2003.
- **Breathe Easy, Buy Local** – raised awareness about 'food miles', the distance that food travels to reach the supermarket shelves. The campaign encouraged people to choose local produce.
- **WEN and the Soil Association** organised the first ever Farmers' Market conference in 1998.
- **Our Test Tube Harvest** was the first campaign of its kind to look at modified crops. WEN was also a founder of the Genetic Engineering Network.

Current activity

Cultivating the Future encourages and supports ethnic minority and other disadvantaged women across the country to produce organic food and become experts in community composting. It recognises that such groups have little access to affordable organic food (particularly traditional fruit and vegetable varieties) or to gardens of their own. The project reaches out to the diverse cultural range of women in this country, many of whom already have food growing skills that they are not utilising. The project celebrates, values and shares their knowledge and skill. As well as growing nutritious food, many of the women involved have enjoyed making new friends and helping to building community links.

- **Green Fingred Monsters**

A practical composting and waste prevention initiative designed for schools and community groups in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

- **Feasting!**

A regular networking event that often involves members staging a feast so that all can share in the fabulous produce they've grown.

Contact:

Clare Joy, Local Food Co-ordinator
food@wen.org.uk

In the UK we buy more than three billion disposable sanpro (sanitary protection) items every year. These are thrown or flushed away. This raises issues about pollution from cotton growing, paper bleaching and sanpro disposal and also health concerns such as Toxic Shock Syndrome. WEN has been campaigning on enviromenstrual issues since 1989.

Successes

- The Sanitary Protection Scandal (1989) was the book that exposed the impact of chlorine and led to changes in the industry, and was the seed for WEN's later campaign.
- WEN helped to establish the **Bag It and Bin It** campaign in 1995. The campaign encourages women not to flush their sanitary waste.
- In 2005 WEN broke the silence around the issue of continence with a briefing, *No Laughing Matter*, about the waste and health issues of stress incontinence.

Current activity

- Promoting the **Bag It and Bin It** message and the availability of washable alternatives, such as pads and menstrual cups.
- **Steering women away from disposable products** used between periods such as panty liners and from lubricated and/or fragranced products, which unnecessarily expose women to synthetic chemicals.

Contact:
info@wen.org.uk

WEN has a network of over 100 groups around the country. Local groups, networks and members are vital to WEN's campaigning and have an important role in developing campaigns and spreading WEN's ideas. They are also well placed to influence local media, industry, business and local communities. Local groups share WEN's aims but are autonomous. They determine their own activities, using the skills and abilities of their members and are legally and financially separate from national WEN. Staff at the national office provide support and information to the groups.

Successes

- **Mapping breast cancer** incidence and sources of environmental pollution.
- **Providing local supporters with advice on real nappies.** Persuading local authorities and health services to provide public information about real nappies and support Real Nappy Week.
- Starting up **local organic food growing groups.**
- **Organising protests** against over-packaged goods.
- **Running stalls** and ensuring a WEN presence at fairs and festivals.
- Getting hundreds of women to take a **toxic tour** of their bathroom cabinet to detect risky chemicals in their favourite toiletries.

Starting a local group

First, if you're not already a member - join WEN! The next best step is to write a letter to tell all the WEN members in your area that you intend to set up a group. As we don't give out members' information, you can send us a letter that we'll pass on to members in your area. Make the letter as chatty and personal as you can as people are much more likely to get in contact with you if you sound friendly and approachable. Give your address, phone number and email address, if you have one, so they can contact you directly. It might be a good idea to put in a definite date, time and venue for a first meeting.

Invite people who are not already WEN members to join your group. You can do this by:

- Informal networking – tell everyone you meet about the new group
- Putting up posters anywhere like-minded women are likely to be
- Sending some WEN information and details of the meeting to the journalist covering environmental issues for your local radio/paper
- Identifying an issue that women are concerned about and getting active!

Contact:
localgroups@wen.org.uk

media contacts

Liz Sutton, *Communications Co-ordinator*
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mobile 07973 323 789

Elizabeth Hartigan, *Nappy Co-ordinator*
BibaHartigan@aol.com



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