

Summer 2025 • The Clean Water Action Newsletter

## *New England States Sticking to Bans on Toxic “Forever Chemicals” in Pans*

The movement to protect people from toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) is gaining momentum. In recent years, state legislatures across the country, including the Connecticut and Rhode Island Legislatures, have passed laws to ban long lists of items that contain intentionally added PFAS, including PFAS-laden non-stick pans. But the chemical lobby isn't giving up without a fight.

Recently, the “Cookware Sustainability Alliance” was created to lobby against bans on toxic PFAS in pots and pans. Formed just last year, they would like the public to believe that removing PFAS from pans is too economically burdensome for companies, and there was a push in both Rhode Island and Connecticut to allow exemptions to the states' new PFAS bans. But the real burden is to the people suffering from cancers and other health harms caused by toxics, the communities struggling with contaminated water from the manufacture and disposal of PFAS, and the taxpayers paying to clean up the mess.

Clean Water Action organizers in both Rhode Island and Connecticut mobilized to submit public testimony and generate member calls and emails to fend off this sneaky attempt to weaken their states' PFAS laws. It worked! Both states' PFAS laws remain strong, and exemptions for cookware with PFAS were not allowed.

Using PFAS to make cookware non-stick is harmful both to consumers and to the families who live near the facilities where PFAS are manufactured. And there are safe alternatives to Teflon! Cast-iron pans, which do not release toxic chemicals and are more durable in the long run, are a great alternative to Teflon-coated products. Spread the word that Clean Water Action members aren't falling for the chemical industry's lobbying efforts. You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, but you CAN make an omelet without cancer-causing chemicals.

**Massachusetts members:** Your state has yet to pass a comprehensive PFAS ban! Take action at: [cleanwater.org/actions/ma-pfas-ban](https://cleanwater.org/actions/ma-pfas-ban)



*Using PFAS to make cookware non-stick is harmful both to consumers and to the families who live near the facilities where PFAS are manufactured.*

# Plastic-Free July Update: ReThink Gains Ground in Cafeterias



*With plastic waste piling up in landfills and waterways, the need for sustainable solutions has never been more apparent, and New England schools are answering the call.*

*ReThink Disposable is Clean Water Action's waste-reduction program that helps institutions shift away from single-use plastics. Thanks to partnerships with Plastic-Free Restaurants, Ahimsa, and the commitment of school leaders and kitchen staff, thousands of students will return to cafeterias that have ditched foam and plastic for durable, reusable alternatives next school year.*

In **Rhode Island**, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School in Providence is leading by example. After finalizing renovations to its dish room, the school will begin using stainless steel Ahimsa trays and sporks for more than 250 students this fall. With this one change, they will eliminate the use of 72,000 single-use items annually and save over \$4,600 annually. These savings free up resources for other school needs and eliminate a significant source of lunchtime waste.

In nearby Johnston, Brown Avenue Elementary School switched to reusables this spring thanks to the Rhode Island Department of Education's Get the Foam Out Grant. They now serve meals using Ahimsa trays and stainless-steel sporks to 150 students daily, preventing 54,000 disposables and saving more than \$3,400. Johnston's Ferri Middle

School was the second school in the district to transition to reusable trays, eliminating 144,000 disposable trays and saving \$12,800. The RI School for the Deaf is next, working on launching reusable trays, forks, and sporks across all grades this fall.

In **Massachusetts**, Harrington Elementary in Lexington is preparing to launch a fully reusable cafeteria system once a new dishwasher is installed. With 200 meals served daily, they will prevent using 72,000 disposable plates each year — echoing the savings and impact seen at Nuestro Mundo. In Georgetown, the two public schools ended the year with a soft launch of Ahimsa trays across its cafeterias. Once fully implemented, this program will serve 1,000 students and prevent 180,000 single-use items, with savings estimated at up to \$16,000 annually.

▼ *Zero Waste Specialist Amber Schmidt talks to students in Providence about how schools switching to reusable dining ware can fight microplastic pollution in the Bay.*



Progress is on the horizon in **Connecticut**, where more schools are beginning to discuss sustainable cafeterias after seeing the successful case studies from ReThink Disposable's work with the Middletown Public Schools. Stamford Public Schools are in early discussions about incorporating dishwashers and reusables in future cafeteria renovations, especially as new local ordinances support the move away from disposable food ware.

The numbers speak for themselves: reusable lunch accessories at our schools are better for the environment and save schools money. This Plastic-Free July, we are proud to work with schools leading the country in zero-waste dining and showing what is possible when sustainability is implemented in our cafeterias.

## CONNECTICUT

### CT Team Scores Big Legislative Wins in 2025!

*The 2025 Connecticut legislative session ended in June, and thanks to Clean Water Action's tenacious canvass teams and active membership, key environmental priority bills passed! The CT team thanks everyone who sent an email, made a phone call, wrote a letter, or made a donation. Grassroots power made the difference. Here is a round-up of what passed:*

**The Climate Bill — HB 5004:** The Trump Administration may want to squash climate action, but they can't stop Connecticut. The climate bill passed in the Senate 26-10 along party lines, and while it didn't include everything advocates wanted, it was a big step in the right direction! This legislation:

- Sets strict interim targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions and a goal of net zero emissions by 2050,
- Requires state agencies to only utilize net-zero carbon electricity by 2030,
- Establishes a Connecticut Clean Economy Council to advise on economic development strategies and policies that strengthen the state's climate mitigation, clean energy, resilience, and sustainability programs, particularly for vulnerable communities,
- Supports workforce development for green jobs, and
- Promotes more renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Connecticut is reclaiming its mantle as an American climate leader!

**Restrictions on toxic neonicotinoid pesticides — SB 9:** Neonicotinoids (neonics) are a toxic class of pesticides that are particularly harmful to pollinators and aquatic life. This bill contains additional climate resiliency measures as well as, critically, restrictions on the application of these harmful chemicals. It's a strong step forward that will protect water and aquatic ecosystems in CT.

**Protections from toxic PFAS:** Clean Water Action and allied organizations fended off an attempt by outside lobbyists to weaken Connecticut's landmark 2024 legislation protecting residents from toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in common products. Big lobbying money was no match for the persistent actions of grassroots volunteers!

Clean Water Action was able to mobilize volunteers and members thanks to the tireless efforts of the field and phone canvass teams. Clean Water field organizers were out in all weather this session making sure that neighbors in important legislative districts got the opportunity to weigh in on these campaigns by writing letters, and the phone team called thousands of residents to generate support and action. Grassroots campaigns are won with strength in numbers. Thank you, canvassers, and thank you to everyone who answered the door or your phone and got involved in the fight for a healthier Connecticut!

## RHODE ISLAND

**PFAS Victory!** Not only did the Rhode Island team successfully defend the state's 2024 comprehensive PFAS ban this session; they also celebrated the signing of a bill to expand it! Legislation sponsored by State Rep. June Speakman and State Sen. Walter Felag that prohibits the manufacture, sale, or distribution of any firefighting personal protective equipment containing intentionally added PFAS chemicals was signed into law in June! It's critical that we protect the first responders who protect us, and that means providing them with gear that isn't exposing them to toxic chemicals.





## MASSACHUSETTS

### *Fighting for Asthma Justice in Massachusetts*

About 1 in 11 Massachusetts residents currently suffers from asthma, and 1.5 million Massachusetts residents still lack access to local air quality data. With ongoing federal budget cuts hitting the Commonwealth's most vulnerable communities hardest, state action is now more important than ever. This was the backdrop for the annual World Asthma Day rally for clean air justice.

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Last session, the Massachusetts legislature failed to pass bills championed by environmental justice advocates to increase air monitoring and clean up pollution. So, on May 6th, Clean Water Action joined neighbors, legislative champions, youth activists, and public health experts to rally in support of getting a package of air quality bills passed this session.

This year's event took place in the vibrant community of East Boston. Eastie residents are

burdened with poor air quality due to the presence of Logan International Airport in the middle of their community, as well as the highways and busy roads that dissect the neighborhoods. Emissions from airplanes, trucks, and cars contribute to the health disparities seen there.

But despite these environmental challenges, the rally was a show of resilience. Neighbors aren't waiting for legislative action to support each other and their community. Folks engaged with hands-on demos on how to build your own DIY air filter, how to use an inhaler correctly, and how to contact elected representatives in support of clean air policies. Attendees enjoyed free food and family-friendly games, plus welcoming resource tables staffed by local asthma care providers.

A powerful lineup of advocates and elected officials spoke, including:

- Dr. Shalini Shah, pediatrician at Boston Children's Hospital
- State Representative Adrian Madaro
- Boston City Councilor Coletta Zapata
- Malden Youth Advocates: Christina Robinson-McCaskill, Sophia Chen, Taliyah Lauture, and Laura Onyejiaka
- East Boston resident and mother: Sonja Tengblad
- ECO youth advocates: Johanna and Diana
- Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project: Vi 'Shon Ginyard and Jasiah Watkins

The rally was a huge success, but the work is just beginning! Clean Water Action members in Massachusetts can get involved by sending a message to Massachusetts state legislators asking them to support legislation to improve air quality in Massachusetts, particularly in pollution hot spots. Visit [cleanwater.org/actions/ma-clean-air](https://cleanwater.org/actions/ma-clean-air) to contact your state legislators!

◀ *Members of the Massachusetts team at the World Asthma Day Rally in East Boston.*

PHOTO BY ANGELA ROWLINGS



## CONNECTICUT

# Honoring Longtime Connecticut Director, Anne Hulick!

As some members may have heard, Clean Water Action's Connecticut Director, Anne Hulick, just began her well-deserved retirement. While she will remain in the fight for clean water and climate justice, Anne will also have more time now to enjoy her family. With her background in nursing, Anne's leadership has been noteworthy for her commitment to preventing harm to our health from pollution and toxic chemicals. Here is a look at her amazing legacy.

Working with the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy CT, Anne led the drive to pass numerous policies that make CT a more sustainable and healthier place to live. She fought for a ban on toxic BPA in food containers, baby bottles, and formula. Most recently, Clean Water Action won a massive victory with the state's 2024 ban on dangerous PFAS in products including food packaging, clothing, carpets, cookware, cosmetics, children's products, firefighting foam, and firefighting protective gear. The legislation included funding for communities contaminated by PFAS to monitor their water, pay for bottled water for those who have no other options, and undertake clean up. When the chemical lobby tried to weaken this landmark legislation in 2025, Anne was ready to rally organizers and advocates to hold the line.

Over the years, Anne fought for a vision of Connecticut in which all communities had a right to clean water and a healthy environment. She worked to strengthen Connecticut's environmental justice policies by requiring cumulative impact analysis of over-burdened communities when new polluting projects are proposed. Anne also advocated for safeguards ensuring that energy efficiency programs are truly accessible to all, including renters and language-isolated populations. Under her leadership, Clean Water has implemented innovative grassroots outreach efforts in Waterbury to reach underserved neighborhoods with information about energy efficiency programs in the state. She served on numerous advisory committees including the CT Environmental Justice Water Subcommittee.

This spring, Anne's decades of environmental health advocacy, both as a nurse and as an organizer, were honored by Health Care Without Harm and the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments with the 2025 Charlotte Brody Award. This prestigious award recognizes a nurse whose environmental activism and accomplishments have made a significant contribution to environmental health. This award is certainly well deserved.

Anne dedicated her career to keeping others healthy, and she'll still be standing with Clean Water Action in her retirement. Thank you, Anne! Clean Water Action will be celebrating Anne at our Connecticut Fall Toast on September 13th! Learn more at [cleanwater.org/CTfall](https://cleanwater.org/CTfall).



▲ Clean Water Action's Connecticut team promoting energy efficiency programs to neighbors at an event in Waterbury with State Rep. Geraldo Reyes.

**Energy Network:** Connecticut communities have banded together under the banner of Clean Water Action's CT Energy Network to take on the climate crisis at the grassroots level. Local energy task force members from towns across the state support each other's clean energy projects by sharing best practices and updates on the latest technologies and funding opportunities. CTEN is stepping in with grassroots energy and organizing expertise to fill the gap left by federal and state funding cuts. Learn more and help your CT town get involved at: <https://cleanwater.org/campaign/clean-energy-connecticut>



## RHODE ISLAND

### *What's Next for the Rhode Island Bottle Bill?*

Fighting plastic pollution and waste means building better systems of reuse and recycling. That's why an even bigger, broader coalition assembled this session to pass a Rhode Island bottle bill. After some last minute behind the scenes work, the legislation that passed the House and Senate in June is a step in the right direction.

For over 18 months, a bipartisan study commission met to examine solutions to beverage container waste. The commission heard from the RI Resource Recovery Corporation, interested parties from retail and beverage distributors, and experts in recycling. The result was a carefully crafted compromise bill that would create a bottle deposit program in Rhode Island.

As the session raced to a close, it became clear that the full bottle bill was not going to get a floor vote, so advocates pushed for language that will keep progress moving forward. The bill that passed both the State House and State Senate will create an implementation study, so the state can assess the impacts of passing the bottle bill as proposed in 2025. This is an important first step.

The problem of waste is not going away. The landfill will not last forever, and litter and plastic pollution are impacting waterways now. Clean Water Action appreciates the seriousness with which legislative leadership is considering a bottle bill, and members should expect continued updates!



▲ Rhode Island State Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee, flanked by fellow legislative supporters of the bottle bill, speaks at a press conference in the State House.



▲ **RHODE ISLAND CHAMPIONS:** Honorees at Rhode Island's Breakfast of Champions in May (from far L to R, Warren Hayman and James Corwin with RI School Recycling Project, Rep. Megan Cotter, Pawtucket City Councilman Clovis Gregor) smile with RI Director Emily Howe and Jed Thorp of Save the Bay.

PHOTO CREDIT: RI CAPITOL TV



## MASSACHUSETTS

**Toxic Free Kids.** Toxic chemicals shouldn't be in things children use every day. But children's products can contain PFAS, lead, asbestos, phthalates, bisphenols, and other chemicals that are harmful to children's health and development. Our Massachusetts team has assembled a broad coalition to fight for passage of An Act for Toxic Free Kids (S195/H384) which would protect children from early life exposures to chemicals that can cause lifelong harm by restricting toxic chemicals in children's products. [Tell your state legislators to support An Act for Toxic Free Kids!](#)



Source: Ecology Center of Michigan

▼ **MASS FUN:** *The Massachusetts team smiling together at the annual event, The Fun is in the Fight!*





### *Drastic Budget Cuts Would Put Clean Water at Risk*

The Trump administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget proposal threatens to eliminate critical State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG) under the Clean Water Act — putting public health, environmental protection, and local economies at serious risk. These grants fund essential state programs that monitor water quality, control pollution, issue permits, and support community-led restoration. Without this funding, many states report they would be forced to shut down core clean water operations, lay off staff, and abandon key projects that protect drinking water, prevent harmful algal blooms, and ensure safe rivers and lakes. Clean Water Action has urged Congress to reject this proposal and is partnering with fellow advocacy groups to educate lawmakers on its harmful consequences. Learn more about potential impacts of the White House budget proposal [here](#).

Clean Water Action has been monitoring the reconciliation Bill H.R. 1 (the “Big Beautiful Bill”), which would gut essential protections for our water and communities. This legislation slashes funding for coastal resilience, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) facilities, and environmental justice programs. These are vital investments that safeguard drinking water, protect vulnerable communities, and prepare for climate impacts. It strips away the regulatory tools needed to prevent pollution and hold polluters accountable. We need bold, equitable action to protect clean water, not rollbacks that put public health and our environment at risk.

### **Around Town: Source Water Collaborative Member Meeting**

Source Water Collaborative's Co-Chairs Lynn Thorp (Clean Water Action) and Deirdre White (Association of State Drinking Water Administrators) welcomed attendees to the annual Source Water Collaborative Member Meeting on June 17. This hybrid gathering brought together 31 national organizations to give updates, exchange ideas, and advance the shared goal of protecting America's drinking water at the source.

### **Toxic Chemicals:**

### *EPA Should Do More — Not Less — to Keep PFAS Chemicals Out of Our Water*

In April 2024, Clean Water Action applauded EPA for finalizing drinking water limits for six of the notorious per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) chemicals. PFAS are widely used chemicals that are highly persistent in the environment, have been found in drinking water sources nationwide, and are known to cause serious health problems. Yet this May, EPA announced plans that it would reconsider these Safe Drinking Water Act limits for four PFAS chemicals and delay protections for two more. Clean Water Action [released a statement](#) opposing weakening these health-based drinking water limits and urging EPA to accelerate Clean Water Act pollution limits and other initiatives that would keep PFAS out of our water and the environment in the first place.

These are examples of why we must urge our representatives not to cut EPA's budget or weaken our environmental and health safeguards.

[Take action today!](#)

### **Celebrating \$1 million in micro-donations!**



Clean Water Fund's long-running partnership with SurveyMonkey's Contribute program recently passed a major milestone: \$1 million donated to Clean Water Fund, and counting. One powerful demonstration of what we mean when we talk about “strength in numbers.”

You can help speed us on our way toward a second \$1 million. Just join the almost half-million others who have signed up to take surveys benefiting Clean Water Fund.

Learn more at  
[cleanwater.org/surveys](https://cleanwater.org/surveys)

## NEW ENGLAND CURRENTS

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