

AWARD

Chemical Weapons Working Group director to receive national award

Special to the Register

This week the coalition of state Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) announced that Craig Williams, director of the Chemical Weapons Working Group (CWWG), has been selected as the 2003 recipient of the John O'Connor Citizen Achievement Award.

The O'Connor Award is presented annually to a person who consistently reflects the spirit and dedication of John O'Connor, a long-time advocate for clean energy, social justice and health care for all. He served as an organizer for Massachusetts Fair Share and was a founder of the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards. O'Connor died at age 46 in November 2001. He worked extensively with the state PIRGs in winning passage of tough federal Superfund laws and led the opposition to corporate energy deregulation.

The PIRGs coalition consists of 28 state organizations, each independent and locally based. These groups work cooperatively on regional and national issues such as preserving the environment, conserving energy and natural resources, protecting consumers, advocating social justice and protecting public health.

The PIRGs coalition said in a statement, "Craig Williams has spent much of his life

working for grassroots organizations promoting environmental justice. For the past 14 years, Craig has served as Director of the Chemical Weapons Working Group [CWWG], which advocates and mobilizes citizens around the safe disposal of chemical weapons. During his tenure the group has helped pass legislation that forced the Army to adopt safer means of chemical weapons disposal, spearheaded the campaign to restructure the U.S. Army's chemical demilitarization program - including more citizen participation, and kept dangerous incineration projects out of several communities across the United States. He also has organized 10 citizen summits on chemical weapons destruction and coordinated the first Russian/American Non-Governmental Organization Conference on Chemical Weapons Disposal. Craig embodies the spirit and commitment that inspired the creation of the John O'Connor Achievement Award, and the state PIRGs around the country are honored to extend this award to him."

Upon hearing of his selection, Williams said, "It's a great privilege to be thought of in John O'Connor's memory. He was an inspiration to all of us who knew him and he is sorely missed. It is my intention to continue working in his spirit and with his dedi-



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Craig Williams accepts the John O'Connor Award from the state Public Interest Research Groups.

cation in the interests of those who are in harm's way due to inappropriate governmental decisions and corporate profits."

Hundreds of thousands of citizens who live near U.S. stockpiles of chemical weapons are facing a decade of toxic emissions from Army incinerators. CWWG efforts have stopped chemical weapons incineration in four of the eight U.S. weapons storage communities. But four more communities, three with a high percentage of poor and minority populations, continue to suffer under the daily threat from Army burn plants in their neighborhoods.

"For the CWWG," Williams said, "correcting this environ-

mental injustice is an ongoing challenge. We are committed to continue fighting to ensure equal protection from exposure to these most deadly of chemicals and their toxic by-products."

Williams received the award Thursday in Denver at the state PIRG's national meeting and staff-wide training conference. Last year's O'Connor Award recipient was Terri Swearingen, honored for her efforts to toughen health and safety requirements for incinerators, implement national siting standards for hazardous waste facilities and her leadership in the citizens' campaign against the WTI incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio.