

# HONOREES: CWA DISTRICT 9

“An injury to one is an injury to all” is an old union slogan. It’s about protecting people as a whole—not just individuals—and recognizing that what affects one person affects all of us.



## CWA DISTRICT 9

Green chemistry is an innovative approach that puts the slogan into practice when it comes to toxic substances. It asks, “is it necessary?” And, if so, what’s the best way to design chemical ingredients and processes to get rid of toxics, reduce waste, and conserve energy.

District 9 of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) has done a lot to get rid of toxic chemicals that its members in California, Hawaii, and Nevada use on the job. Supported by the CWA health and safety leadership, others in the union, and the BlueGreen Alliance (BGA), District 9 is an inspiring example of why unions are important in public health, especially to prevent hazards and promote green chemistry.

District Organizing Director Libby Sayre and Environmental Program Coordinator Ernie Pacheco are two of the District’s representatives responsible for this leadership.

Ernie started out as an environmental activist, aware that we are “swimming in a sea of toxics.” As a union activist, he wanted to figure out how to persuade employers to reduce their use of toxic chemicals and protect CWA members. For Libby, “too many workers don’t understand the dangers of toxic chemicals, making them effectively a hidden workplace hazard. We need to change that.”

Their work integrates national union policies, concerns about international issues, and taking leadership on difficult topics to protect members’ interests. With a green chemistry approach to advance their occupational and environmental health, District 9 systematically looked for toxic chemicals in thousands of products used by its largest employer, AT&T. The union negotiated to replace some of those products and continues to press for the use of safer products. At the same time, Ernie and Libby work with the BGA and others to find alternatives with less or no toxic effects.



*Libby Sayre and Ernie Pacheco of CWA District 9*

The District, the larger CWA, and the BGA also were key players in developing and refining a unique database about chemical hazards and less toxic alternatives. Designed with workers, for workers and their families, the Chemical Hazard and Alternatives Toolbox (ChemHAT) sets a high bar for innovation, practicality, and protection of worker and public health. The District also supports struggles against international trade agreements that undermine workers’ rights and the public’s right to a healthy environment.

Ernie and Libby provided critical input in shaping the Safer Consumer Products Regulations that implement the first phase of California’s Green Chemistry Initiative. As members of Californians for a Healthy and Green Economy (CHANGE), they advocated successfully for workers’ exposures to be recognized in these groundbreaking regulations. District 9 also partnered with Worksafe to keep California’s chemical right-to-know regulation stronger than the federal one.

We proudly recognize CWA District 9 for its leadership to protect workers and our environments from chemical hazards. We look forward to blazing green chemistry trails together in the future.