



# The Ecology Action Center News

Summer 2011

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## The EAC Comes a Long Way in 40 Years

by Carl Roberts, EAC Volunteer

Roots are important to the Ecology action center. They filter watershed, prevent erosion, support beautiful flora, and even remind us where we came from. Here's a look at how the EAC became what it is today.

### 1971: "One time" drive marks the beginning of Operation Recycle

Inspired by the growing global appreciation for Earth's natural environment, ISU biology professor Derek McCracken was the "founding father" of Operation Recycle. He planned a "one-time" recycling drive to be held over a weekend in February. "Faculty and students got involved in the whole idea after the first Earth Day," McCracken said in a 1999 discussion. "Environmental action was a part of the whole movement." Even WJBC radio host Don Munson promoted the recycling drive on the show "Problems and Solutions."

On that first weekend, the drive collected over 105 tons of paper and more than 20 tons of glass that first weekend. "We were so swamped that I couldn't visit the other sites," McCracken said. Volunteers had to break up the 20-plus tons of glass in order for it to be transported. "The glass was so packed that you could walk on it and you would not sink," McCracken said. "When they came to pick it up, the front end of the truck went up in the air."

### 1971-1982: Ongoing recycling drives are held in Bloomington-Normal

Because of their popularity, recycling drives continued to be held every four to seven weeks at three locations in Bloomington-Normal and was run by an all-volunteer staff of members from area churches and scout groups. "ISU had a beat-up, old truck they let us use," recalls Myra Gordon, a dedicated volunteer who would later become the organization's first director. The City of Bloomington, Simpson Paperstock, and Irving Tick also donated trucks and a great deal of time over many years.

More than \$10,000 in profits from the sale of the recyclables was donated by Operation Recycle to improvement projects in McLean County. Operation Recycle even had its own "Johnny Appleseed," farmer John English would grow trees on his farm, and volunteers planted them all over Comlara Park. Thanks to the outspoken leadership of Operation Recycle, Bloomington and Normal briefly partnered with the organization in an early curbside program and later on a very short-lived "pay-as-you-throw" experiment.

### 1983: Operation Recycle becomes a full-time organization

In 1983, Community Action, under the leadership of Executive Director Carol Reitan, offered Operation Recycle the opportunity to go full time. Workers from Bloomington Township's workfare program and McLean County Court Services were used to fill out the staff.

Operation Recycle set up drop boxes around town where residents could recycle anytime. After a few years, the volume of recycled materials grew from 200-300 tons a year to reach 1,000 tons, and the list of recyclable materials was expanded.

Operation Recycle tested the limits of recycling and developed the first program in McLean County to pick up recyclables from businesses and campus buildings. Gordon remembers, "We ended up going out to 40+ businesses. By

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9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Monday—Friday

*Continued on page 5*



*“The first step towards change is awareness.”*

~Nathaniel Branden

### **EAC Staff**

**Michael Brown**  
Executive Director

**Kris Hall**  
Assistant Director

**Larissa Armstrong**  
Program Assistant

**Ruth Ann Lipic**  
Radon Program

### **EAC Board of Directors 2010-2011**

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*This issue of the  
Ecology Action Center  
News produced and  
edited by EAC Intern  
Kurt Erbach*

## **Natural Gas and the Risks of Hydraulic Fracturing**

By Victoria Morales, EAC Intern

Heating water and often fueling stoves, natural gas is one of the most commonly used fossil fuels in America; it accounts for about 24% of the total energy use. However, have you ever wondered how to obtain the gas from the Earth? Can turning on a stove’s burner really be as simple as the turn of a knob?

A lot could be said about how natural gas is obtained, so here are a few of the highlights. As the name implies, hydraulic fracturing involves water and cracking rock under the Earth’s surface. This is a necessary step in building natural gas wells.

The process of establishing a natural gas well begins by drilling straight down through the Earth’s crust to find a source of the gas. After drilling deep enough, other lines are drilled horizontally in several directions, often stretching for miles, in order to establish the largest possible surface area from which the gas can be extracted. Concrete is then poured to create a casing for the well. As explained on the Natural Gas Organization’s website; “Once the drilling and casing is complete, typically *3 to 4 million gallons of water*, mixed with sand and fractional amounts of *chemical additives*, are pumped into the wellhead at high pressure, creating cracks in the rock beds.”

Information such as this raises a number of concerns including contamination of groundwater and surface water supplies. Moreover, the Earthworks Organization states, “In most cases, fresh water is used to fracture wells because it is more effective than using wastewater from other wells.”

“Some of the fracturing fluids are pumped out of the well and into surface pits or tanks during the process of extracting oil, gas and any produced water, but studies have shown that anywhere from 20-40% of fracking [another term for hydraulic fracturing] fluids may remain underground.” The water left behind represents a considerable amount of waste and raises environmental concerns as well.

Studies and testimonials have been conducted in communities that have been affected by hydraulic fracturing and they demonstrate the risk that this practice can have on drinking water sources. In addition to the people impacted, the wildlife surrounding fractured area can be affected for years by the fracking fluids that remain under ground. Many of the chemicals used during the process have been linked to cancer and several diseases. As if these effects do not raise enough concern, one must also consider what happens to the other 80-60% of

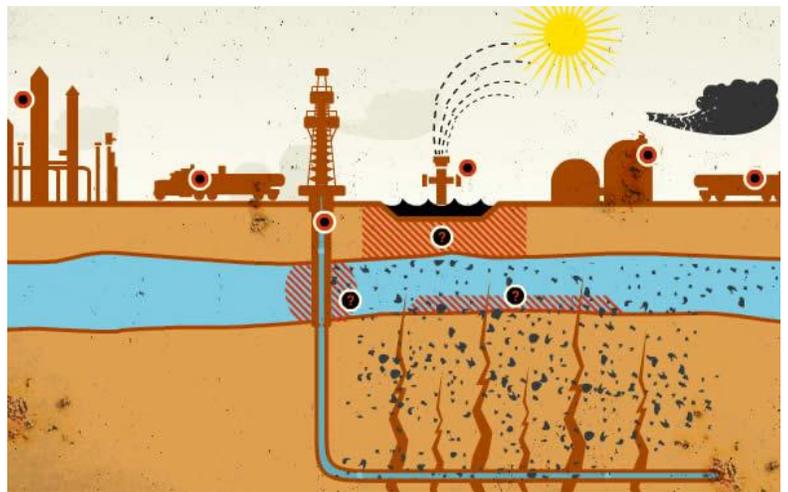


Image courtesy of [www.gaslandthemovie.com](http://www.gaslandthemovie.com)



## See *GASLAND*, June 15, 7pm at the Normal Theater

water used in this process. It certainly must go somewhere, and it may not be treated properly.

Even though the US Environmental Protection Agency has approved the process, the studies of the long term effects have only just begun. The EPA website reports that, "initial research results are expected by the end of 2012 with a goal for a report in 2014." In the meantime, companies keep digging and drilling for gas or oil using hydraulic fracturing. Inquires at the McLean County Department of Planning earlier this year indicate that there are companies likely to use hydraulic fracturing right here in central Illinois in the near future.

*Want to learn more? Join us on June 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm at the Normal Theater in Uptown Normal for the presentation of the acclaimed documentary GASLAND by Josh Fox.*

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### **EAC Celebrates 40 Years with 40 Green Ideas**

*As part of the on-going celebration of the Ecology Action Center's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, the EAC launched a campaign to provide 40 green ideas for our community. Visit the EAC website for more detailed tips including local resources and events. The small choices we make every day add up to a big difference for our environment!*

1. Be an extreme recycler!
2. Drink organic fair trade coffee
3. Take a Staycation!
4. Support wind and solar energy
5. Green your refrigerator
6. Get your energy doing useful work for yourself and your community, not at an energy-intensive gym!
7. Buy paper products made from recycled paper
8. Protect our water supplies
9. Turn off phantom electricity use
10. Compost your food scraps and organic waste
11. Drive slower
12. Line-dry your clothes during warmer months
13. Eat lower on the food chain
14. Use a push or electric lawn mower
15. Use a reusable water bottle
16. Install a faucet aerator on each faucet in your home
17. Keep organic material on your property (and don't bring in more)
18. Take pride in your organic lawn
19. Recycle your electronics
20. Use natural cleaning supplies
21. Get your kids outside
22. Save energy at home through conscious use of your appliances
23. Test your home for radon
24. Conserve water
25. Replace incandescent light bulbs with CFLs or LED lighting
26. Make thoughtful choices when hazardous wastes are concerned
27. Join the local food movement
28. Drive less
29. Grow your own vegetables
30. Have your home energy audited
31. Use rechargeable batteries
32. Install a rain garden to protect clean water
33. Use a rain barrel
34. Keep your home cool without using electricity
35. Use reusable hand towels and rags instead of paper towels
36. Use native plants in your yard
37. Be Yard Smart
38. Find new homes for unneeded items through Freecycle
39. Take time and appreciate and enjoy nature; share your favorite places and experiences with family and friends
40. Wake up, become aware, start talking with those around you, and take action!

**Green Idea #26:  
Make thoughtful  
choices when  
hazardous  
wastes are  
Concerned**

*The EAC staff would like to thank Valerie Hackett, Carolyn Treadway, Roy Treadway, Cindy Caldwell, and EAC interns Lauren James and Hannah DeMay for their assistance with this project.*



*Make a difference in your community— 40 green ideas to create and maintain a healthier environment!*

*With a rain barrel, you get free water for your garden while also reduce storm-water runoff pollution*

*Thanks to all members who have renewed their memberships! We couldn't do this without you!*

## **Build Your Own Rain Barrel Workshops**

The Ecology Action Center is excited to announce our hands-on workshop where you build your own water saving rainwater collection and storage container. Commercially available rainwater collection and storage systems range in price from \$75.00-\$165.00 but the Ecology Action Center is offering this workshop at a fraction of the cost.

The workshop will provide all the materials for you to create a rain barrel that will allow for the versatility of a traditional water source and that will last for years to come.

### **Workshop Dates:**

Tuesday, June 14 at 5:30PM  
Saturday, June 18 at 10:00AM  
Saturday, June 18 at 1:00PM

### **Cost**

\$28.00 for EAC members  
\$38.00 for non-members

Registration forms are available through the BN Green Calendar on the EAC website.

Current workshops will fill up quickly, so register soon!



## **Membership Notes**

By Kris Hall, EAC Assistant Director

Thank you, thank you, thank you! Since I started sending out renewal letters last summer and began keeping records about response trends, I have been heartened that so many members renew so quickly when asked. I begin by sending renewal letters about a month before each membership expires, and more than half of you who got those letters sent back your renewals immediately. Since we are an organization that focuses on conservation, this is extremely important. Those additional renewal letters use valuable resources of paper, postage and staff time, and we SO appreciate your TIMELY support!

That being said, we know that some of you are interested in the possibility of electronic renewal notices. Our current database system does not allow us to do this yet, but we are investigating the possibility of upgrading to a membership database that would. In the meantime, if this option interests you, please send me an email message at [khall@ecologyactioncenter.org](mailto:khall@ecologyactioncenter.org). While we cannot yet begin to offer electronic renewal notices, this will help us gauge the interest in this service. Please do keep in mind that your membership dues may be paid electronically anytime through the "Donate" button on our website located just under the BN Green Calendar on the right side of the webpage.

As we celebrate 40 years of working with our community to help our environment, we are very aware that our members have helped make this possible. Thank you so very much.



## 40 Years of the EAC, continued from page 1

recycling what we could, their garbage was reduced by 70-to-80%." They also became one of the first centers in the state to recycle plastics using funds from one of three state grants that Gordon applied for and received in 1987.

### **1994: Operation Recycle renovates nineteenth century Hewett House**

Before becoming the home of the EAC, the Town of Normal purchased the house for the large parking lot behind it, to provide more parking spaces for the Normal Library. Historic preservation plans in Normal thankfully prevented the Hewett House from being torn down, so the town manager, David S. Anderson, decided the house would be best used for the proposed Ecology Action Center.

Operation Recycle needed to do considerable renovation to the house before re-opening it as the EAC; the peeling wallpaper all had to be scraped off, and the walls needed to be sanded and painted. "Cynthia Garrison was indispensable," McGowan said. "And intern Mercy Davison helped rally teams of volunteers."

### **1995: Ecology Action Center opens as an educational center**

When the house was finally ready for the EAC to move in, Anne McGowan, who had been an active volunteer and board member since the first recycling drive in 1971, became the EAC's first director. The first workshop in the building was led by Greg Koos of the McLean County Historical Society for homeowners and restoration contractors. It also was a place where area teachers could access ECONET, the worldwide interactive computer network dedicated to environmental concerns.

In addition to meetings held and classes taught at the center, McGowan went to schools throughout the area to teach "the how, why and fun of recycling" to third graders, enlisting the help of volunteer parents and college students to conduct training sessions. Around this time, Myra Gordon also wrote the first "Earth Schools Manual" as part of graduate study at ISU.

### **2004: Major Changes for the EAC**

In order for the historic 1860s Victorian house to operate efficiently and serve as an environmentally friendly example for the community, the EAC used money from a DCEO Regional Energy Program grant in 2004 to install a geothermal heating and cooling system, soy foam insulation, and weatherization. "These changes enabled us to have more stable temperatures year round... and enabled us to have more educational programming in the facility," Elzanati said.

Additionally, even though people had been calling the organization the Ecology Action Center since the opening of the Hewett House, the formal name of the organization was still Operation Recycle. In 2004 the name was officially changed.

### **2011 and into the future**

A highlight of each year is the Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo, which is organized and promoted by the EAC in partnership with IWU. While the EAC presents programs for all ages, they especially enjoy teaching the community leaders of the future. Today's children have the opportunity at a young age to learn about the importance of protecting the environment.

*Thank you to all who have helped out in the last 40 years! Here's to 40 more!*

*Abridged for  
the newsletter,  
the full-length,  
version of the  
article, "The  
EAC Comes a  
Long Way in 40  
Years" is  
available at  
[ecologyactioncenter.org](http://ecologyactioncenter.org)*

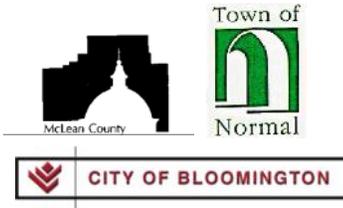
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

**June 14, 5:30 p.m.:** Rain Barrel Workshop—registration forms on EAC website

**June 15, 7:00 p.m.:** *GASLAND*, The Normal Theater. FREE ADMISSION

**June 18, 10:00 a.m.:** Rain Barrel Workshop—registration forms on EAC website

**June 18, 1:00 p.m.:** Rain Barrel Workshop—registration forms on EAC website

**June 25:** Yard Smart Garden Walk—get more details & RSVP by calling 454-3169

**June 27-July 1:** EAC Summer Camp Session 1

**July 5, 5:30 p.m.:** Green Drinks, Medici in Uptown Normal

**July 18-July 22:** EAC Summer Camp Session 2

**August 2, 5:30 p.m.:** Green Drinks, Medici in Uptown Normal

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