

**Toxic Time Bomb:  
Love Canal, Superfund, and the Establishment of  
Environmental Rights and Responsibilities**

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I have always been interested in environmentalism and the outdoors. When I heard this year's theme of Rights and Responsibilities in History, I began to research potential topics related to environmental justice and discovered Love Canal. It demonstrates the complexities that arise from the clash of rights and responsibilities. I decided to present Love Canal as a case study in the study of waste management, along with the resulting legislation (CERCLA). It piqued my interest and soon I had a topic that fit every part of the theme.

I began conducting my research by first searching on the Internet. I went to public libraries to find books about my topic. Michael Brown's *Laying Waste: the Poisoning of America by Toxic Chemicals*, based on his original investigation at Love Canal, was used by the Love Canal Homeowners' Association. After gleaning a basic understanding, I consulted newspapers from the 1970s through today, which I included on my website. I searched library microfiche of government hearings about the Superfund program. I used the Love Canal archive at University of Buffalo, where I found many important photographs. I conducted three interviews, including Martha Faust, the executive director of Minnesota Brownfields, for a current perspective on how areas are dealt with and resold today. I also interviewed two CERCLA experts: Professor Alex Klass, who teaches environmental law at the University of Minnesota, and Justin Pettinelli, a remediation expert and environmental engineer at 3M. These interviews were extremely helpful and helped to deepen my research and understand the different viewpoints associated with the policy regime.

I created a website because it allowed me to use more words than an exhibit and I could easily incorporate multimedia elements to strengthen and enhance my project. I began by establishing an outline of my website that I could show to NHD mentors. I started my website on Weebly, choosing a muted green background photograph of grass because it reminded me of the setting of Love Canal. To set the tone further, I added *Where Do the Children Play*, which reminded me of the children who played on the top of the leaking Love Canal. I also included *Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)* to explain the ideas during the 'context' section era. To help explain CERCLA's mixed and limited legacy, I used

*Waiting on the World to Change.* The most difficult part was deciding what research should be included on the website directly.

My topic relates to the NHD theme because Love Canal, with the help of Superfund, redefined and clarified rights and responsibilities related to waste cleanup. It violated homeowners' basic rights to a clean, safe environment. They stood up for their rights, advocating for relocation. Hooker ignored their responsibility to inform others of the problems caused by their actions. Because of the events at Love Canal, and many similar sites around the nation, CERCLA was passed in 1980. It redefined financial and legal responsibility for cleanup along with creating a new policy regime that is followed today.

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