Wins also include key building efficiency bills

Despite Illinois state government once again being hamstrung by massive deficits and gruesome budget battles, Environment Illinois still won the fight for key energy efficiency measures in 2009.

Among them was a large, Environment Illinois-negotiated energy reform package that calls for natural gas utilities to begin reducing demand for more fuel through energy-efficiency programs, rather than simply going out and getting more supply.

By 2019, Illinois natural gas utilities will be expected to meet 1.5 percent of their annual energy demand through efficiency measures—a stronger requirement than that of the American Clean Energy and Security Act currently before Congress.

According to an analysis by the Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, these efficiency programs have the potential to prevent the emission of more than 50 million metric tons of CO2 in Illinois by 2030.

The energy bill passed the Illinois General Assembly on May 31—the session’s last day—and Gov. Pat Quinn signed it into law July 10. The bill also includes a bold new on-bill financing program that will allow Illinois residents to finance energy efficiency upgrades through payments on their utility bills.

On May 31, lawmakers also passed the Energy Efficient Building Act, which will bring the latest national model code standards for energy efficiency to new Illinois homes.

“From the time we first proposed this legislation years ago until today, awareness of the value of energy efficiency has grown significantly,” said State Rep. Julie Hamos, sponsor of this legislation. “People across all sectors of the economy now recognize why this is such an important step to take.”

The month of May also saw passage of the Green Buildings Act, which requires that all new state-funded building construction and renovations of state-owned facilities meet green building practice standards.

“Not only will these results help save our environment, they will save consumers money on energy costs and spur economic growth when our state needs it most,” said Environment Illinois Staff Attorney Brian Granahan.
Recent action

Nation’s largest urban solar plant slated for Chicago
An Environment Illinois-supported project to bring the nation’s largest urban solar plant to Chicago’s South Side is moving forward. The Chicago City Council passed an ordinance in late July that would allow the city to lease land for the plant to Exelon Solar Chicago LLC.

The project would develop a 10-megawatt solar plant, blanketing 41 acres of an unused brownfield site in the West Pullman neighborhood of Chicago—currently an expanse of contaminated and unusable lots sitting vacant—with 32,800 solar photovoltaic panels.

“For Chicago to be a true leader on environmental issues, it must also be a leader on the vital resource of solar power—and this project is a bold first step,” said Environment Illinois Staff Attorney Brian Granahan, who testified in favor of the ordinance. The plant could be operational by January 2010.

Bringing cleaner cars to Illinois
This past May, President Obama solved the hard-fought clean cars battle in Illinois by announcing stringent new federal vehicle emissions standards for new cars and trucks. As a result of these standards, by 2011 we’ll reduce carbon pollution from cars and light trucks by 83 million tons nationwide.

Several states, including Illinois, were considering adopting stronger vehicle emissions standards at the time of President Obama’s announcement. State Rep. Karen May and State Sen. Jackie Collins were leading efforts to bring cleaner cars to Illinois.

As vehicles are the second-leading cause of global warming pollution, these standards will keep us on the right road in the fight to reduce our global warming pollution—and save Illinoisans at the pump through more fuel-efficient cars and trucks.

Max Muller
Program Director

To our members

Recent action

Seven votes. That was the slim margin by which the House of Representatives approved legislation this June to repower our country with clean energy and cap the pollution responsible for global warming. It goes to show you that even with a pro-environment president in the White House, and the largest block of pro-environment members of Congress in recent memory, we still have our work cut out for us.

From Illinois’ delegation, Reps. Rush, Jackson, Lipinski, Gutierrez, Quigley, Davis, Bean, Schakowsky, Kirk, Halvorson and Hare voted in favor of the energy legislation. Reps. Roskam, Costello, Biggert, Foster, Johnson, Manzullo, Schock and Shimkus voted against it.

The way Illinois’ delegation votes will almost certainly have an effect as Congress considers legislation to restore our waters, protect our national forests, and clean up toxic sites in Illinois and across the country. Take action on our Web site to let your representative know you’re standing up in support of Illinois’ environment.

Max Muller
Program Director
As the U.S. Senate considers historic energy legislation, we’re building support to ensure that we pass a bill that sets us on the path to repower America with clean energy.

The House of Representatives’ approval of the American Clean Energy and Security Act this summer marked a clear break from the inaction that characterized the federal government’s response to global warming during the past eight years.

If the Senate follows suit this fall, we’ll see billions of dollars invested in energy efficiency and renewable power, new green buildings sprouting up across America, and significant, mandatory reductions in carbon pollution.

It’s not perfect
Still, the energy bill passed by the House doesn’t do all that’s necessary. In order to win enough votes for passage, the bill’s sponsors agreed to compromises that benefit oil and coal companies, agribusiness and other interests at the expense of taxpayers and the environment. We’re still fighting hard for stronger energy efficiency and renewable energy provisions in the bill—standards that are more consistent with the stringent requirements we’ve fought to put in place at the state level here in Illinois. But we can’t wait any longer to get started fighting global warming. And this bill has the potential to transform our energy systems. That’s why we decided to support—and work extremely hard for—passage of the bill.

Building support for change
Despite the concessions, the vote in the House was close, with just a seven-vote margin in favor of the legislation. (Eleven members of Illinois’ delegation voted in favor of the bill.)

We educated citizens and lawmakers on the consequences of inaction or further delay. For example, our research showed that lower crop yields resulting from climate change could cost corn growers in Illinois $243 million each year, and nationally the toll would be roughly $1.4 billion because of lower corn yields. We released our findings in Champaign along with renowned climate scientist Don Wuebbles from the University of Illinois and American Corn Growers Association President Keith Bolin.

And we went door-to-door and reached out online to raise awareness and give citizens a chance to make their voices heard, through the more than 10,400 petition signatures we gathered across the state this summer.

Next stop: The Senate
The message we heard was clear: Illinoisans are ready for developing new energy solutions and tackling the vexing challenge of global warming.

In the coming months, Environment Illinois will work hard to ensure that Sens. Dick Durbin and Roland Burris support bold energy and climate solutions. We’ll need their leadership and support to pass a strong, effective climate bill.

Restore and protect Illinois waterways
Whether it’s Lake Michigan or the Illinois River, from every great body of water flows a series of smaller streams and wetlands. But if the smaller upstream waters are fouled or impaired, the larger waters pay the price—as do the wildlife and fish that depend on them.

Unfortunately, some developers and polluters are arguing that these smaller streams and wetlands—which feed and clean our larger waterways, like Lake Michigan—aren’t covered by Clean Water Act protections. They want to throw out three decades of Clean Water Act protection, leaving polluting industries free to dump into our streams and pave over our wetlands without asking for permission.

If they get their way, more than 60 percent of Illinois’ few remaining wetlands and half of Illinois’ stream miles will be at risk for unlimited pollution and development. More than 1.5 million Illinoisans get at least some of their drinking water from waters that could lose protection.

Environment Illinois is building support to restore Clean Water Act protection to these streams and wetlands through the Clean Water Restoration Act. And we’re calling on you to make sure your legislator supports this solution.

Environment Illinois is building support to repower America with clean energy. We’re focusing much of our energy on building support among citizens and key constituencies that could influence the deciding votes.

Sign the petition in support of full restoration of Clean Water Act protections for all of our lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands by visiting www.EnvironmentIllinois.org/action.
Chicago BPA ban is first of its kind

This May, Chicago became the world’s first city to ban the toxic chemical bisphenol-A (BPA) from baby bottles and toddlers’ sippy cups. BPA is a synthetic sex hormone that mimics estrogen, but is also used in the epoxy lining of most food cans and hard clear plastic containers. Hundreds of studies link low-dose BPA exposure to early onset puberty, hyperactivity, obesity, diabetes, liver enzyme abnormalities, and breast and prostate cancers.

Environment Illinois worked closely with Chicago Aldermen Manny Flores (1st Ward) and Edward Burke (14th Ward) to pass the ordinance.

The chemical industry, relying on industry-funded studies, insists BPA is safe and has lobbied furiously against bills to ban it in dozens of states, including Illinois. When Chicago passed the ordinance, only Minnesota and Suffolk County, N.Y., had enacted similar bans.

Visit www.EnvironmentIllinois.org and click on “Child Safe Chemical Act” to learn more about BPA and other toxins that threaten children’s health.