

April 16, 2009

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Golden Gate University Environmental Law & Justice Clinic Receives EPA Environmental Award

EPA Award One of Many Clinic Successes Celebrated for Earth Day 2009

Environmental Law & Justice Clinic Receives EPA Achievement Award

The US Environmental Protection Agency's Pacific Southwest Region (Region 9) has awarded the 2009 Environmental Award to the Environmental Law & Justice Clinic (ELJC) at Golden Gate University School of Law.

"The Environmental Law & Justice Clinic at Golden Gate University School of Law is an inspiring model of collaborative work with community partners," the EPA notes in a press release issued today. "The clinic combines social justice advocacy, direct service in legal and technical areas, and student education to address environmental problems in low-income communities, communities of color and those facing language-access barriers, [and] has participated in important legal advocacy for underserved communities in areas such as greenhouse gas regulation, renewable energy projects, and the disproportionate and cumulative impacts of air pollution."

The Environmental Law and Justice Clinic is one of 40 recipients selected from more than 200 nominees of this year's Pacific Southwest Region Environmental Award. The awards recognizes commitment and contributions to the environment in California, Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii, Pacific Islands and tribal lands and are being presented today at the EPA Region 9 offices in San Francisco.

"We are very proud that the EPA has recognized our clinic for its service to the community," says School of Law Acting Dean Alan Ramo, co-founder of the clinic and co-director of the Law School's environmental law program. "The Environmental Law & Justice Clinic exemplifies our commitment to train lawyers who are talented practitioners and seek justice for their clients."

"It is a great pleasure and honor that we can recognize the innovative and important environmental work achieved by this year's impressive group of organizations and individuals, and the example they set for all of us to follow," says Laura Yoshii, the EPA's acting administrator for the Pacific Southwest Region. "This year's winners and nominees have made superb efforts to protect and preserve our air, water and land, and increased awareness of the environmental challenges we all face."

Other Earth Day News from the Environmental Law and Justice Clinic:

Environmental Law & Justice Clinic Convinces City Planning Dept. To Set Aside Decision Exempting Biodiesel Plant from Review

Golden Gate University's Environmental Law and Justice Clinic, working on behalf of Bayview Hunters Point Community Advocates, has convinced the San Francisco Planning Department to set aside its decision to exempt a 10-million gallon biodiesel facility from environmental review. The clinic argued that the decision to exempt the plant from environmental review should not have been made without notice to residents and community organizations in San Francisco's Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood, which is already negatively impacted by environmental toxins. The plant, which will be the city's first biodiesel facility, will be operated by Darling International Inc.

Under the leadership of Visiting Assistant Professor Deborah Behles, the clinic convinced the Planning Department to evaluate the project to assure that the potential environmental impacts are disclosed and mitigated as required under the California Environmental Quality Act. Student clinicians Seth Mansergh, Stephanie Rexing, Cheryl Tang, Ethan Wimert, Caroline Koch and Ken Blackwood worked on the case, helping with the investigation, drafting the complaint, and filing the brief that convinced the city to set aside its decision.

"Darling was a multi-faceted, difficult case," says second-year law student Stephanie Rexing. "Ultimately we were able to bring about an outcome that we feel will be best for the surrounding community and the City of San Francisco as a whole." Third-year law student Ethan Wimert adds, "Biofuels are a promising tool in the effort to meet the demands of a rapidly changing energy market. A thorough review of this project will ensure that San Francisco meets its commitment to safeguarding the health of its citizens while retaining its standing as the country's environmental policy leader."

"I am so proud of our staff—particularly Deborah Behles—and our students," says Associate Professor Helen Kang, director of the Environmental Law & Justice Clinic. "They investigated and brought the San Planning Department to the realization that it had made a grave error in approving the biodiesel plant at Pier 92 without looking at what it would do to the neighborhood. Many biodiesel plants have had industrial accidents with highly flammable methanol, and the cities hosting them have routinely reviewed them under our environmental review laws. Notably, when the city approved this plant, it did it so quietly that our clients wouldn't have known about it, but for Professor Behles and our students. The city called to tell us that it would initiate environmental review two days after Professor Behles and the students filed the brief."

Environmental Law & Justice Clinic Receives Two New Grants for 2009

The School of Law's Environmental Law & Justice Clinic has received two new grants to support its mission in 2009. The San Francisco Foundation has granted \$25,000 to support the clinic in providing legal and environmental science consulting services to Bay Area groups working to reduce pollution in low-income communities. In addition, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund has awarded the clinic \$20,000 to support its efforts this year. The clinic also has a multi-year grant from The California Wellness Foundation for this year's work.

About the Golden Gate University Environmental Law & Justice Clinic

The Environmental Law and Justice Clinic (ELJC) at Golden Gate University School of Law was established in 1994 as one of the first US law clinics, and the first in California, to focus on environmental justice. The clinic's mission is to train Golden Gate Law School students to be

effective and ethical lawyers and to improve environmental conditions for communities of color and low-income people, primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area and California.

The clinic is staffed with students who, under close faculty supervision, represent community clients on environmental matters. ELJC clinicians are certified under State Bar of California rules to perform many of the tasks of an attorney: they interview and counsel clients, develop legal strategies, draft legal documents, appear at hearings, and negotiate with opposing parties. For more about the School of Law's Environmental Law and Justice Clinic, contact Clinic Director Helen Kang at 415-442-6647 or visit www.ggu.edu/law.

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