

SALTA Environmental Health Session 3

THE STORY OF SAN DIEGO'S RIGHT TO KNOW

Characters / Personajes

Government Employee (GE) / Empleado de gobierno: Tony Lo Presti

Industry Employee (IE) / empleado de industria: Silvia León

Maria: EHC staff- Persona de EHC: Luz Palomino

Community Member / miembro comunitario-Rosita: Yeni Linqui

Narrator: Jorge Glackman

Props:

Signs:

#1

"In a San Diego community around 1980, there was woman, who was very worried about the odors coming from next door to her house".

#2

Planning Office

#3

HOW DISGUSTING Warehouse

#4

"Right to Know What Happened Act"

#5

End

Act One

"In a San Diego community around 1980, there was a woman who was very worried about the odors coming from next door to her house."

Coughing and holding a baby.

Rosita: Oh, what a stink!! My son, everything will be all right, you'll see. *(Talking to the boy)*. The doctor said that you have lung irritation. But my boy, get well. *(Turns to Window)* I'm almost certain these smells are what are getting him sick. What can I give the boy so he doesn't get sick? Maybe, whoever knows what these guys have in there, can tell me how to prevent this lung irritation that you have. Although, who knows what they have in there? They take barrels in and out every night. What could it be? Nobody knows. But I can't just stand here not doing anything, while you get sick. Oh, I know! I'm going to go to the city authorities. I'm sure they do know what these guys have in there. I'm going to go the planning office, first thing tomorrow.

The next day...at the Planning Office, Rosita comes in...

Rosita: Good afternoon. Is this where you grant Business permits?

EG: Yes. Do you need a permit?

Rosita: No, I have a question.

EG: Let's hear it, maybe I can help you.

Rosita: It's about a Business next door to my house.

Look, since some time ago, my son has been coughing a lot. And the thing is that a lot of smoke comes out from there, and I wanted to know what they keep in there.

EG: Oh, I don't have that information. That is privileged information, and only the owners and workers of the premises can get that kind of information.

Rosita: But, wasn't it here where the permit was granted?

EG: Yes, it was. But the only information we have here is the use that will be given to the place. The business that you are referring to stated its operations as a patent processing and recycling warehouse. That's all.

Rosita: So then, you don't have information on the Chemicals that are kept in there.

EG: Well, yes and no. They had to have turned in that information, but it is not available to the public. In other words, we don't have the slightest obligation to give it to anyone.

Rosita: But I'm telling you that the fumes or vapors get all the way to my house, and my son gets very sick often. I want you to tell me if there is anything I can do to prevent him from getting sick.

EG: Oh, lady, we're not here to listen to your problems. Maybe what your son needs is a good diet.

Rosita: My son eats well.

EG: So, take him to the doctor.

Rosita: I have, and they have told me that the problem is a respiratory irritant, and I want to know what they keep in that warehouse to see if it has anything to do with the respiratory irritation that my son is suffering from.

EG: Well, go and ask them. We're not obligated to give you that information.

Rosita: Very well then, that's what I'll do.

The next day, in front of HOW DISGUSTING Warehouse

Rosita: Good morning. Are you in charge of this place?

Man: Yes, lady. How can I help you?

Rosita: Well, I live in that house, right there. And I have a son, who has been diagnosed with bronchitis caused by an irritant. I come here because I would like to know what kind of chemicals you keep here.

Man: Well, I can't tell you that.

Rosita: Why not?

Man: Well, because I can't, but thank you for coming.

Rosita: And who can give me that information?

Man: Look, no company is obligated to give that information to the public. If you worked here, and you had to handle the chemicals, you would be informed. But none of our workers here has gotten sick, so what your son probably has is laziness.

Rosita: My son is one year old and something is causing him a respiratory irritation.

Man: I already told you, what can you know about chemicals? The information about what is kept here is of no use for you. These chemicals cannot be harming anyone. They're harmless, benign, chemicals. Maybe it's what you cook.

Rosita: But I want to know what those fumes that come out of this place are. I would also like to know if there are any other risks such as an explosion, or anything like that, that might happen.

Man: Well, as I already told you, we are not going to provide you with that information. I have to go. The office is closed. Good bye.

Rosita is left there, alone

Rosita: Oh! I don't know what I'm going to do. It seems like as a neighbor in this community, I'm not allowed to know what they keep in there.

At that moment, a person from EHC passes by and sees Rosita

Maria: Good afternoon lady, how are you doing?

Rosita: Well, thank you.

Maria: Well, my name is Maria, I am from the EHC, and today we are collecting signatures to support a new law in San Diego, which establishes that the public has the right to know what they are breathing and what kinds of things are around them. A law that in fact, gives us the right to know what industries are dumping into the water, the air, and in general, to our bodies.

Rosita: Well, I'm glad Maria! That's exactly my situation right now. My son...

Narrator:

And that is how after many attempts to obtain information, it was decided that the only alternative for people to know what was around them, not only in warehouses, but also in factories and other places that dump toxic waste, which affect public health, would be an act that would grant that right to the public. It was not easy to convince Congress to adopt it, but many testimonies from people like Rosita and Maria, made it possible to pass the first right to know law in 1980. However, the struggle would continue...

Rosita and Maria are in front of HOW DISGUSTING Warehouse

Both: *Carrying a sign that says "The San Diego Right to Know Act – has been passed"*

We won, yoo-hoo! Now, we are able to know what affects our community's health. Bravo!

Rosita: Well, how good, and how bad. Now I know what these guys are keeping here is toxic, and very harmful for our health. And it is the cause for my son to be sick. Sons...

Maria: Then, let's go talk to them, and ask them when they are leaving.

Rosita: OK

They knock on the door.

Man: Yes?

Rosita: I'm the neighbor who came to talk to you about a year ago, and here is my friend from EHC, Maria.

Man: And what do you want?

Rosita: Well, we came to see if you are already planning on changing your operations for cleaner ones, or if you are thinking about taking off.

Man: What we are doing is organizing every industry owner to create an industrial environmental association. We are going to get together to fight against ignorant people like you. Do you know what you are going to lose?

Maria: But, what are you talking about?

Man: First of all, we are going to hire politicians on our side (*Holds EG*), who are not going to let themselves be corrupted by those ideas from you, ignorant people. And if that doesn't work, we're going to move to another country where there are no ridiculous laws such as the "right to know" law. What you are going to see is that you are going to end up without work and without industries.

Maria and Rosita look at each other

Maria: Well, there must be someone who wants to keep the environment clean!

They leave

Narrator:

Well, this is how EHC participated on creating the local Right to Know Act, one of the first victories of the organization. The organization and the communities achieved environmental justice, but as you can see this work had some implications. This new law will be enforced unequally. In other words, we face the fact that in any country or planet some inhabitants or residents are protected more than others. We call this inequality, **Environmental Racism**, but that's another play.

There were others, some good, some bad, but this sent a message to the state about environmental protection. The state adopted another modeled law after this one, at a state level. In many other places, they haven't yet adopted measures about the public right to information, such as this one. That has made it possible for many industries to go to those places or countries and pollute the environment. This is now a global problem, but the right to know has been a unique tool to fight environmental degradation and protect public health.

Narrator shows a sign to the public that reads...

The End