



COURTESY CARYN WAECHTER

# RADIUM GIRLS RISE UP

## A CENTURY-OLD TALE OF TOXICITY RESONATES TODAY

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“Have you ever felt poisoned by a job you thought you were lucky to have?”

That timeless concern, expressed by the main characters in the newly released film *Radium Girls*, is reminiscent of classic movies like *Erin Brockovich*, *Silkwood*, and more recently, *Dark Waters*. It is also a concern voiced among workers, essential and otherwise, in the time of COVID-19.

Yet the story of *Radium Girls* has something different. Based on true events, the victims became the activists. They were naive, vulnerable young girls and women, painting glow-in-the-dark watch dials in a radium factory 100 years ago in New Jersey, utterly unaware of how toxic that substance could be.

“Several years ago, I was looking for a screenplay that would combine my passion for the environment with my storytelling career,” says producer/director Lydia Dean Pilcher. “When I read

Ginny Mohler and Brittany Shaw’s screenplay for *Radium Girls*, I was captivated by this radical coming-of-age story, told through the eyes of teenage sisters—played by Golden Globe nominees Joey King and Abby Quinn—whose big dreams get shattered by their discovery of a corporate cover-up with fatal consequences.”

The early women’s political movement plays a significant role as well in pushing this story to a higher level of national media attention. It was the 1920s, and women had just won the right to vote. They wanted to use their new power in that time of rapid scientific discovery and growth in industrial productivity.

Pilcher, with co-director/writer Ginny Mohler and producer Emily McEvoy, created an innovative feature film in both metaphorical content and timing related to our current moments of crisis. They found a story that touches on many of today’s social hot buttons: women’s issues, the integrity of scientific



Producer Emily McEvoy, writer Brittany Shaw, producer/director Lydia Dean Pilcher, and writer/director Ginny Mohler premiered *Radium Girls* at the Tribeca Film Festival. An active social impact campaign promotes the film's powerful environmental message.

research, environmental justice, worker safety, and public health concerns around toxic chemical regulation.

Pilcher has produced more than 40 feature films, and they all pack a punch: *The Namesake*, *Iron Jawed Angels* and *Queen of Katwe* are all examples of powerful films of human resilience. For *Radium Girls*, a group of female Broadway producers, including Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner, joined as executive producers to support and amplify the work of the creative team.

In March 2020, the trailer for *Radium Girls* was playing in theaters across the U.S. when the current global pandemic shuttered movie theaters and completely upended all traditional routes of distribution. The producers had a 90-day theatrical commitment to fulfill before the movie could launch on Netflix. Pilcher watched as a new virtual cinema model evolved.

Filmmakers and indie distributors began to partner with art houses and independent theaters to promote films to their communities and share in ticket revenue for digital screenings. By the end of the summer, eager to push out the movie before the election, Pilcher decided to aim for an October release date.

While Juno Films re-booked the movie in drive-ins, socially distanced venues and virtual cinemas, Team Radium Girls reached out to national groups with common purpose and offered partnerships. They built a wide-reaching social impact campaign featuring more than 65 organizations and affinity groups that responded with enthusiasm. Every partner gets their own unique link on the Eventive platform, a filmmaker Q&A on Zoom, and a social media toolkit with graphics for any outlet—and then they run with it.

The affinity partners included large and small advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club, the National Coalition of Labor

Union Women, International Society of Women Engineers, National Science Teachers Association, AARP, National Women's Studies Association, The Climate Reality Project, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, League of Women Voters, the Carnegie Science Center, the Sloan Science on Screen program and many more.

"*Radium Girls* reminds us that in order to move toward a brighter, more equitable and just future, we have to know the past that came before it," wrote a Sierra Club reviewer. "That is the first step toward healing."

Radium, not banned until the '70s, is still present in old factories that are now EPA Superfund sites. Radium is a "forever" chemical that doesn't break down in the environment, much like the toxic PFAS and PFOAS that impact our health today. Team Radium Girls is now partnering with the Sierra Club on their existing Gender and Toxics Initiative in a PSA campaign to create greater awareness of these harmful "unseen" chemicals.

Pilcher was trained in the Climate Reality Project's program for climate communicators, and she knew that people have a harder time understanding things they can't see—such as climate change, radium, even COVID-19. "Audiences' keen interest in watching true stories is to see the real truth that is revealed. *Radium Girls* is a story that really happened. It's history; you can't deny it," says Pilcher.

*Radium Girls* is in theatrical/virtual cinema release, and will be available on Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, Apple TV+ and Google Play. For more details, follow Team Radium Girls on Instagram and Facebook @radiumgirlsmovie. ■

To find out more about PGA's environmental initiatives and the Studio Production Alliance, visit [greenproductionguide.com](http://greenproductionguide.com).