Precautionary Principle
–Practical Policy to Protect Children's Health

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The Goal:
Transforming the way we make decisions

Instead of asking, "How much environmental harm will be allowed?", in San Francisco, decision-makers will ask a very different question: "How little harm is possible?"

The Precautionary Principle does not pre-determine an outcome.

It creates a process for decision making.

The Precautionary Approach:

- Risk Assessment
  - What is an acceptable level of harm? (i.e. # of cancers in 1000 people)
  - Does this activity (product) fall within that acceptable level?
  - Single activity considered
- Alternatives Assess.
  - Is this potentially hazardous activity (product) necessary?
  - What less hazardous options are available?
  - How little damage is possible?
  - Multiple activities compared

San Francisco's Precautionary Principle Ordinance

- Chapter One of a newly formed Environment Code – over arching principle.
  - For complete text see: www.sfenvironment.org

- Five Tenets Define a Mechanism for Implementation

1. Duty to take anticipatory action to prevent harm

Historically, environmentally harmful activities have only been stopped after they have manifested extreme environmental degradation or exposed people to harm.

Waiting Too Long?

- Lead in gasoline, paint
- Asbestos in building materials
- Tobacco
- PCB's, DDT, CFC's
- PVC, Brominated Flame Retardants
- Global Warming

2. Right to know complete and accurate information

Burden to supply this information lies with the proponent not the general public

- Potential human health and environmental impacts are often not disclosed or even known

- Example: "Inerts" in pesticides

  Plutonium handling and releases

3. Duty to examine a full range of alternatives, *including doing nothing*

- Obligation to select alternative with least potential negative impact
- Selecting which alternatives are considered and selected is a political/ public decision

- Example: How can discharges of plutonium be avoided/minimized?

4. Must consider the full range of costs, including costs outside the initial price

- All reasonable foreseeable costs: raw materials, transportation, manufacturing, clean up, disposal

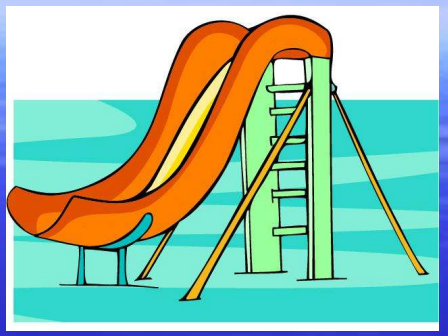
- Example: All costs associated with prevention of discharges.

5. Decisions must be transparent, participatory, and informed by the best available information

- Locally or internationally the public bears the ecological and health consequences of these decisions. *Environmental Democracy*

- *Example: Who is at the table to determine practices at the Lab?*

Implementation in San Francisco



- **Arsenic Treated Wood**
  - Evaluated health and environmental impacts
    - *Sufficient evidence of harm*
  - Alternatives analysis revealed:
    - Most applications have a less toxic formulation (ACQ, CBA)
    - Submerged Aquatic applications - arsenic treated wood is the most environmentally preferable formulation

The Precautionary Principle:

≠ Zero risk	= Minimize harm
≠ Zero science	= Maximize information/ science
≠ Loss of jobs	= Increase innovation
≠Predetermined outcome (i.e. ban)	= Transparent Process for public decision making

Re-defining the Central Question for Decision Makers:

It is NOT sufficient to ask:

Is it legal?

Is it safe?

We Also MUST ask:

Is it necessary?