

Who Else is Applying the Precautionary Principle?

Other governmental bodies taking action based on the Precautionary Principle include: San Francisco, the Los Angeles Unified and Emeryville Unified School Districts, the California Environmental Protection Agency, the cities of Portland, OR and Denton, TX, the states of New York and Massachusetts, and the European Union .

The County of Mendocino has worked with the Mendocino Partnership for the Precautionary Principle to develop a procedure to make the Precautionary Principle operational. The pilot projects provide staff and the public an opportunity to apply the developed Precautionary Principle Procedure to important County decisions. The Partnership created the Precautionary Principle Procedure and Public Participation Guidelines to make clear to all parties how residents can be involved in decision-making, as public participation is a key element of the Precautionary Principle.

The Mendocino Partnership for the Precautionary Principle is a diverse group of individuals from organizations, government agencies and businesses working together to implement precautionary action to protect health and the environment in Mendocino County, CA. The Partnership is also all of us wanting to take environmental precaution for our future.

Please join the Partnership and be involved in implementation of the Principle.

Printed on recycled paper with soy ink 

History of Precautionary Action in Mendocino County

For some time now, our local governments and communities have instinctively, though informally, incorporated the Precautionary Principle into various policies.

For example, based on a desire to better protect human health and the environment:

- In 1979, Mendocino County adopted an ordinance barring the aerial overspray of organophosphate-based pesticides.
- By year 2004, 90% of school districts in Mendocino County ceased using pesticides on school property. The remaining district implemented a pilot project to phase out the use of herbicides. In March 2004, county voters chose to restrict the growing of genetically modified organisms to protect organic farming systems and safeguard against possible ecological and human health impacts of the new technology on our food supply.
- In May 2005, the City of Point Arena adopted an ordinance restricting the growing and raising of genetically modified organisms.
- In June 2006, the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors adopted the Marc A. Lappé Memorial Precautionary Principle as an Administrative Policy to make county decisions with future generations in mind.
- In September 2007, the Water Agency and Environmental Health launched pilot projects to put the Policy into action.

Join the Partnership online at:
www.mendoprecaution.org
Phone: (707)884-5002
Email: info@environmentalcommons.org

The Marc A. Lappé Precautionary Principle Policy, Mendocino County

Adopted by the
Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
June 27, 2006

Making Decisions for the Future

Instead of asking,
“How much environmental
harm will be allowed?”
decision-makers ask,
“How little harm is possible?”

For more information:
www.mendoprecaution.org
Phone: (707) 884-5002
Email: info@environmentalcommons.org

What is the Precautionary Principle?

It's the common sense advice, "Look before you leap," and "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

The Precautionary Principle is a framework for decision-making that anticipates how actions will affect the environment and health of future generations. When it is apparent that an activity is a potential threat to the environment or human health, full scientific certainty is not necessary to initiate precautionary action.

Precautionary decision-making is based on thorough examination of alternatives, transparency, community participation, and prevention of harm. It is not a ban on products or practices.

To support a healthy future, decisions must be made with greater care than in the past. The effects of careless and harmful activities have accumulated over the years. Humans and the rest of the natural world have a limited capacity to absorb and overcome such harm.

Implementing the Precautionary Principle

In September 2007, the Mendocino County Water Agency and the Environmental Health Division embarked upon pilot projects to implement the Precautionary Principle Policy.

The Water Agency will apply the Precautionary Principle to its state-mandated Stormwater Management Program. A leading source of stream pollution is polluted stormwater runoff. When rain falls on land and impervious areas such as paved streets, parking lots and building rooftops, it can wash away soil and sediment. Polluted stormwater runoff containing oil, grease, chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, metals, debris and pathogens for example, can severely reduce water quality. If left unmanaged, runoff stresses streams, ages lakes, and degrades wetlands.

The Environmental Protection Agency requires Mendocino County to have a Stormwater Management Program and implement practices to control polluted stormwater runoff in the unincorporated urbanized areas of Ukiah and Fort Bragg. The County will be subject to fines if the Stormwater Plan does not result in set limits on toxins in stormwater run-off.

The goal of applying the Precautionary Principle to this Program is to enhance the effectiveness of the existing Stormwater Discharge Plan, by further reducing untreated discharges that contribute high levels of pollutants to receiving bodies of water.

Environmental Health has chosen to open the County's Vector Control Program to Precautionary decision-making. The means of mosquito larva control as a preventive measure against West Nile Virus will be open to comment by residents seeking the most effective and least environmentally harmful method.

Five Key Elements of the Precautionary Principle

1. **Anticipatory Action:** There is a duty to take anticipatory action to prevent harm. Government, business, and community groups, as well as the general public, share this responsibility.
2. **Right to Know:** The community has a "right to know" complete and accurate information on potential human health and environmental impacts associated with the selection of products, services, operations, or plans.
3. **Alternatives Assessment:** There is an obligation to examine a full range of alternatives and select the one with the least harmful potential impact on human health and the environment, including the option of doing nothing.
4. **Full Cost Accounting:** When evaluating potential alternatives, there is a duty to consider all the reasonably foreseeable short and long-term costs and benefits to public as well as private sectors of the community, even if such costs are not reflected in the price. Some of these costs and benefits may include raw materials, manufacturing, transportation, use, cleanup, eventual disposal, labor, energy, health, safety, and job-creation.
5. **Participatory Decision Process:** Decisions applying the Precautionary Principle must be transparent, participatory, and informed by the best available science and other relevant information.