The Precautionary Principle

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The Precautionary Principle

• Alternatively called the Principle for Precautionary Action. It has been emerging for the past 15 years as a principle for guiding human activities, to prevent harm to the environment and human health.
Consensus Statement 1998

“The release and use of toxic substances, the exploitation of resources, the physical alterations of the environment have had substantial unintended consequences affecting human health and the environment. Some of these concerns are high rates of learning deficiencies, asthma, cancer, birth defects and species extinctions, along with global climate change, and worldwide contamination with toxic substances and nuclear materials.”
Consensus Statement

“We believe existing environmental regulations...have FAILED to protect adequately human health and the environment-the larger system of which humans are but a part.”
Consensus Statement

“We believe there is compelling evidence that damage to humans and the worldwide environment is of such magnitude and seriousness that new principles for conducting human activities are necessary...people must proceed more carefully than has been the case in recent history. Corporations, government entities, communities and scientists must adopt a precautionary approach to all human endeavors.”
Consensus Challenge

“When an activity raises the threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically. In this context the proponent of an activity, rather than the public, should bear the burden of proof.”
The Precautionary Principle

1. People have a duty to take anticipatory action to prevent harm

2. The burden of proof of harmlessness of a new technology, process, activity, or chemical lies with the proponents, not with the general public.
3. Before using a new technology, process, or starting a new activity, people have an obligation to examine a full range of alternatives, including the alternative of doing nothing.

4. Decisions applying the precautionary principle must be open, informed, and democratic and must include affected parties.
The Precautionary Principle

In common sense terms can be summarized as:

- “Look before you leap.”
- “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”