



TAKING PRECAUTIONARY ACTION!

Over the past several years, ECO-Action's action education program, *Need to Know Initiative*, has been successful at bringing attention to the impact that toxic chemicals have on our health and even on our children's behaviors and ability to learn (See *Community Exchange* #190). You can also view our poster, "Anthony Can't Learn," about children's learning and behavior problems due to chemical exposure at our website www.eco-act.org.

At ECO-Action, our position has always been that it is not good enough to "educate" people about problems without offering "action options" for people to engage in to make a positive change. Thus when we design a program to inform, we design it to inspire actions necessary to change the problem—this process is called "action education." Now hundreds of groups (250 original organizational endorsers) across the country are joining forces to take action in a nationwide campaign called **BE SAFE (Blueprint Ensuring our Safety And Future Economy)**.

With the lead of the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (formerly Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, Lois Gibbs, Director) a newly-created coalition has emerged called the **Environmental Health Alliance** (see detailed description below) to build a unified demand for preventive, protective policies on human health and the environment. *The goal is to place the BE SAFE "precautionary approach" message into the forefront of public and political consciousness.*

The "Promoting the Precautionary Principle" or "Taking Precautionary Action" are difficult phrases to banter about, but the principle has a powerful message and an impressive record of success. *In fact this summer in San Francisco, the Board of Supervisors adopted the precautionary principle as city and county policy!*

The San Francisco Precautionary Principle (Sec 101) basically states that when we have credible evidence on harm, we should act and not wait until conclusive proof—only found as a result of severe illness and death—can be established. The goal is to "prevent,"

rather than knowingly allow harm to occur. The San Francisco policy can be used as a model for your local government or school boards to adopt. The concise and very readable policy can be easily accessed online at www.rachel.org as Rachel's *Environment and Health News* #765 or from ECO-Action.

This concept of prevention (precautionary principle) and making it "official policy" is achievable when we build grassroots support for it! Right now, many in our country see that the only way to deal with the very, real threat from chemical exposure is one of "prevention." People are very tired of waiting until the worst case scenario happens—a disaster—and then investigating only to find that manufacturers and government was well aware of the potential harm but failed to take action.

If you have internet access, you can learn more about the campaign at www.besafenet.com or contact Yomi Noibi at ECO-Action if you would like to have someone speak to your group about the precautionary principle and how it would work in your community. You can also sign on to the campaign to work with other Georgia groups. Currently the following groups in Georgia are part of the BE SAFE campaign: Chattahoochee RiverKeeper, Inc.—Columbus; ECO-Action; Physicians for Social Responsibility—Atlanta, Refashion Network, Inc; and the Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy, Clark Atlanta University.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE

Blueprint Ensuring Our Safety And Future Economy

BE SAFE Platform

In the 21st century, we envision a world in which our food, water and air are clean, and our children grow up healthy and thrive. Everyone needs a protected, safe community and workplace, and natural environment to enjoy. We can make this world vision a reality. The tools we bring to this work are prevention, safety, responsibility and democracy.

Our goal is to prevent pollution and environmental destruction before it happens. We support this

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Contact us to find out how ECO-Action can help your community group.

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precautionary approach because it is preventive medicine for our environment and health. It makes sense to:

- Prevent pollution and make polluters, not taxpayers, pay and assume responsibility for damage they cause;
- Protect our children from chemical and radioactive exposures to avoid illness and suffering;
- Promote use of safe, renewable, non-toxic technologies; and
- Provide a natural environment we can all enjoy with clean air, swimmable, fishable waters, and stewardship for our national forests.

We choose a "better safe than sorry" approach motivated by caution and prevention. We endorse the common-sense approach outlined in the Blueprint's four principles listed below.

BE SAFE Platform Principles

HEED EARLY WARNINGS

Government and industry have a duty to prevent harm, when there is credible evidence that harm is occurring or is likely to occur—even when the exact nature and full magnitude of harm is not yet proven.

PUT SAFETY FIRST

Industry and government have a responsibility to thoroughly study the potential for harm from a new chemical or technology before it is used—rather than assume it is harmless until proven otherwise. We need to ensure it is safe now, or we will be sorry later. Research on impacts to workers and the public needs to be confirmed by independent third parties.

EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

Precautionary decisions place the highest priority on protecting health and the environment, and help develop cleaner technologies and industries with effective safeguards and enforcement. Government

and industry decisions should be based on meaningful citizen input and mutual respect (the golden rule), with the highest regard for those whose health may be affected and for our irreplaceable natural resources—not for those with financial interests. Uncompromised science should inform public policy.

CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTION

Decision-making by government, industry and individuals must include an evaluation of alternatives, and the choice of the safest, technically feasible solutions. We support innovation and promotion of technologies and solutions that create a healthy environment and economy, and protect our natural resources.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

You Have A Stake in the South!

The Southern Strategic Thinking And Action Convention (or Southern STAAC) will be held October 30-November 2 in Birmingham, Alabama. Workshops are arranged in half-day, one day, and two day formats. *ECO-Action will be presenting a workshop on power Saturday morning at the convention.* For information, contact the Southern Organizing Cooperative at 205-715-4480 or email orgcoop@bellsouth.net.

Taking Applications Now

The ECO-Action Training the Trainer Series is a year-long, 4 weekend seminar, leadership development program. To participate in *the ECO-Action Training the Trainer Series, Class of 2004*, contact the office for an application (404) 584-6499.

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**Community Exchange-
Linking Grassroots
Communities in Georgia**