

# JUST TRANSITION



## From Unsafe Workplaces & Environments to Sustainable Jobs & Healthy Communities

### ■ What is “Just Transition”?

“Just Transition” is a principle, process, and practice to ensure there is justice for workers and communities as our country transitions to a clean environment and healthier economy. The principle of Just Transition is that a healthy economy and a clean environment can and should co-exist. The process for achieving this vision should be a fair one that does not cost workers and communities their health, environment, jobs, or economic assets, and fairly compensates any losses. The practice of Just Transition is to put the people who are most affected by polluting industrial practices—the frontline workers and the fence line communities—in the leadership of crafting policy solutions.

### ■ Why Do We Need It?

Just Transition is about achieving a sustainable economy in communities where polluting industries are transitioning to cleaner ways of doing business. We need to make sure environmental victories—such as shutting down polluting facilities—don’t become economic and personal disasters for workers and communities. Communities that will lose income, benefits, and tax bases as local industries make environmentally sound transitions should be provided with support from government and industry to retrain workers and clean up contaminated neighborhoods that may be left behind.

### ■ Who Is Involved?

Since 1996, the Just Transition movement has been building a voluntary coalition of labor and environmental justice activists who are creating a dialogue on Just Transition issues on local, national, and international levels. The process of Just Transition from unsafe workplaces and environments to healthy, viable communities with a sustainable economy is building momentum. The Just Transition coalition provides valuable tools such as educational workshops, joint fundraising, local organizing partnerships, and policy development.

## **BE SAFE: Take Precautionary Action to Protect Communities & Workers**

# BE SAFE's FOUR PRINCIPLES

## 1. HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

We must heed the early warning signs of impacts to our communities from industries transitioning to more environmentally sound practices. Government and industry must be called on to support just transitions for workers and communities affected by plant shutdowns so they aren't left behind to deal with high unemployment rates and toxic pollution from abandoned factories. The precautionary approach and Just Transition process are mutually supportive. By being cautious, we protect the people who are most affected by pollution, and ensure they participate in decisions about the best ways to protect their health, safety, and economic assets.

## 2. PUT SAFETY FIRST

Just Transition policies put safety first by supporting the use of cleaner, safer methods of industrial production. In instances where the best way to protect human health and the environment is to eliminate the production of toxic chemicals, workers should be offered jobs with equivalent pay, career prospects, and retraining. Plans for sustainable economic development for the impacted community should also be made.

As we put safety first, we need to make sure we do not:

- Improve the health and safety of workers inside a facility by transferring pollutants to disadvantaged communities for disposal;
- Make the transition to organic farming without improving the working conditions, wages, and benefits to farm workers;
- Sacrifice the health or well being of any group of people in any region or country so we can achieve environmental or economic improvements elsewhere.

## 3. EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

We can exercise democracy by supporting just transition policies. Show support for organized labor and people of color environmental justice organizations through your political work and financial contributions. Demand that both workers and community residents participate in local policy making boards. Include "just transition" language in all environmental and economic policies, as well as provisions for compensating for health, environmental, or job losses. The Just Transition coalition strengthens local community-labor alliances through education and organizing. You can support these local alliances in challenging unfair corporate practices, and help promote responsible pollution prevention strategies.

## 4. CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTIONS

We can work together to choose the safest solutions that will protect workers, jobs, and communities while industries transition to cleaner, environmentally-sound practices.

### ■ **Support Just Transition.**

For more information on the Just Transition principle and community & labor projects, contact Just Transition Alliance at [www.jtalliance.org](http://www.jtalliance.org) or 202-588-1850.

### ■ **BE SAFE.**

Take precautionary action to protect workers and communities and support just transition. Sign on to the BE SAFE Platform on the next page. Be counted when we deliver this national Platform to the White House in 2005. Endorse the BE SAFE Platform today at [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com).

### ■ **Your Vote Counts.**

The next election will set the country's course on just transition policies. For information on state and federal environmental voting records, contact [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org) and [www.lcv.org](http://www.lcv.org). To register to vote, contact [www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net).

## Workers & Communities Unite to Create Just Transition

- In 2001, the Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas closed and 16,000 workers lost their jobs. As the local community grapples with the economic loss and a suspected contaminated site, Just Transition organizers are making sure this primarily Latino working-class community is part of any deal-making between government, developers, and training and educational entities. Organizers created their own Community Development Authority to involve the community in the economic transition. This model can teach us how to construct community-based economic development strategies and facilitate worker dislocations and community cleanup through community and labor alliances.
- In Rillito, Arizona, Just Transition organizers are nurturing an alliance between a local union at the Arizona Portland Cement (APC) plant, the community, and Tucsonians for a Clean Environment. For four years, workers were without a contract and the fence line community suffered from the state's worst air pollution. Just Transition community workshops and joint picketing at the plant have assisted a new union contract in 2002 and heightened attention to community concerns. A recent \$82,000 fine against APC for exceeding air emission standards points to the effectiveness of union-community complaints to the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

### References:

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# ***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 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 the damage they cause;*
- *Protect our children from chemical and radioactive exposures to avoid illness and suffering;*
- *Promote use of safe, renewable, non-toxic technologies;*
- *Provide a natural environment we can all enjoy with clean air, swimmable, fishable water 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 BE SAFE’s four principles listed below.*

## ***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.

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**Take precautionary action to protect workers and communities with just transition.**

**Sign onto the BE SAFE Platform.**

Be counted when we deliver this national platform to the White House in 2005.

Endorse the platform today at [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com)

BE SAFE is coordinated by the Center for Health, Environment & Justice. To sign the platform or for more information, contact us at CHEJ, P.O. Box 6806, Falls Church, VA 22040, 703-237-2249, or 518-732-4538, or visit [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com)

