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# Precautionary Action Benefits Workers & Economy

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■ **Jobs vs. Environment Myth.** There is a widely held misconception that environmental regulations harm our economy and put Americans out of work. One reason the “jobs versus the environment” mindset has gained momentum in the US is due to a shift from manufacturing-oriented jobs to service-oriented jobs over the last 20 years that coincided with an increase in environmental regulations over the same period. Americans have felt the loss of millions of manufacturing jobs since the 1980s, but the contributing factors are largely increased competition from imports, shifts in demand, technological changes, corporate downsizing, and defense cutbacks. [Yapijakis] Another misconception is that environmental regulations cause US companies to relocate to countries with lower standards. However, most businesses move to gain access to new markets, find cheaper labor, escape from taxes, or gain political stability and influence. These factors have a much greater affect on profitability than the costs of complying with environmental regulations, which rarely amount to 2-3% of a company’s sales revenue. [Ackerman]

■ **Safety & Precautionary Action Increases Jobs.** Economists have repeatedly found that there is no association between environmental regulations and employment. Contrary to widespread belief, environmental regulations have rarely (if ever) caused businesses to shut down or flee to countries with weaker standards. The opposite is more often true: environmental regulations, clean production, and implementation of safe alternatives can create high-quality job opportunities. Studies have found environmental regulations have a positive impact on overall employment. Environmental protection creates more than 1,360 jobs annually, thus creating a net increase in employment. [Ackerman] The US environmental industry is now a hundred billion dollar business employing over a million people in a variety of technical, service, and policy-oriented jobs, as compared to 25 years ago when it was a \$10 billion business mainly focused on handling waste. [Yapijakis] A study to test the likely effects of environmental regulations on employment in the most polluting U.S. industries — pulp and paper, plastics, petroleum, and steel—found no evidence that environmental regulations play a major role. [Morgenstein]

■ **Healthy Economy & Environment.** Environmentally sound processes can be more labor intensive than the alternatives they replace: for instance, recycling creates more jobs than land filling. Energy efficient policies likewise can create local jobs: instead of buying oil from abroad, we can buy domestic products such as insulation and support energy-efficient construction. Jobs created in support of environmental protection policies are securely rooted in the domestic economy—the money generated from environmental measures do not rely on imports or exports from other countries. As one of the world leaders on environmental protection and clean manufacturing and energy technologies, our country has an unprecedented opportunity to leverage our know-how to promote a global standard showing that a healthy economy and a healthy environment go hand-in-hand. (See *Clean Production Brochure*.)

■ **99.9% of all Layoffs are Not Environmentally Related.** As illustrated in the table on page 2, government data reveal few manufacturing plants shut down as a result of environmental or safety regulations. [Ackerman] Of course, this does not automatically help a laid-off coal miner or logger. While net increases in employment are essential for a healthy economy, it is equally important to provide income support and retraining opportunities for the workers who lose their jobs, including the 999 out of 1,000 who lose their jobs for reasons other than environmental protection. (See *Just Transition Brochure*.)

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## 99.9% of Layoffs Are Not Environmentally Related

Year	Layoff "Events"		Workers Laid Off	
	Total	Environmental	Total	Environmental
1996	5,697	7	1,184,355	1,098
1997	5,683	5	1,146,115	541
1998	5,851	7	1,227,573	1,538
1999	5,675	13	1,149,276	3,394
2000	5,620	7	1,170,427	1,142
2001	8,350	3	1,751,187	445
<b>Average</b>	<b>6,146</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1,271,487</b>	<b>1,360</b>
<b>% Environmental</b>		<b>0.1%</b>		<b>0.1%</b>

*Layoff "Events": Employers reporting 50 or more workers out of work for 31 or more days.*

*Total: Layoffs for all reasons.*

*Environmental: Layoffs for environmental reasons.*

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 14, 2002

## BE SAFE'S FOUR PRINCIPLES

### 1. HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Workers are usually the first to be injured by careless and wasteful business practices that contaminate the workplace and surrounding community and are often exposed to higher levels of toxic chemicals than the population-at-large. As a result, illnesses related to exposure often show up first in workers—the "canaries in the coal mine". Early warning signs of the hazards of vinyl chloride were first recognized when workers using this chemical developed a rare form of cancer. Infertility and cancer among agricultural workers exposed to pesticides, and birth defects and cancer in their children, also pointed to a link between workplace exposures and serious health effects. [Ackerman]

The precautionary approach guides us to act early to prevent likely harm to workers and communities from toxic exposures. By heeding early warning signs and taking precautionary action to prevent chemical exposures, we can prevent untold suffering from cancers and other devastating health problems, and save society huge costs associated with treatment.

### 2. PUT SAFETY FIRST

We must continue to promote the use of alternative products and production processes that reduce or eliminate workplace health hazards. Environmental regulations, clean production, and use of safe alternatives can create high-quality job opportunities. The economic costs of inaction can be enormous, far outweighing any economic costs of precautionary action. In the vast majority of cases, a precautionary approach will actually benefit workers and the economy by stimulating innovation and creating safe, relatively high-paying, unionized jobs. [Ackerman]

### 3. EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

As environmental awareness and regulations to protect the environment have increased, more and more businesses are operating under a new environmental ethic that profit should not occur at the expense of societal well-being or destruction of natural resources. However, this shift in corporate thinking would not have taken place without environmental regulations, consumer pressure, and re-education of management. [Yapijakis] We need to support and promote environmentally conscious businesses and protective worker safety policies.

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)

## 4. CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTIONS

### ■ Spread the Word

Help dispel the “jobs vs. environment” myth. Let people know about the studies that show strong environmental protections contribute to job growth.

### ■ Support Worker Safety

Support local campaigns to protect workers. Contact the national AFL-CIO Health & Safety Department at [www.aflcio.org/safety/](http://www.aflcio.org/safety/) and the National Council on Occupational Safety & Health (COSH) at [www.coshnetwork.org](http://www.coshnetwork.org) about activities in your region.

### ■ BE SAFE

Take precautionary action for a healthy workplace, environment and economy. Sign on to the BE SAFE Platform and 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 worker safety policies. For information on 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).

## Lessons Learned from Asbestos: Heed Early Warning Signs & Take Precautionary Action

### A \$30 Billion Mistake in The Netherlands

The tragedy of asbestos exposure provides one illustration of the costs of inaction. The hazards of asbestos exposure (primarily lung disease) were first identified over 100 years ago, and the case against asbestos steadily grew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as exposure was repeatedly linked to cancer. A 1999 study looked at the illnesses, deaths, and associated costs that have resulted from asbestos exposure in just one country—the Netherlands. It is estimated by 2030 some 52,000 Dutch people will have suffered from asbestos-related diseases, and \$30 billion will have to be spent to address asbestos-related problems. This includes money spent on asbestos removal, medical treatment of victims, compensation to victims, clean-up costs after asbestos fires, disposal, and other attempts to repair the damage. This is just the monetary cost; it does not include the agony of the deaths and illnesses due to asbestos. This enormous human and monetary cost could have been avoided by paying attention to the early warnings of the health and environmental hazards of asbestos.

### U.S. Ban & Worker Compensation Needed

Even though asbestos exposure has been linked to cancer since the 1930s, the US was still debating the issue until the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned the production and distribution of asbestos in 1989. Unfortunately, the US ban was overturned three years later by a federal appeals court, and EPA has not proposed a new ban since. Thousands of injured U.S. workers have been fighting for years in the courts and Congress for adequate compensation. We must take precautionary action now to provide compensation to injured workers and ban asbestos in the US to prevent further deaths from this silent killer.

## References:

Information in this fact sheet is from: (1) Frank Ackerman, & Rachel Massey. *Prospering With Precaution: Employment, Economics and the Precautionary Principle* (Global Development and Environment Institute, Tufts University, Medford, MA 02155)(2002); (2) Hans Heerings, *Asbestos: Deep in the Very Fibres of Society* (September 1999); (3) Richard D. Morgenstern, William A. Pizer, & Jhih-Shyang Shih, *Jobs versus the Environment: An Industry-Level Perspective*, Washington, DC, Resources for the Future, 2000; and (4) Constantine Yapijakis, *The Myth of Jobs versus the Environment*, Environmental Research Laboratory, Cooper Union School of Engineering, Manhattan, NY, (1998).

# ***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.



**Take precautionary action for a healthy workplace, environment & economy.**

**Sign onto the BE SAFE Platform.**

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