

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

W. B. A.

To: Lane County Commissioners
From: Mary O'Brien
Date: March 13, 2009
Re: Precautionary Principle and Lane County

While the wording of "the" precautionary principle has many versions around the world, the following captures the essentiality of the principle:

Precautionary Principle

When evidence points toward the potential of an activity to cause significant, widespread, or irreparable harm to public health or the environment, options for avoiding that harm should be examined and pursued, even though the harm has not yet been fully proved.

The term "Vorsorgeprinzip" (literally "caring-into-the-future principle") was first coined in Germany during the 1970s when Germany suspected that "acid rain" from industrial activities was causing forest die-offs. While scientific proof of the cause(s) of the forest die-off was not yet as definitive as it subsequently became, Germany chose to act to limit emissions of sulfur dioxide, a principle source of acid rain under the term "Vorsorgeprinzip." This was later translated into English as the Precautionary Principle. Details on the history, European, and international uses and debates regarding the Precautionary Principle can be found on Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precautionary_principle

In July 2003, San Francisco City and County adopted the first local-government ordinance in the United States. The City maintains a helpful website on its work with the Precautionary Principle: http://sfenvironment.org/our_policies/overview.html?ssi=14

On March 7, 2006, the City of Berkeley passed a similar precautionary principle ordinance:
<http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/citycouncil/2006citycouncil/packet/032106/2006-03-21%20item%2002%20precautionary%20principle%20ordinance.pdf>

On June 27, 2006, Mendocino County adopted a similar precautionary principle policy:
<http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/administration/pdf/43-Precautionary%20Principle.pdf>

Two central elements of these three local ordinances are (1) shared government, business, and public responsibilities for precaution; and (2) the essential step of considering alternatives that may lessen harm to public health and the environment.

I look forward to having a discussion with you about Lane County and the precautionary principle.

Mary O'Brien
maryobrien10@gmail.com