

Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle

This statement was drafted and finalized at a conference at the Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin, which took place 23-25 January 1998. The 32 authors of the statement are listed beneath the statement.

The release and use of toxic substances, resource exploitation, and physical alterations of the environment have had substantial unintended consequences on 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, stratospheric ozone depletion; and worldwide contamination with toxic substances and nuclear materials.

We believe existing environmental regulations and other decisions, particularly those based on risk assessment, have failed to adequately protect human health and the environment, as well as the larger system of which humans are but a part.

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.

While we realize that human activities may involve hazards, people must proceed more carefully than has been the case in recent history. Corporations, government entities, organizations, communities, scientists and other individuals must adopt a precautionary approach to all human endeavors.

Therefore it is necessary to implement the Precautionary Principle: Where an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health, 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 bears the burden of proof.

The process of applying the Precautionary Principle must be open, informed and democratic, and must include potentially affected parties. It must also involve an examination of the full range of alternatives, including no action.

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(Affiliations noted for identification purposes only.)

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[Return to the Urban Governance page](#)

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