

**Precautionary Principle:
In Defense of *Common* Sense**

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The Construction Manager

“When I started in this business ...

... Now you need a piece of paper in your hand to put one foot in front of the other.”

Law Firm

(McKenna Long & Aldridge)

“... understanding the implications of the
‘precautionary principle’ may allow you to
avoid its *unrealistic goals*.” (emphasis added)

The U.C. Berkeley Professor

(Political Science and Public Health)

DDT

Asbestos

“Precautionary Principle ... is a
marvelous piece of rhetoric.”

(A. Wildavsky: But Is It True : Harvard University Press, 1995)

Alar

CFCS

Global
Warming

Institute of Economic Affairs

"If someone had evaluated the risk of fire right after it was invented, they may well have decided to eat their food raw."

Precautionary Principle

But it seems like Common Sense?

3 Premises

1 THEME

Internal logical consistency
does not always confer validity.

It's the BOUNDARIES!

Premise 1

Market Capitalism

The primary mediator of economic activity and use of technology from 1750 to present.

**ECONOMIC
PROBLEM**

Production + Distribution

**ECONOMIC
SOLUTION**

Market mechanism

Economic Self-Interest / Competition

Capitalism: Legal/Political

Individual Freedom / Private Property

Premise 1

The Unintended and the Ironic

(Adam Smith - Wealth of Nations, 1775)

Every individual ... intends only his own gain, and he is ... led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for society that it was no part of his intention.

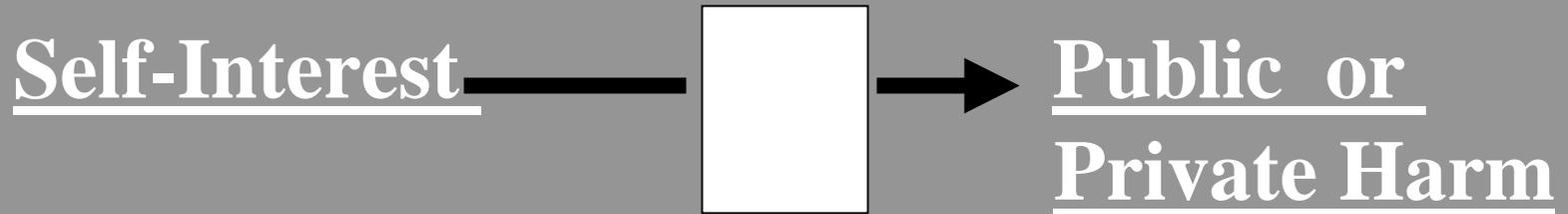
Self-Interest



Public Interest

Premise 1

The Unintended and the Obvious



Negative Externalities
(External to market transaction)

Premise 1

Negative Externalities

EXAMPLE

Tragedy of the Commons

This is the reality of HHW
(Our bread and butter is the externality of household chemical products)

Premise 1

**The Precautionary Principle
expands the economic problem.**

ECONOMIC PROBLEM **Production + Distribution**
 + Externalities

**Intentional / Systematic
Analysis of Externalities**

Premise 2

Expansion of Democratic Ideal

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Religion
- Sexual Preference
- Rights of Nature
- Environmental Justice
- Community Right To Know
- International Parity
- Non-English speaking

Premise 2

**The Precautionary Principle
gives a voice and method to historically
externalized interests.**

**Intentionally and Systematically
Expands the Democratic Ideal**

Premise 3

Expansion of Science and Knowledge

Ecology

Systems Theory

Toxicology

What a scientist Knows v. Believes

Statistics

**Explicit burden to be forthcoming w/
information**

ppb

Epidemiology

Accident Literature

Premise 3

**The Precautionary Principle
provides a language and method for
complexity and uncertainty.**

**Predicated on 21st Century
Science / Knowledge**

Premise 1

Market Capitalism

ECONOMIC PROBLEM **Production + Distribution**
+ **Externalities + Public Participation +**
+Information

ECONOMIC SOLUTION **Market mechanism**
Economic Self-Interest / Competition
Capitalism: Legal/Political
Individual Freedom / Private Property
+ **Precautionary Principle**

Precautionary Principle

**Full
Alternatives
Analysis**

**Full Costs
Analysis**

**Public
Process**

**Information
Complete
Accurate**

Tenets

**Considers
Externalities**

**Expands
Democratic
Ideal**

**21stC
Knowledge**

3 Premises



Costs Analysis 1

BEFORE PP

- **Economic activity** is subject to cost analysis w/ classic boundaries of economic activity.
- Narrow in time and place

WITH PP

- **Economic activity** is subject to a broader cost analysis.

Premise 1: Considers Harm / Externalities.

Premise 3: 21st Century Knowledge

Costs Analysis 2

EXAMPLE: Household Hazardous Waste

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATION

- **Purchase** of household chemical products.

EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Safety and Costs of use and disposal** of these products
(consumers, trash haulers, HHW programs, landfills)

Alternatives Analysis 1

BEFORE PP

- **Economic activity** is mediated by classic economic competition only.

WITH PP

- **Economic activity** is not buffered from consideration of a breadth of alternatives.
- Competition expanded

Premise 1: Considers Harm / Externalities.

Premise 3: 21st Century Knowledge

Alternatives Analysis 2

EXAMPLE

ECONOMIC COMPETITION

- MTBE
(petroleum waste)
- Chemical Pesticides

ALTERNATIVES COMPETITION

- Ethanol (corn)
- No oxygenate
- Integrated Pest Mgmt.

Premise 1: Considers Harm / Externalities.

Premise 3: 21st Century Knowledge

Public Process 1

Gives A Voice To:

- **Diversity of Communities**
- **Vulnerable populations (custodial population)**
- **Environment**
- **Common Resources**

Premise 2: Expands Democratic Ideal

Public Process 2

BEFORE PP

- Economic agent and partners in transaction prioritize self-interest.

WITH PP

- Economic agent and partners are subject to a more public, societal decision making process.

Premise 1: Considers Harm / Externalities.

Premise 2: Expands Democratic Ideal

Public Process 3

Without Public Process:

- First warnings of harm have been ignored.
- “**Trade Secrets**” with Bill Moyers
- Environmental Racism
- PCB body burden of infants v. Hazwoper

Science / Knowledge 1

BEFORE PP

- Economic activity is based on information relevant to transaction and buffered by ignorance or uncertainty.

WITH PP

- Economic activity is subject to full breadth of information.
- Science and its uncertainties are only one of tools.

Premise 1: Considers Harm / Externalities.

Premise 3: 21st Century Knowledge

Science / Knowledge 2

EXAMPLE: Polar Bears and Seals

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Economic activity buffered from knowledge of ecological relationships.

CONSIDERATION OF OTHER

- Domoic acid poisoning of seals
- Dioxins in polar bears

Premise 3: 21st Century Knowledge

Common Sense in Precautionary Principle

Expands Boundaries Of

- Economic Analysis
- Sciences / Knowledge / Uncertainty
- Democratic Ideal

Not A Casual Tool

**Please consider it with rigor
and a critical mind.**