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Improving Life, One Breath at a Time

We bring people and resources together to fight tobacco use, bad air and the asthma epidemic.



January 9, 2004

Karen Wolf
 Project Manager
 King County DDES
 900 Oakesdale Avenue SW
 Renton, WA 98055-1215

Re: Amendment to King County *Comprehensive Plan* - Addition to the Environment Chapter

Dear Ms. Wolf:

King County's *Comprehensive Plan* strongly promotes public health and environmental protection. The goals of many isolated County programs and policies include prevention of damage to public health and the environment. **In accordance with those principles**, we propose that introductory comments be added to the Environment Chapter of the County *Comprehensive Plan* that would unify the diverse programs and policies within a framework of a foundational approach to decision making. Specifically, we propose the addition of a reference to the precautionary principle in the introduction to the Environment Chapter. The precautionary principle states that "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically."

Many active County programs and policies are compatible with a precautionary approach to environmental management and public health. Examples include: 1) the model Hazardous Waste Program, directed toward the public and small business, which has reduced the use of hazardous pesticides and promoted an integrated pest management program; 2) a product procurement policy that encourages purchase of environmentally friendly items; and 3) a waste management policy.

We propose that the King County *Comprehensive Plan* include a statement acknowledging and encouraging the use of the precautionary principle in decisions related to public and environmental health. Given escalating rates of chronic illnesses and disabilities and the associated rise in healthcare costs, it behooves us to look upstream towards prevention. Inclusion of a statement acknowledging the precautionary principle in the Environment Chapter is appropriate and entirely compatible with the current King County *Comprehensive Plan*. A primary advantage of including such a statement is that it places the King County efforts on a principled foundation that not only protects ecological and human health, but has economic advantages by reducing long-term health care expenses and related costs to society as well.

We have included the following attachments: 1) specific suggested additions to the Environment Chapter; and 2) examples demonstrating that current policy and programs of King County are consistent with the precautionary principle. In addition, in the next couple weeks, we will provide you with a white paper discussing the precautionary principle and its local application.

in greater detail which is being developed by the Precautionary Principle Working Group

In short, adopting the precautionary principle as recommended will ensure that King County sustains a high quality environment that allows all to prosper and live healthy, productive

The Precautionary Principle Working Group, a subset of the Collaborative on Health and Environment - Northwest, is coordinating this effort. The American Lung Association of Washington serves on this work group and is the primary contact for this initiative. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Marina Cofer-Wildsmith
Chief Executive Officer
American Lung Association of Washington

Precautionary Principle Working Group members:

Elizabeth Davis, League of Women Voters of Washington
Kate Davies, D.Phil., Antioch University
Sibyl Diver, Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition
Pam Emerson, Environmental Protection Agency Region 10
Robin Evans-Agnew, American Lung Association of Washington
Steve Gilbert, Ph.D., Institute for Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders
Bruce Herbert, Newground Investment Services
Elise Miller, M.Ed., Institute for Children's Environmental Health
Linda S. Park, Ph.D., Seattle Biotech Legacy Foundation
Janna Rolland, M.P.A., Community Toolbox for Children's Environmental Health (former director)
Ivy Sager-Rosenthal, Washington Public Interest Research Group (WashPIRG)
Gregg Small, Washington Toxics Coalition
Tim Takaro, M.D., Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Linda Westbrook, R.N., Ph.D., Washington State Nurses Association

A Precautionary Approach for King County

Suggested addition to the introduction of the Environment Chapter of the King County Comprehensive Plan:

Every citizen of King County has an equal right to a healthy and safe environment. This requires that our air, water, soil and food be of a sufficiently high standard that individuals and communities can live healthy, fulfilling and dignified lives. The duty to enhance, protect and preserve King County's environment rests on the shoulders of government, residents, citizens, the media, industry, and businesses alike.

Fundamental to the precautionary principle is the careful assessment of less toxic alternatives using the best available science. This requires recognition of scientific uncertainty when evaluating hazards as well as the need to ensure that ecological and human health are the highest priorities.

King County views the precautionary principle as its policy framework to develop approaches (regulatory and voluntary) for a healthier County for all. By doing so King County will create and maintain a health and sustainable environment for current and future generations. These are clearly worthy goals.

Transforming our society to realize these goals and to live more respectfully within the bounds of nature will take a behavioral as well as technological revolution. Applying a precautionary approach to decision-making will help King County speed this process of change by moving beyond finding cures for environmental ills to preventing the ills in the first place.

Other King County policies and actions compatible with the precautionary principle:

The following are a small selection of policies or actions by King County that are compatible with the precautionary principle to ensuring environmental health and a high quality of life.

1) Hazardous Waste Management

A good example of the current practice of the precautionary approach in King County is the Hazardous Waste Management Program. This program focuses on providing citizens and small businesses with hazardous waste education and collection. "The Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County is an intensive effort to reduce and properly manage that waste through education, collection and technical assistance." (See - <http://www.metrokc.gov/hazwaste/>)

2) Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Both the City of Seattle and King County support/employ Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as a strategy to eliminate use of the most hazardous pesticides to reduce overall pesticide use on public lands managed by the city and county. "IPM is a holistic approach to pest (including

weed) management. IPM stresses the prevention of pest problems through design and maintenance practices, and uses a range of pest management techniques, including biological, cultural, and mechanical, with chemical controls as a last resort.” (See - <http://www.metrokc.gov/hazwaste/ipm/>).

This is an excellent example of a precautionary approach to the use of pesticides.

3) King County Recycled Product Procurement Policy

King County literature includes a policy promoting the purchase of “environmentally preferable products.” The following section of the King County Recycled Product Procurement Policy states the following:

5.3 "Environmentally preferable products" means products that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products that serve the same purpose. This comparison may consider raw materials acquisition, production, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, reuse, operation, maintenance, or disposal of the product.

(See - <http://www.metrokc.gov/procure/green/policy.htm#1>)

Encouraging the purchase of products with “lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment” is clearly compatible with the precautionary principle.

4) Smart Growth Initiative- Low Impact Development/Built Green Ordinance

In 2003 King County initiated a Smart Growth program including a Low Impact Development/Built Green Ordinance. The ordinance is designed to reduce the environmental impact of housing projects. “The demonstration projects authorized in this ordinance also will feature Built Green construction principles, which emphasize recycled materials, energy efficiency, natural habitat protection, and other environmentally friendly construction practices.” (See - http://www.metrokc.gov/ddes/press/press_LIDord.htm. Additional information is also available at the Built Green web site - <http://www.builtgreen.net/>.)

5) Education

In addition to the use of precaution in land and resource management, education is a critical element underlying the success of the precautionary principle. Stakeholder participation is one of the fundamental principles of the precautionary approach, and education enhances the ability of all stakeholders to participate effectively. King County is a recognized leader in public education, and has received two awards from the Environmental Education Association of Washington (EEAW). In addition, the King County Park System won the “Organizational Excellence Award,” and the School and Youth Program of the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County won the “Community Catalyst Award.” Most recently, King County formed a partnership with the non-profit organization called Nature Vision, which “will keep environmental education classes alive in King County schools.”