

# Clean Production



The aim of Clean Production is to reduce harmful impacts to people and the environment throughout the entire life cycle of a product by eliminating toxic substances in products and toxic wastes, and promoting the use of renewable material and energy sources. Clean Production puts the spotlight on how products can be designed and manufactured to identify more ecologically sound alternatives to reach the same goals. Clean Production applies to the whole production process—from extraction of raw materials to product manufacture and what happens to the product when it is disposed of or no longer used.

- **What is the Problem?** Americans buy more mass-produced and packaged goods than ever before and generate the most waste per capita anywhere in the world. Our natural resources are being depleted, poisoned and wasted at an unsustainable rate. Our transportation and energy systems generate greenhouse gases and harmful emissions. Of equal concern is the widespread use of untested and unregulated chemicals to produce household items, food, clothing, and shelter. As modern day Americans, we all participate indirectly in fueling unhealthy production practices as consumers, workers and taxpayers.
- **Why Clean Production?** The life cycle of a product consists of a number of steps, and each step uses energy and materials and generates waste and emissions. Most products on the global market use toxic and resource-intensive materials in their production and as a result generate billions of pounds of hazardous waste each year. Clean Production requires producers to look at the impacts of all phases of their manufacturing to see how they can improve products and processes to be more compatible with our natural ecosystem. Clean Production also supports local and regional production systems and building international solidarity for safe and sustainable materials to increase global corporate accountability.
- **How Do We Get There?** Producers must take responsibility for their products throughout their entire life cycle and the public, workers and communities must have access to information about how “green” a product is and any potentially harmful impacts. Informed consumers and workers are a prerequisite to obtaining clean production systems. Product life cycle assessments, product labeling, environmental product profiles, and MIPS (material intensity per service unit) ratings on all products, provide people with information. Producers can also use these tools to improve their product design. Consumers and governments must put their spending power into “green” procurement, and taxpayers must demand ecological tax reform so public money goes to safer materials.

**BE SAFE: Support Clean Production to  
Promote a Clean Environment and Workplace**

# BE SAFE's FOUR PRINCIPLES

## 1. HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Less than ten percent of the 80,000 chemicals used in commerce today have been fully tested for human health and environmental impacts. Yet, we already know many of these materials have inherently harmful properties. Industry continues to use these untested chemicals as well as those known to be carcinogenic, toxic and persistent. We must heed the early warning signs of the huge impacts of toxic manufacturing in our everyday lives and prevent the use of untested materials by demanding producers use Clean Production systems.

Product designers are in the greatest position to heed early warning signs as they have the ability at the beginning of the process to ensure a company chooses inherently safe materials that do not exhibit toxic properties harmful to human and ecological health. Unfortunately, most product designers are paid to focus on the bottom line of evaluating the function, performance, and cost effectiveness of a particular material. Until companies prioritize public health and employ precaution in their decision making process, highly toxic materials will continue to be widely used.

## 2. PUT SAFETY FIRST

Clean Production puts safety first by asking decision-makers to first determine what materials are safe to use in production processes and products rather than what is cheapest. For instance, the state of Massachusetts is taking the lead towards Clean Production by requiring all commercial industries within its borders to cut their use of toxic materials in manufacturing processes by 50 percent over ten years. The state requires every industry to prepare a Toxic Use Reduction Plan and then helps them find safer chemicals and processes. This partnership has produced impressive results and eliminated the perceived need for hazardous waste incinerators. For more information on this program, go to [www.turi.org](http://www.turi.org).

## 3. EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

Clean Production promotes the democratic principle by ensuring all stakeholders, including communities, workers and consumers, have access to information and a voice in decision-making processes. This means we should not only have information about emissions from manufacturing processes but also about product contents. For example, we have the right to know if our food is genetically engineered or if vinyl baby products will release hazardous softeners during use.

We also have the right to demand that industry be responsible for the entire life cycle of their products including the "end-of-life" stage. By taking back their discarded products, producers can close the material loop and thereby reduce consumption. This means products will be designed for durability, reuse and better recycling. It also means local authorities and taxpayers save money by not having to foot the bill for disposing of producers' waste. Producer Responsibility legislation for all electronic products and cars has now been passed in Europe. It is time we demanded the same company practices here in North America. We also need to call on governments to reduce spending on product waste and promote the development of cleaner, safer products.

## 4. CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTIONS

### ■ Purchase Green Products.

For more information, visit [www.greenguide.org](http://www.greenguide.org), [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org), and [www.cleanproduction.org](http://www.cleanproduction.org).

### ■ Get Involved at the Local Level.

Encourage public and private institutions in your community to adopt safe, clean product purchasing policies. For more information, visit [www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org), [www.inform.org](http://www.inform.org), [www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org), and [www.cleanproduction.org](http://www.cleanproduction.org).

### ■ Support Corporate Responsibility Campaigns.

For more information, visit [www.computertakeback.com](http://www.computertakeback.com), [www.cleancarcampaign.org](http://www.cleancarcampaign.org), and [www.grrn.org](http://www.grrn.org).

### ■ BE SAFE.

Take precautionary action to protect our health from toxic manufacturing processes and support clean production. Sign on to the BE SAFE Platform on the next page. 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 clean production 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).

## Sweden & Europe Take Precautionary Action on Harmful Chemicals

The public should not have to prove chemicals are responsible for the environmental health epidemic we now face. Our government and industry should focus on continually implementing more sustainable and safer ways to produce food, energy and products. Governments and industry around the world are already instituting policy changes.

- The Swedish Parliament has required all products be labeled with health and environmental information by 2010 and new products be free of carcinogenic, mutagenic and persistent chemicals by 2007.
- The recent focus on safe chemical use has spurred multinational companies such as IKEA, Volvo and Ericsson to search for safer product ingredients. (For more information, see *Taking Steps to BE SAFE* at [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com))
- The European Union is developing new legislation, called REACH that would mandate new registration requirements for existing and new chemicals. Through REACH's authorization program, the use of inherently harmful materials (PBTs, carcinogens, reproductive toxins, etc) will be banned unless industry can prove no harm.

Sweden's Chemical Policy and the European Union's proposed REACH program recognize the need to protect human health by employing the precautionary approach in policies regulating the use of chemicals in products and production processes. This will help industry apply the precautionary principle to product design decisions. Governments around the world have a responsibility to institute similar policy changes that will promote precaution, prevention and safety. For more information on these policies, please visit Clean Production Action's website: [www.cleanproduction.org](http://www.cleanproduction.org)

### References:

**Primary Contributor:** *Alexandra McPherson, Clean Production Action.*

# ***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 to protect our health  
and support clean production.  
Sign onto the BE SAFE Platform.**

Be counted when we deliver this national platform to the White House in 2005.  
Endorse the platform today at [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com)



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)