

END LANDFILLING



Protect Our Health and the Environment

- **Health Hazards.** Millions of pounds of toxic chemicals are dumped in municipal landfills every year. Hazardous waste from small businesses and households make up 1 to 2 percent of landfill waste. Many of these chemicals are toxic at very low levels and are slowly leaking and poisoning the air and groundwater of surrounding communities. Leaking landfills have polluted drinking water wells with cancer-causing chemicals such as toluene or vinyl chloride and have harmed many communities. Also, as garbage decomposes, methane and toxic gases are released into the air. Under federal regulations, 'modern' landfills are built with plastic liners (the thickness of two credit cards) designed to prevent waste from leaking into drinking water. However, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has admitted even with liners, "*All landfills will eventually leak*" [FR1988]. EPA's regulations conveniently let landfill operators off the hook for future liability after 30 years—while liner warranties and landfill caps typically last only 20 years.
- **Natural Resource Depletion.** Landfills take a huge toll on our environment, not only because of damage they cause when they are built and operated, but because they remove products from circulation so that virgin resources have to be mined or harvested to replace them. On average, 71 trash cans' worth of resources were used to create the products thrown out in each trash can of garbage set out at the curb! Landfills waste valuable resources: for every ton of paper recycled, acres of forest are saved from clear-cutting.
- **Global Warming.** Biodegradable garbage rotting in a landfill produces methane gas—a 'greenhouse gas' that contributes to global warming. Methane is 21 times more potent in its greenhouse effect than carbon dioxide (from car exhaust), and landfills are the largest man-made source of methane (37% globally). That's why the European Union is moving to ban biodegradable material from landfills. By separating and composting biodegradable materials under controlled conditions instead of landfilling them, methane production is significantly reduced and these materials are recycled into compost, a valuable resource for fertilizing soil.
- **Jobs & Recycling.** Businesses that recycle and reuse discarded materials provide 10 to 50 times as many local jobs as landfills, and are in direct competition with landfills for their supply of discards. Even with recent shifts in our culture's throwaway mentality to reuse and recycle more, many landfill businesses like Waste Management Inc. or BFI/Allied have little financial incentive to make recycling work because their profits are 10 times higher when they just bury the waste in their landfills. Wasting is their business. Conserving resources is in the community's interest.

**BE SAFE: Take Precautionary Action to Protect
Our Health & the Environment from Landfill Pollution**

BE SAFE's FOUR PRINCIPLES

1. HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Landfills endanger community drinking water supplies, are a major contributor to global warming, destroy our natural environment, and undermine recycling, sustainable jobs and local economies. Now that we know about the devastating repercussions of landfilling our waste, we can heed these early warning signs and prevent future pollution by taking a precautionary approach to end landfilling and replace it with safer alternatives. (See *Zero Waste* and *Extended Producer Responsibility Brochures*)

2. PUT SAFETY FIRST

America has a long-established history of taking preventive approaches to protect public health. For instance, we have made huge improvements in the last century in our effort to provide drinking water free of disease-causing germs. When it comes to landfilling, we already know what the mistakes of the past were—burying garbage with no thought for what would happen when it slowly rotted and contaminated our drinking water and air.

In 1984, Congress passed a law to require the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to create national minimum standards for the siting, design, operation and closure of municipal solid waste landfills. The standards, established in 1991, were to insure that “there is no reasonable probability of adverse effects on health or the environment” from a polluting landfills. [HSWA] This year, EPA proposed to radically alter this program with a proposed rule allowing states to waive compliance with most landfill design, operation and cover standards—claiming it would encourage innovation. Groups across the country believe this claim is a thinly disguised effort to deregulate landfill permitting and are opposing the proposal. They point to an existing rule that permits EPA to consider innovative alternatives without waiving environmental protections. As a first step, we need to put safety first and ensure regulations and enforcement programs at least require current landfill operators to meet existing standards and halt the spread of contaminants into our environment. At the same time, we need to take a “better safe than sorry” approach by taking preventative action to eliminate landfilling through waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting.

3. EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

Taking individual responsibility for waste is critical—like reducing, reusing, recycling and composting at home and in schools and offices. But such action alone is insufficient to protect our communities from the hazards of landfills. We must insist on rules that enable resource-conserving businesses to out-compete resource-wasting businesses. We need to hold our municipalities and industry accountable and generate support for reuse, recycling and waste reduction technologies over landfilling contaminated waste.

4. CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTIONS

■ Join the End Landfilling Campaign

Support campaigns to end landfilling and stop the government from deregulating landfills and providing subsidies through energy tax credits, and more. Contact GrassRoots Recycling Network at www.grrn.org/landfill, Pennsylvania Environmental Network at www.penweb.org/issues/energy/green4.html, and CHEJ at www.chej.org.

■ More Information on Landfill Hazards.

See the above websites and Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League at www.bredl.org/solidwaste/, G. Fred Lee's site (<http://members.aol.com/gfredlee/landfill.htm>), Center for a Competitive Waste Industry at www.competitivewaste.org, and EcoCycle (www.ecocycle.org).

■ BE SAFE.

Take precautionary action to protect our health from landfill pollution. 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.

■ Your Vote Counts.

The next election will set the country's course on how we manage our waste. For information on state and federal environmental voting records, contact www.sierraclub.org and www.lcv.org. To register to vote, contact www.earthday.net.

Community Action Results in Best Waste Prevention & Recycling Program in America

"Voters stopped incineration in 1982, set the world's first 50% recycling goal in 1985, and approved a \$6 per ton surcharge on wasting in 1989 that is still funding recycling every day in dozens of cities in our county."

*Daniel Knapp, Ph.D.,
President of Urban Ore,
Berkeley, California*

In Alameda County, California, citizens organized and passed Voter Initiatives to halt an incinerator, set a 50% recycling goal and add a \$6 a ton surcharge on waste coming to county landfills. The surcharge funds are only used to promote waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting programs. As a result, Alameda County has one of the best waste prevention and recycling programs in America.

Voters used California's initiative law three times to bypass legislative deadlocks and enable citizens to resolve key recycling issues. "The initiatives all passed by over 60% because they appealed equally to progressives and conservatives," said Daniel Knapp, a community leader in Alameda County. For more information, see www.stopwaste.org.

References:

53 Federal Registry 168 [FR], pgs. 33344-33345, Aug. 30, 1988; 1984 Hazardous & Solid Waste Amendments [HSWA] to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (RCRA).

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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 from landfill pollution. 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



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