

ZERO WASTE



We Can Eliminate Waste

■ What is Zero Waste?

Zero Waste is about redesigning the way our society uses resources to eliminate waste and safely return products back to nature or the marketplace. Americans buy more mass produced and packaged goods than they did a few decades ago, and the waste is piling up. Instead of a use-it-up, throw-it-out mindset, Zero Waste takes the viewpoint that waste is not inevitable, but is the result of bad design and decision-making. Zero Waste promotes a dramatic shift in how we value and manage our natural resources. [Lombardi] It can be achieved through policies that promote producer responsibility, end subsidies for wasteful practices, and ensure products are designed to be reused, repaired, or recycled.

■ Why Recycling Is Not Enough

The success of recycling programs across our country—more people recycle than vote—shows that people are not the problem. [Connett] Even with 100 million Americans doing their part to recycle, 71 trash cans of wasted resources were used to make what is thrown out as garbage in one trash can set out at the curb! According to industrial ecologist Robert Ayres, only 1% of material goods are still being used within six months of entering the market in North America. And every trash can of garbage takes products out of circulation so virgin resources have to be mined or harvested to replace them—at three times the expense! A 1999 report by the GrassRoots Recycling Network and other groups found subsidies to US industries will cost taxpayers \$13 billion over 5 years to pay these industries to use virgin resources and dispose of their waste.

■ Growing Support for Zero Waste

Most waste in the US today is still buried in landfills or burned in incinerators—options with many health consequences and problems. (See *Landfills and Dioxin* Brochures). But there is a major change underway in how the world thinks about “putting out the trash”. In Australia, New Zealand, and California, communities have committed to achieve Zero Waste over the next 20 years. In the United Kingdom, landfill diversion programs are receiving substantial funding, and the European Union is working to ban organic chemicals from landfills. Thirty nations have already put “Take Back” laws in place that make industry responsible for managing their used up products and packaging (See *Extended Producer Responsibility* Brochure). [Lombardi]

BE SAFE: Take Precautionary Action To Protect Our Environment By Redesigning Products With Zero Waste

BE SAFE's FOUR PRINCIPLES

1. HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

One of the goals of Zero Waste is to gradually replace landfills and incinerators with sustainable enterprises that create local jobs and promote self-sufficient communities. Zero Waste is gaining momentum around the world because it heeds the early warning signs of overloaded, polluting waste management systems, and offers positive alternatives to using up our dwindling natural resources. Zero Waste speaks to all environmental protection concerns—air, water, soil, and species. The safest approach to waste, toxic and otherwise, is to prevent it in the first place. Eliminating waste and toxic products means we no longer need to manage, treat, or regulate it. Here's a message business will like: Zero waste equals zero regulation.

2. PUT SAFETY FIRST

Our society's consumption and use of products is inevitable. What is not inevitable is waste, which is a result of poor product design, inefficiency, and failure to recognize discards as resources. Manufacturers must be held responsible for redesigning their products to reduce material consumption and facilitate reuse, recovery and recycling.

Zero Waste:

- Redesigns the current, one-way industrial system into a circular system modeled on Nature's successful strategies (recycle, reuse, repair).
- Challenges badly designed business systems that use too many resources.
- Addresses, through job creation and civic participation, the increasing wastage of human resources and erosion of democracy.
- Helps communities achieve a local economy that operates efficiently, sustains good jobs, and provides a measure of self-sufficiency.
- Aims to eliminate rather than manage waste.

Zero Waste can be achieved through policies that promote producer responsibility, end subsidies for wasteful and polluting practices, and ensure products are designed to be reused, repaired, or recycled.

3. EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

Zero Waste is a new “whole system” design principle for the 21st Century that focuses on how resources and materials flow through society and challenges ‘business as usual’ economic incentives that reward waste. Zero Waste policies should hold government and corporations accountable for waste and encourage communities to “eliminate instead of manage” their waste. Communities have already been successful in making producers take responsibility for products like mercury thermometers and disposable beverage containers, and should continue to press for voluntary stewardship initiatives and waste minimization regulations.

4. CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTIONS

■ Promote Zero Waste In Your Community.

Visit “What You Can Do in Your Community” on the GrassRoots Recycling Network website at www.grrn.org/zerowaste/community/index.html, and access organizing information and a Briefing & Tool Kit for local elected officials.

■ Join the Nationwide Campaign on Zero Waste.

Visit the following Websites for information: www.GRRN.org; www.ecocycle.org; and www.rcbc.bc.ca/zerowaste.htm, and internationally, www.zerowaste.co.nz and www.no-burn.org.

■ BE SAFE.

Take precautionary action to eliminate waste. 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 waste management policies and practices. 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.

Successful Zero Waste Programs

Companies Embrace Zero Waste

The concept of Zero Waste was embraced by corporations like Xerox, Toshiba and Fetzer Wineries, that started to think of industrial process waste as a sign of inefficiency and lost profit. Many companies, including Hewlett Packard and Fetzer, have redesigned their manufacturing processes to reduce waste by up to 90%.

Zero Waste Programs Worldwide

Transferred to the municipal sector, the concept of Zero Waste focuses attention on the whole life cycle of products—to eliminate rather than manage waste. In 1995 Australia’s capital city, Canberra, passed a goal of No Waste by 2010 as a result of an extensive citizen stakeholder process. New Zealand activists have succeeded in getting over half the country’s local governments to adopt Zero Waste goals. The GrassRoots Recycling Network brought the Zero Waste idea to North America, and was instrumental in getting Zero Waste goals and programs adopted in North Carolina and several counties in California. The Global Alternatives to Incineration Alliance has spread Zero Waste to dozens of communities in the developing world.

Voters Support Waste Reduction

A Voter Initiative organized by local citizens and passed in Alameda County, California, added a \$6 a ton surcharge on landfill waste that has financed one of the best waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting programs in America (www.stopwaste.org).

Waste Reduction Replaces Incinerator

Citizens protested a planned incinerator in Halifax, Nova Scotia and developed one of the best waste diversion programs in North America, reducing their landfill waste by 50%. Order the video at www.grrn.org/order.

References:

Connett, Paul. *Zero Waste*. Toronto, 2000; and Lombardi, Eric. *Beyond Recycling: Zero Waste*. EcoCycle, Inc., Boulder, CO.

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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 environment by
redesigning products to achieve zero waste.
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

