

# The Precautionary Principle

## A Progressive Guideline in Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing Decision-Making

ANA adopts the Precautionary Approach in 2003

### The Precautionary Principle Defined

#### The Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle (1998):

"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."

The principle has (4) central components:

1. taking preventive action in the face of uncertainty;
2. shifting the burden of proof to the proponents of an activity;
3. exploring a wide range of alternatives to possibly harmful actions;
4. and increasing public participation in decision making.

"...It's like preventative medicine for human and environmental health, and is the next generation of public and environmental health policies that prioritize preventing harm." *Precautionary Principle Academy, Antioch University, Seattle, Washington (2006)*

Produced for the Washington State Nurses Association (2007).  
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References: Gilbert, S., Plant, K. (2006). Assessing your daily risks: reasonable, rational and responsible. *Institute of Neurotoxicology and Neurological disorders and People for Puget Sound* [http://asmalldoseof.org/precautionary/PP-Poster\\_Final\\_April\\_2006.pdf](http://asmalldoseof.org/precautionary/PP-Poster_Final_April_2006.pdf); Brody, C. (2004) The precautionary approach; thinking like a nurse. *American Journal of Nursing*. March 2004. Vol. 104, Issue 4.; American Nurses Association Position Statement on Mercury in Vaccines (2006) <http://nursingworld.org/readroom/position/consumer/MercuryInVaccines062106.pdf>

Universal Precautions: A Precautionary Approach in Reducing Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure



The ANA Applied the Precautionary Approach as a Decision Making Tool Regarding the use of Thimerosal in Vaccine Production



The FDA Utilizes a Precautionary Approach to Pharmaceuticals for Human Safety Prior to Market Release



#### (5) Precautionary Principle Applications to Apply in the Occupational Health Setting

1. Work with management and other health and safety team members to phase out highly toxic, highly persistent and highly bioaccumulative products and production methods and assist in developing safer alternatives
2. Advocate for employees by reviewing the potential health effects of new and old products and production methods with workers and the environment before they are implemented.
3. Protect companies and workers by researching alternatives to toxic cleaning products and disinfectants.
4. Be pro-active with Hazard Communications, "right-to-know".
5. Encourage nursing research to "clarify the complex relationship between human disease and the physical and biological effects of environmental hazards with the goal of facilitating social and behavioral changes," as stated in the 1995 Institute of Medicine report.

<http://nursingworld.org/ajn/2004/apr/health.htm>

#### The Precautionary Principle Applied at Home and in the Community

