



Asking Science To Take A Backseat To Emotion

by *Bonner R. Cohen*

(NAPSA)—Can there ever be a time when safe will equal sorry? That may be the case if European bureaucrats and American environmental activists ignore the achievements of modern science and technology.

They have embraced a doctrine fundamentally at odds with common sense. It's known as the "precautionary principle." At first glance, it would seem to suggest little more than "look before you leap" or "better safe than sorry."

Yet as cattlemen, biotechnology companies and manufacturers of medical devices are finding out, the precautionary principle is a lethal weapon aimed at today's most innovative products and promising scientific breakthroughs.

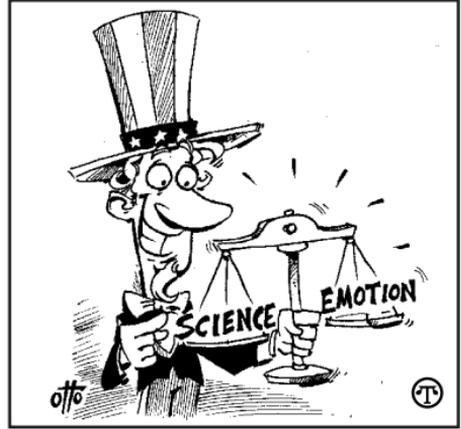
The Science and Environmental Health Network, a North Dakota-based activist group, is one of many environmental organizations that define the precautionary principle as follows:

"When an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause-and-effect relationships are not fully established scientifically."

The precautionary principle opens the door to a world in which conjecture becomes the driving force behind health and safety regulations.

Nothing in life is risk-free; everything we do involves trade-offs. We have come to take electricity for granted, recognizing how it has made life more comfortable—and safer—than our distant ancestors could ever have imagined. Had the precautionary principle been in force when it came along, it's doubtful electricity would ever have surmounted its regulatory hurdles.

In Europe, the precautionary principle is already being used to justify the European Commis-



The precautionary principle opens the door to a world in which conjecture defines health and safety regulations.

sion's decision to bar the import of North American beef from cattle fed with growth hormones.

The EC's hostility to agricultural biotechnology could one day deny food to the world's hungry.

In this country, Health Care Without Harm has launched a nationwide campaign against medical devices such as blood bags, transfusion equipment, and intravenous tubing and bags.

The group claims that the chemicals used to make the bags and tubes softer, could leach into patients—even though they can't document a single case of a patient's being injured in this manner. In fact, the targeted devices have been used safely by hospitals for 40 years.

These groups are now pushing for adoption of the precautionary principle at the state level. Efforts are already underway in Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New Hampshire.

Unfortunately, when speculation trumps science, the public can only lose.

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.heartland.org.

Bonner R. Cohen is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Virginia.