

# **County Ad Hoc Committee & Mendocino Partnership for the Precautionary Principle review language for a Precautionary Principle Policy**

On January 17, 2006, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Mendocino Board of Supervisors and the Mendocino Partnership for the Precautionary Principle (<http://mendoprecaution.org/committee.html>) began reviewing language for a Precautionary Policy for Mendocino County. Mendocino's draft policy is modeled on the non-binding Precautionary Principle Ordinance adopted by the City/County of San Francisco in July 2003 (<http://www.sfenvironment.com/aboutus/innovative/pp/>).

The meeting's discussion centered on three main points of distinction between San Francisco's Ordinance and Mendocino County's proposed Precautionary Policy.

1. Generally, ordinances are laws that have enforcement as a key aspect. San Francisco is unique in that it passed a non-binding ordinance. Those attending the study session agreed that our 'ordinance' should also be non-binding. However, we believe language of this nature is better served as a policy providing direction for Mendocino's 27 departments within government. This approach is more in-line with how Mendocino County government operates. Various departments are more likely to adjust to a Precautionary Principle approach if it is inserted as administrative policy.
2. We identified a need for language to "operationalize" the Precautionary Principle. We need to draft language addressing questions such as;
  - A. How do we ensure public involvement and participation?
  - B. How do we encourage and obtain government participation in applications of the Precautionary Principle?"
  - C. Who is responsible for drafting a progress report for the Board of Supervisors?
  - D. How do we determine departmental progress in adopting a precautionary approach?

The Partnership and the County's Executive Office will meet to draft additional language clearly addressing the questions above. This language is intended to become a part of the final policy.

3. Historically, the Precautionary Principle has been adopted and used in urban local governments where the Principle's application often surrounds decisions involving toxic chemicals. If Mendocino County adopts a Precautionary Policy, it will certainly build on this application of the Principle.

However, Mendocino County is a rural county. Therefore, land and resource decisions pertaining to construction, energy, water availability, water quality, and agriculture are at the heart of unique matters and concerns in protecting our environment and public health.

The draft Precautionary Policy for Mendocino County underscores the importance of and provides a means to enact laws and develop policies in such areas.

In adopting a Precautionary Policy we need to begin to evaluate aspects of decisions that consider all the reasonably foreseeable costs and benefits to public as well as private sectors of the community, even if such costs are not reflected in the price.

The study session adjourned with recognition that we need to continue to craft the language for a Precautionary Principle Policy. Subsequent review of draft policy language will take place in late February or early March 2006. Date to be determined. We will likely bring policy language before the Board of Supervisors in early April 2006.

To receive a copy of the DRAFT Mendocino County Precautionary Principle Policy contact: [britt@mcn.org](mailto:britt@mcn.org)