

# The Declaration of Independence From PCBs

Whereas polychlorinated biphenyls, commonly known as PCBs, belonging to the larger class of chemicals known as persistent, organic pollutants that have been determined to be harmful to the long term health and viability of both human beings and the environment, whose lasting effects are measured in hundreds of years, and

Whereas PCBs are a fabricated, industrial product with no naturally determined occurrence, a normal background level is zero; any PCBs measured in human or animal populations is, by definition elevated, and

Whereas their ubiquitous presence in the environment and thorough integration into the food chain is a direct result of, at best, irresponsible corporate behavior, and at worst, deliberate, industrial misconduct, and

Whereas we, the people, regardless of race, age or income have a right to a clean and healthy environment and to a life, free from the effects of industrial pollutants that have been imposed upon us through occupational exposure or more commonly, without our knowledge and/or against our will, and

Whereas we, the people, investors in public companies governed by SEC guidelines, insist that they fully disclose their environmental liabilities, and

Whereas we, the people have a right to have access to the mechanisms of justice in environmental matters, and

Whereas we, the people remind our government to fully and consistently enforce the "doctrine of public trust," to protect public resources such as air and water, and

We, the people petition you to rise above party affiliation and economic influence, to fully embrace the highest and most honorable mission, to value and protect the interests of all people equitably and without prejudice and to specifically and without delay to recognize, honor and respond to the following principles and concerns that we hereby set forth:

We, members of communities affected by PCB contamination are united by its unwelcome presence. Whether placed there by intent or accident, through improper disposal by industry or considered containment by government, whether as residents living in proximity to PCBs or workers exposed to PCBs, we are equally at risk to the potential ill effects associated with this toxic substance. We seek an expedited remediation for all PCB's that are currently or potentially available for release into the environment.

We respectfully insist on direct, local citizen participation in all matters relating to the community affected by the contamination. We are in full agreement with the Environmental Health Alliance, that: "Government and industry decisions should be based on meaningful citizen input and mutual respect (or the golden rule), with the highest regard for those whose health may be affected rather than those with financial interests. Independent science should inform public policy, and give the public information to make decisions about threats and guarantee effective safeguards and enforcement." Environmental Health Alliance "Be Safe: Blueprint Ensuring our Safety and Future Economy" 2003

The medical health of a citizenry should never be sacrificed for the economic health of a corporation. Communities deserve complete and timely responses to their concerns about health effects

including, but not limited to, comprehensive testing to identify the extent of contamination in both the environment and people and; health studies including medical monitoring and access to information about toxic exposure.

**We fully endorse the guidance offered by "The Precautionary Principle" as a mechanism for the public's protection. "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 1998 Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle"**

Risk assessment alone is an inadequate methodology, and risk assessment of a single option is an inherently inadequate basis for decisions. It cannot fully measure the risk of complex interactions between the multitude of industrially introduced chemicals in various dosages, experienced by differing individuals at various stages in their development.

In that numerical cleanup standards reflect assumptions derived from risk assessments, we seek a cleanup based on best available technology, which may provide the greatest possible margin of safety for the environment and human health.

**We strongly favor a policy of treatment over containment.** Decisions about hazardous waste, especially regarding its disposal should be based on preventing, not merely managing, exposures. Treatment destroys PCBs; landfills merely store them and landfills may eventually fail. We urge regulatory agencies to support a continuing investigation and review of current and emerging technologies, and the employment of those that offer the highest level of destruction of PCBs with the least amount of toxic residue. We additionally urge our governing bodies to commit all necessary resources to innovative technological treatment solutions.

**It is no longer technologically necessary to remove PCBs from one community for landfill disposal in another, especially if the host community is already overburdened, economically depressed, or where environmental justice concerns are at issue.**

Decision making regarding PCB contamination based on "cost effectiveness," must include the following issues to fully reflect true costs: The long term impact on the health of the community and the environment, of untreated PCBs and/or byproducts associated with their treatment/destruction, and The economic loss to property owners and communities stigmatized by the presence of toxic waste, even if it is temporarily contained and The additional, potential liability faced by government and private industry if ongoing research reveals that current levels of protection are inadequate, and The long term monitoring and additional remedial measures that containment facilities may require.

As citizens accountable and responsible for our behavior, we hold corporations to this same standard of accountability and responsibility for their actions.

**The polluter, not the taxpayer, rightfully must pay the cleanup costs.**

**We similarly hold you, the state and federal regulatory agencies responsible and accountable for our protection, to exercise the full extent of your authority to fulfill your mission to those you have been entrusted to serve.**