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Precautionary principle

David Robinson

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **precautionary principle** or precautionary approach states that if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to the public or to the environment, in the absence of scientific consensus that the action or policy is harmful, the burden of proof that it is *no* harmful falls on those taking an action.

The principle is used by policy makers to justify discretionary decisions in situations where there is the possibility of harm from taking a particular course or making a certain decision when extensive scientific knowledge on the matter is lacking. The principle implies that there is a social responsibility to protect the public from exposure to harm, when scientific investigation has found a plausible risk. These protections can be relaxed only if further scientific findings emerge that provide sound evidence that no harm will result.

In some legal systems, as in the law of the European Union, the application of the precautionary principle has been made a statutory requirement in some areas of law.

Regarding international conduct, the first endorsement of the principle was in 1982 when the World Charter for Nature was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, while its first international implementation was in 1987 through the Montreal Protocol. Soon after, the principle integrated with many other legally binding international treaties such as the Rio Declaration and Kyoto Protocol.