

Environmentalists and Health Advocates: Let's Stop Wasting Our Time!



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Environmental organizations doing notable work to challenge the status quo and corporate power:

Environmental Research Foundation
PO Box 5036
Annapolis, MD 21403-7036
410-263-1584
(Publishers of *Rachel's Environment & Health News* from which much of this information was adapted.)

Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF)
2859 Scotland Road,
Chambersburg, PA 17201
717-709-0457
celdf.org

RECLAIMDEMOCRACY.ORG is a tax-exempt non-profit (501c3) organization working to revoke illegitimate corporate power and revive grassroots democracy. Contributions are tax-deductible.

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For decades, the mainstream environmental movement has sought to protect the planet's forests, air, water, and wildlife primarily through government regulation. The major groups gather data, write reports to prove damage, and ask government to regulate the products and behavior of corporations causing much of the damage.

Thousands of environmentalists toil tirelessly, proposing laws and regulations, and opposing the latest efforts to weaken existing laws. We write letters, meet with agency personnel, publish pamphlets and hold conferences, serve on citizen advisory boards, and organize phone trees. We pore over volumes of information, becoming experts in science and law. We work hard, and when we find that our efforts have been thwarted, redouble efforts, hoping to succeed the next time. The organizations of the mainstream environmental community are well intentioned, earnest, and diligent.

We also, admittedly, are largely ineffective in changing the overall trends that are degrading the environment in almost every realm.

Look at chemical issues for example: chemical manufacturers have managed to keep cancer-causing products on the market despite regulatory efforts, civil litigation by victims, news reports, right-to-know laws, and hundreds of scientific studies confirming harm to humans and the environment. These corporations have turned the regulatory system into their allies

The regulatory system is not protecting our health or the environment nearly so much as the interest of those corporations it supposedly governs. The system serves as a buffer, thwarting attempts to assert the rights of humans over them.

Skeptical? After three decades of unremitting attempts to regulate corporate polluters, here is our situation (as of 1996), as documented in [Toxic Deception](#) by Dan Fagin and Marianne Lavelle:

* The government does not screen chemicals for safety before they go on the market.

* Chemicals are presumed innocent until the public can prove them guilty of causing harm. This *guarantees* that people will be hurt before control can even be considered.

* Close to 2000 new chemicals are introduced each year in the U.S.; virtually none of them is screened for safety by government. When screening does occur, it is after trouble is apparent. About 70,000 different chemicals are in commercial use. More than 80% of these chemicals never have been tested to learn whether they cause cancer, much less for harm to the nervous, immune, or reproductive systems.

In sum, in the vast majority of cases, nothing is known about the health and environmental consequences of dumping these chemicals into the environment. It's a huge corporate experiment and we're the guinea pigs.

The corporations use a single line of defense: we don't know for sure how dangerous these chemicals really are. But this simple strategy works because Congress has placed the burden of proof on us. Because we all are exposed to hundreds--if not thousands--of chemicals each day, pinpointing the source of a rash, a birth defect in a child, or a brain tumor is next to impossible. The dice in this game are loaded. Why do we continue to play?

Instead, why doesn't the environmental movement come together to discuss a new strategy--one that asserts the right of sovereign people to control subordinate entities like corporations? We could lawfully shift the burden of proof onto the purveyors of poisons. We legitimately could deny them the protections of the Bill of Rights. (if it doesn't breathe, it shouldn't be protected as a person under the Constitution). Let's get together and focus our energy on *defining*, not regulating corporations. This is essential if we ever are to achieve lasting protection for our health and the environment.