

# **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **BROAD INTERNATIONAL COALITION ISSUES URGENT CALL FOR STRONG OVERSIGHT OF NANOTECHNOLOGY**

*Over Forty Groups Release Fundamental Principles for Nanotech Oversight, Citing Risks to the Public, Workers, and the Environment*

WASHINGTON, DC – With the joint release today of *Principles for the Oversight of Nanotechnologies and Nanomaterials*, a broad international coalition of consumer, public health, environmental, labor, and civil society organizations spanning six continents called for strong, comprehensive oversight of the new technology and its products.

The manufacture of products using nanotechnology—a powerful platform for manipulating matter at the level of atoms and molecules in order to alter properties—has exploded in recent years. Hundreds of consumer products incorporating nanomaterials are now on the market, including cosmetics, sunscreens, sporting goods, clothing, electronics, baby and infant products, and food and food packaging. But evidence indicates that current nanomaterials may pose significant health, safety, and environmental hazards. In addition, the profound social, economic, and ethical challenges posed by nano-scale technologies have yet to be addressed.

As Chee Yoke Ling of the Third World Network explained, “Materials engineered at the nano-scale can exhibit fundamentally different properties—including toxicity—with unknown effects. Current research raises red flags that demand precautionary action and further study.” She added, “As there are now hundreds of products containing nanomaterials in commerce, the public, workers, and the environment are being exposed to these unlabeled, and in most cases, untested materials.”

George Kimbrell of the International Center for Technology Assessment continued, “Since there is currently no government oversight and no labeling requirements for nano-products anywhere in the world, no one knows when they are exposed to potential nanotech risks and no one is monitoring for potential health or environmental harm. That’s why we believe oversight action based on our principles is urgent.”

This industrial boom is creating a growing nano-workforce which is predicted to reach two million globally by 2015. “Even though potential health hazards stemming from exposure have been clearly identified, there are no mandatory workplace measures that require exposures to be assessed, workers to be trained, or control measures to be

implemented,” explained Bill Kojola of the AFL-CIO. “This technology should not be rushed to market until these failings are corrected and workers assured of their safety.”

“Nanomaterials are entering the environment during manufacture, use, and disposal of hundreds of products, even though we have no way to track the effects of this potent new form of pollution,” agreed Ian Illuminato of Friends of the Earth. “By the time monitoring catches up to commerce, the damage will already have been done.”

Ron Oswald, General Secretary of international trade union IUF, highlighted the importance of defending against the massive intrusion of nano-products into the global food chain, pointing out that “hundreds of commercially available products—from pesticides to additives to packaging materials incorporating nanotech—are already on the market or just a step away. Workers, consumers, and the environment must be adequately protected against the multiple risks this development poses to the global food system and the women and men who produce the food we all depend on.”

“The makers of these materials are winning patents based on novelty and uniqueness, but industry then turns around and says their nano-products do not need to be regulated differently because they are the same as bulk materials,” pointed out Kathy Jo Wetter of ETC Group, an international civil society organization based in Ottawa, Canada. “This contradiction benefits industry, but it cannot stand. Mandatory, nano-specific regulatory oversight measures are required.”

“Although governments worldwide spent over \$6 billion on nanotech R&D last year, research spending on risks and social effects comprises only a ‘nano’ portion of that,” noted Rick Worthington of the Loka Institute an organization that promotes public participation in all matters related to science and technology. “We’ve seen the outcome of unregulated ‘miracle technologies’ such as synthetic chemicals before in the toxic pollution of entire communities. A portion of the nano research on social and environmental issues should involve active participation by communities, whose insights can help us avoid the catastrophic problems experienced in the past.”

The coalition’s declaration outlines eight fundamental principles necessary for adequate and effective oversight and assessment of the emerging field of nanotechnology.

- I. A Precautionary Foundation:** Product manufacturers and distributors must bear the burden of proof to demonstrate the safety of their products: if no independent health and safety data review, then no market approval.
- II. Mandatory Nano-specific Regulations:** Nanomaterials should be classified as new substances and subject to nano-specific oversight. Voluntary initiatives are not sufficient.
- III. Health and Safety of the Public and Workers:** The prevention of exposure to nanomaterials that have not been proven safe must be undertaken to protect the public and workers.

- IV. Environmental Protection:** A full lifecycle analysis of environmental impacts must be completed prior to commercialization.
- V. Transparency:** All nano-products must be labeled and safety data made publicly available.
- VI. Public Participation:** There must be open, meaningful, and full public participation at every level.
- VII. Inclusion of Broader Impacts:** Nanotechnology's wide-ranging effects, including ethical and social impacts, must be considered.
- VIII. Manufacturer Liability:** Nano-industries must be accountable for liabilities incurred from their products.

“We’re calling upon all governmental bodies, policymakers, industries, organizations, and all other relevant actors to endorse and take actions to incorporate these principles,” said Beth Burrows of the Edmonds Institute, a public interest organization dedicated to education about environment, technology, and intellectual property rights. “As new technologies emerge we need to ensure new materials and their applications are benign and contribute to a healthy and socially just world. Given our past mistakes with ‘wonder technologies’ like pesticides, asbestos, and ozone depleting chemicals, the rapid commercialization of nanomaterials without full testing or oversight is shocking. It is no surprise that the public of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is demanding more accountability.”

The complete document is available at numerous endorsing organizations websites, including [www.icta.org](http://www.icta.org). Organizations can endorse the principles by emailing [gkimbrell@icta.org](mailto:gkimbrell@icta.org).

The initial endorsing organizations are:

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| Acción Ecológica (Ecuador)   | Center for Genetics and Society (U.S.)            |
| African Centre for Biosafety   | Center for the Study of Responsive Law (U.S.)     |
| American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (U.S.) | Clean Production Action (Canada)                  |
| Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union | Ecological Club Eremurus (Russia)                 |
| Beyond Pesticides (U.S.)   | EcoNexus (United Kingdom)                         |
| Biological Farmers of Australia  | Edmonds Institute (U.S.)                          |
| Canadian Environmental Law Association                                       | Environmental Research Foundation (U.S.)          |
| Center for Biological Diversity (U.S.)                                       | Essential Action (U.S.)                           |
| Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (U.S.)                 | ETC Group (Canada)                                |
| Center for Food Safety (U.S.)  | Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security (India) |
| Center for Environmental Health (U.S.)                                       | Friends of the Earth Australia                    |
|  | Friends of the Earth Europe                       |
|  | Friends of the Earth United States                |
|  | GeneEthics (Australia)                            |

Greenpeace (U.S.)  
Health and Environment Alliance  
(Belgium)  
India Institute for Critical Action-Centre  
in Movement  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade  
Policy (U.S.)  
Institute for Sustainable Development  
(Ethiopia)  
International Center for Technology  
Assessment (U.S.)  
International Society of Doctors for the  
Environment (Austria)  
International Trade Union Confederation  
International Union of Food,  
Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant,

Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers'  
Associations  
Loka Institute (U.S.)  
National Toxics Network (Australia)  
Public Employees for Environmental  
Responsibility (U.S.)  
Science and Environmental Health  
Network (U.S.)  
Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (U.S.)  
Tebtebba Foundation - Indigenous  
Peoples' International Centre for Policy  
Research and Education (Philippines)  
The Soils Association (United Kingdom)  
Third World Network (China)  
United Steelworkers (U.S.)  
Vivagora (France)