

JCPA

JEWISH COUNCIL
FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

CORE PRINCIPLES

The organized Jewish community's agenda for environmental stewardship and justice are derived from both traditional and contemporary principles:

Stewardship

The diversity of life is sacred and should be protected because of its intrinsic value and its contributions to the well-being of humankind. Humankind's unique place in the natural order enables us to transform the natural world to pursue human development and requires us to safeguard ecological systems so that the diversity of life can thrive.

Environmental Justice

All people have the right to live, work, study, and play in environments free of dangerous air, water, or land pollution.

Responsibility to Future Generations

Humankind has a solemn obligation to future generations to live within the ecological limits of the earth.

Prevention of Harm

Regulations should cautiously and prudently err in favor of protecting human life and health.

Public Involvement in Decision-Making

All citizens have a right to be actively involved in decision-making that affects their health or the quality of their environment.

Citizens' Right to Know

Government and industry have an obligation to regularly inform the public of known and suspected dangers to their health from industrial and governmental facilities and from food, water, air, household supplies, and other consumer products.

The Common Good

Government has an obligation both to regulate the use of private property in the interest of the common good and to provide transition assistance to those who lose their livelihood due to changes in environmental policies.

Energy Independence

In order to protect American economic independence, avoid military conflict, and protect the environment and public health, the U.S. should adopt policies which wean the U.S. economy from its reliance on fossil fuels.

Equitable Distribution of Responsibility

Individuals, corporations, governments, and nations that cause pollution or the destruction of ecosystems must bear responsibility for remediation and restoration.

Governmental Compliance

Federal and state governments must be held to the same environmental standards as the private sector, except when national security unambiguously requires a strictly limited exemption.

U.S. Leadership

The United States should take a leadership role in protecting the global environment.

Moral Leadership

As environmental issues are matters of personal and societal morality and ethical responsibility, faith communities have an obligation to provide leadership regarding the necessity of protecting all creation.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND JUSTICE

The JCPA supports a comprehensive and precautionary approach to protecting all members of the public from environmental health threats (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

Equal Protection from Pollution and Degradation

The JCPA affirms the right of all people to live and work in environments with clean air, land, water and food and calls on government to protect public health by establishing ensuring sufficient regulations and facilities to safely minimize, manage, and dispose of toxic, nuclear, and other hazardous wastes. The JCPA calls on government to ensure that all communities have equal access to environmental clean up programs and equal protection from environmental hazards and the placement of waste disposal facilities, regardless of income, race, or ethnicity (Statement adopted at the 1995 Plenum).

Product Testing and the Right to Know

The JCPA supports mandatory pre-market testing of potentially harmful commercial, industrial, and agricultural products and processes that may have the potential to harm the environment or public health before approval for production and use (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum). The JCPA supports the mandatory labeling of consumer products regarding their toxicity and the provision of information about the toxicity of the chemicals emitted by industrial and commercial facilities (Agenda 1998-1999).

Pollution Prevention

The JCPA favors measures that impose the cost of pollution remediation on polluters; provide incentives for pollution prevention; and promote the development of non-toxic alternatives to hazardous materials (Agenda 2000 – 2001).

Public Health Research

The JCPA supports the establishment of comprehensive registries for both disease and environmental exposure that will provide data for identifying environmental causes of disease. The JCPA supports funding for research into the interactions between the genetic and environmental causes of disease (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

The JCPA urges Congress to create a Nationwide Health Tracking Network to be housed at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and to give the Centers the authority necessary to establish a comprehensive, national repository of information about the incidence of disease. All feasible actions to ensure that personal health information is kept strictly confidential must be required by law and their implementation carefully monitored. Only aggregate information should be made available to individuals, communities and researchers. The Centers must also be given the mandate and necessary funds to conduct investigations of possible connections between diseases and environmental factors. (Adopted by the 2003 Plenum).

Nuclear Waste

The JCPA supports the isolation of commercial and defense nuclear wastes in a manner that protects public health and the environment (Agenda 1999-2000).

Regulatory Procedures

As cost-benefit analysis cannot adequately assess the “value” or quality of life, the JCPA does not support its use as the primary tool for evaluating regulations and standards. Rather, the effectiveness of regulations for protecting the vulnerable, preventing harm, and safeguarding creation should serve as the primary evaluation criteria for regulations (Agenda 1999-2000).

The JCPA opposes routine provision of compensation for loss of profits as a consequence of environmental or other regulation. (Resolution adopted in 1995)

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY POLICY

Overview

The JCPA supports the development of a comprehensive national energy policy that increases U.S. energy independence by reducing dependence upon fossil fuels – particularly oil from the Middle East – through energy efficiency and the development of environmentally clean affordable alternative energy sources and technologies (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

Climate Change and Energy Independence

The community relations field should educate and advocate on the importance of climate change as an issue in environmental, religious, ethical and moral terms and lobby for the reversal by the US Government on the Kyoto Accord; Urge the Jewish community to work with those in leadership positions within their communities and in businesses to demonstrate what can be done to tackle climate change – independent of government regulation. Among the meaningful responses to this most urgent environmental challenge are: ‘Greening’ Jewish institutions in building design and operations; encouraging members of the Jewish community to make sustainable choices, such as conserve energy at home and on the road; and committing individual companies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; Participate in interfaith efforts to engage other groups outside the Jewish community to take action on climate change; and, support legislation materially similar to S2025/HR 4409, the bipartisan “Fuel Choices for American Security Act,” currently pending in Congress. (Adopted at 2006 Plenum)

Climate Change and Poverty

The JCPA believes the community relations field should, at both the state and federal level, support measures to protect vulnerable populations (at home and abroad) from environmental damage related to climate change and that limit the economic burdens of new policies on those populations (including efforts to direct revenue generated by climate change legislation toward such programs); support increased funding for programs that help vulnerable populations pay for their immediate home energy needs and reduce their energy demands; support efforts to create new jobs and job-training programs to help those who lose their jobs as a result of new environmental regulations and policies; support studies that examine the effects of climate change on vulnerable populations and facilitate implementation of emergency plans to respond to these effects; promote multilateral international cooperation to deal with this issue. (Adopted by the 2008 JCPA Plenum)

Dependence on Foreign Energy Sources

America’s increasing dependence on foreign oil for transportation, electricity, industry and other uses poses great risks for our nation and the world, specifically threats to national security, economic stability, and the health of our environment. In particular, our dependence on foreign oil enriches some countries

that are hostile to the United States and support terrorism. America's growing energy consumption and reliance on foreign oil and other fossil fuels requires prompt action and the Jewish Council of Public Affairs calls upon our government to make this issue a top national priority.

In order to achieve a substantial reduction in US dependence on imported energy sources, America must initiate a national campaign that employs creativity, collaboration, and commitment to develop a comprehensive energy plan that effectively addresses our dependence on foreign oil while taking into account the environmental, economic and other domestic needed changes.

The JCPA calls on Congress and the Administration to expeditiously address the urgent need to reduce the United States' dependence on foreign oil by developing and implementing a comprehensive, environmentally sound energy plan. The JCPA believes such a multifaceted approach should include: Supporting the modernization and expansion of America's energy infrastructure with sensitivity to our natural environment; Dramatically increasing energy efficiency and conservation; Rapidly developing, producing, and marketing renewable and alternative energy technologies; Developing and implementing environmentally responsible options to increase overall domestic energy production; Collaborate with international partners to develop global solutions; Diversifying foreign energy sources to reduce our reliance on hostile regimes; Expanding cost-efficient, energy-efficient alternatives to ensure that conservation is a viable option for all Americans; Improving mass transit options to reduce the consumption of oil by American vehicles; Supporting changes in urban and suburban communities that facilitate effective use of modes of transportation that do not consume external energy, such as cycling and walking; Offering economic and other incentives to purchase more fuel-efficient or alternatively-fueled vehicles and to rely upon public transportation; Mandating significant enhancements in fuel economy standards for all modes of transportation and improving mass transit options; Increasing public awareness through broad education campaigns; Exploring the use of nuclear energy with appropriate safeguards. (Resolution adopted by the 2007 Plenum)

Domestic Energy Production

The U.S. should not seek to increase energy independence by drilling for oil or gas in environmentally sensitive areas, particularly those that are unique natural areas or critical habitats for threatened species (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

Energy Conservation and Clean Energy Technologies

The JCPA supports policies to effect the rapid adoption of clean and renewable energy sources and technologies, including solar, wind, fuel cell, and natural gas, and the phasing out of reliance on fossil fuel technologies which contribute to air pollution, respiratory illness, global warming, and the degradation of ecosystems (Agenda 2000 – 2001). The JCPA supports significant increases in vehicle fuel economy standards. The JCPA supports increased development and use of mass transit (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum). The JCPA supports keeping the Strategic Petroleum Reserve filled to capacity (JPP 1993-1994).

International Agreements on Global Climate Change

The JCPA supports U.S. leadership in global efforts to address climate change. The JCPA supports the goals of the Kyoto Protocol and urges that the U.S. and other developed nations should achieve a majority of greenhouse gas emission reductions required under international agreements through direct domestic action. International agreements addressing climate change must protect those most vulnerable: poor people, those living in coastal areas, and those relying on subsistence agriculture (Agenda 1999 – 2000).

Domestic Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions

The JCPA supports the creation of mandatory domestic emissions reductions programs under the legislative authority provided by the already ratified Rio Treaty (Agenda 1999 – 2000).

Economic Displacement

The JCPA supports federal programs to provide retraining and economic transition assistance to the workers and industries most negatively affected by changes in energy policies (Agenda 1999 – 2000). Congress should generously fund the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and other programs to reduce the negative impact on poor people of energy policies that increase the cost of energy (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

Market Incentives

The JCPA favors policies which provide market-based incentives to adopt clean energy technologies, including taxation of pollution (Agenda 2000 – 2001).

Utility Regulation

Changes in the regulation of utilities should be done in a manner that promotes significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions, including the elimination of subsidies to fossil fuel industries so that environmentally friendly energy production will become increasingly competitive (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

Biological Diversity

The JCPA supports a comprehensive approach to preserving and restoring biological diversity at home and abroad (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

Public Lands

The JCPA supports management of both public and private lands to preserve and restore biological diversity. The JCPA supports the establishment of a system of interconnected, strictly protected biological preserves on land, in fresh water, and in the sea (Agenda 2000 – 2001). Government should remove subsidies for logging, mining, or grazing on public lands, especially in old growth forests (Agenda 1999-2000). The JCPA supports generous and permanent funding for the acquisition and protection of sensitive land and water habitat (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

Endangered Species

The JCPA supports reauthorization of a strengthened Endangered Species Act – overdue for reauthorization since 1993 (Resolution adopted at the 2001 Plenum).

The JCPA supports protection of species on public and private lands based on current science, erring on the side of protecting species when scientific authorities differ. The federal government should conduct sufficient biological research to make timely decisions regarding species protection. Governments should work proactively to prevent dangerous declines in species populations and create recovery plans for all endangered and threatened species (Agenda 1999 – 2000). Government should protect and restore sufficient habitat to secure viable populations of declining species throughout their present ranges. Congress should amend the Endangered Species Act to prohibit the federal government from granting permits (“incidental take permits”) to destroy habitat that is scientifically demonstrated by peer review to be essential to the recovery of endangered species. The Administration and Congress should devise, fully fund and aggressively publicize positive incentives to encourage private property owners to protect and recover endangered and threatened species and the habitat upon which they depend (Resolution adopted at the 1997 Plenum).

INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The JCPA supports increased foreign aid for environmental protection, sustainable economic development, and family planning in developing countries. The JCPA urges the Administration to take a leadership role in ensuring that international institutions, including the World Trade Organization and the World Bank, actively work to protect the global environment (Agenda 2000 – 2001). The U.S. should actively address environmental degradation and resource shortages in regions where such developments might lead to either mass migration or armed conflict. The JCPA supports the inclusion of provisions to protect the environment in trade agreements (Agenda 1999 – 2000).

OTHER

Urban and Community Planning

The JCPA supports the provision of incentives for the revitalization of cities through environmentally responsible “Brownfields” programs. The JCPA supports land-use and transportation policies which would contain urban sprawl, promote the redevelopment of cities, and protect open spaces (Agenda 1999 – 2000).

Conservation of Natural Resources

The JCPA supports policies—based on pricing, taxation, and other incentives—that lead to the reduction of the level of U.S. per capita consumption of energy, paper, metals, and other resources. The JCPA calls on all households and communal organizations to adopt internal conservation and waste-reduction policies including recycling, the use of recycled and energy-efficient products, and the elimination of hazardous pesticides and cleaning supplies (Agenda 1999 – 2000).

Agriculture

The JCPA supports comprehensive testing of all genetically engineered products for their capacity both to disrupt ecosystems and to cause illness. The JCPA supports policies which promote sustainable agricultural practices—including soil conservation, minimized use of pesticides and fertilizers, and maintenance of the genetic diversity of food crops (Agenda 2000 – 2001). In addition, governments should protect agricultural lands and public health through programs to safeguard groundwater, regulate chemical and animal waste runoff from farms and livestock facilities, and promote organic agricultural practices (Agenda 1999 – 2000).

The JCPA calls on the Israeli government to address the rapidly deteriorating environmental conditions in Israel (Agenda 2000 – 2001).