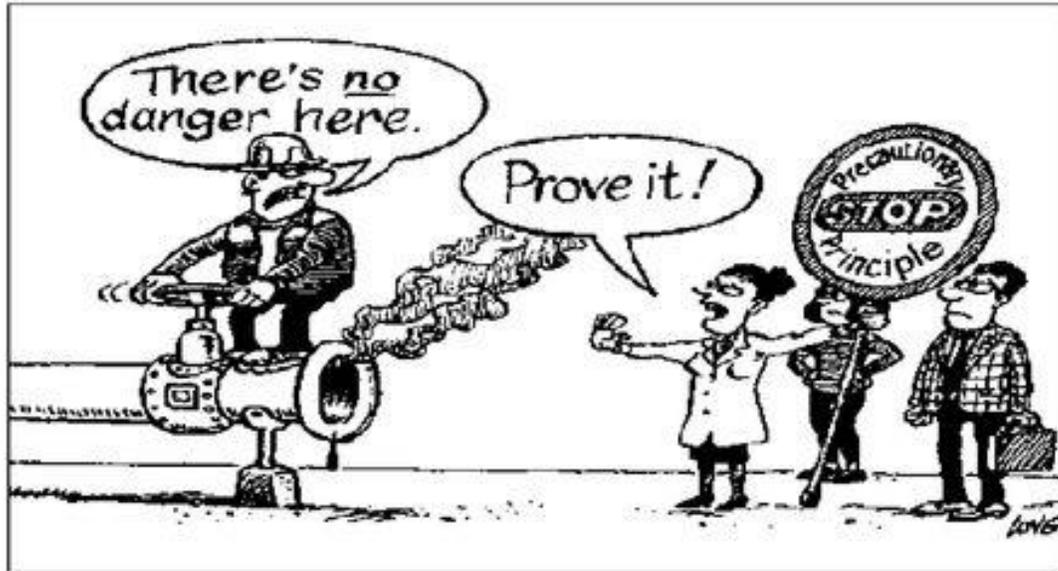
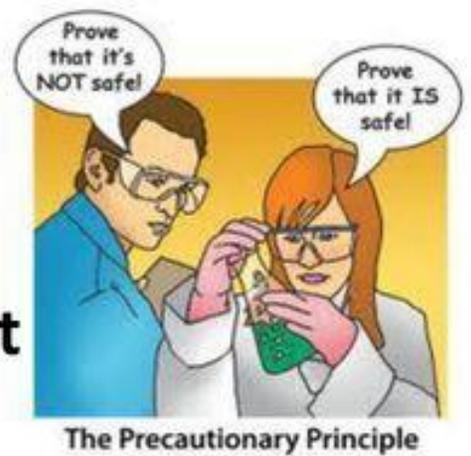




**IS THE PRECAUTIONARY  
PRINCIPLE GOOD OR  
BAD?**

# The Precautionary Principle

- **The Precautionary Principle:** is an ethical theory which says that action should be taken to prevent harm **even if there is not sufficient data to prove that the activity will have severe negative consequences**
  - It also stipulates that if people wish to engage in an activity that may cause changes in environment, **they must first prove that it will not do harm**



# Precautionary paralysis

Do the known unknowns and unknown unknowns prevent us from making any decisions, or from taking any action, if we rely on the precautionary principle?

Is it overly risk-averse?

Is it anti-science, anti-progress?



# Risk assessment

What risks are  
worth taking?

What's the worst  
that could  
happen?

[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=zORv8wwiadQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zORv8wwiadQ)



# The cynical view

Who's assessing the risks?

What are their underlying values?



# A bit closer to home...

We all know that we should consume less sugar, drink less alcohol...

- According to a recent study, there's no safe level of alcohol consumption in relation to cancer and pregnant women
- Moderate drinking may in fact be healthier for the heart than total abstinence
- How do we balance our enjoyment of drinking against the uncertain risks?

<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/d-but-should-we-stop>

**How many units in a drink?**

**1 =**

-  A small bottle (275ml) of lower strength (4%) alcopop
-  A half pint of lower strength (4%) lager, beer or cider
-  A single measure of spirit (40%)

**2 =**

-  A standard glass (175ml) of lower strength (12%) wine or champagne
-  A pint of lower strength (4%) lager, beer or cider
-  A 440ml can of medium strength (4.5%) lager, beer or cider
-  A double measure of spirit (40%)

**3 =**

-  A pint of medium strength (5%) lager, beer or cider
-  A large glass (250ml) of lower strength (12%) wine
-  A large bottle (700ml) of lower strength (4%) alcopop

**4 =**

-  A large bottle (700ml) of higher strength (5.5%) alcopop
-  A 500ml can of higher strength (7.5%) lager, beer or cider

**CHECK THE LABEL**  
Most drinks tell you how many units are in them

**Know your limits**  
Units of alcohol per 125ml glass 

The UK Chief Medical Officers recommend that adults do not regularly exceed:



**14 units a week for both men and women**



# The precautionary principle – further questions and issues

- The precautionary principle shares one of the problems of Utilitarianism – that consequences are not always predictable.
- Is the precautionary principle just a version of Negative Utilitarianism, the avoidance of harm to the greatest number?
- Are there any values underlying the precautionary principle? Or do we all bring our own values and preferences to the table?
- How do we balance present benefits against future harms?
- Do different decisions stem from different values, or from weighing up facts differently, or from differing preferences between present and future benefits and problems?