



Canadian Health Coalition Coalition canadienne de la santé

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MEDIA RELEASE

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‘Smart Regulation’ puts profits before health

OTTAWA -- The Canadian Health Coalition responded to the Government of Canada's Smart Regulation: Report on Actions and Plans released by Treasury Board President Reg Alcock on March 25, 2005 with the following statement:

The Government of Canada's Smart Regulation plan is infected with a corporate virus designed to attack federal regulatory agencies. The objective is to turn guardians of public health into promoters of involuntary and uncontrollable health hazards and industrial risk. The results of 'Smart Regulation', including its pilot program at Health Canada – the Therapeutics Access Strategy, produce jaundiced regulatory behaviour that puts commercial interests before the protection of human life.

'Smart Regulation' is market-oriented and industry friendly regulation. It is designed to harmonize Canada's health and environmental protection with that of the Bush White House and is part of the continental (U.S.) integration agenda. The Bush White House is implementing a sweeping deregulatory strategy to dismantle public safeguards on behalf of powerful corporate interests. (<http://www.ombwatch.org/regs/bushrecord/takeover>) In harmonizing with the Bush regime, the Martin government is also moving to dismantle crucial safeguards, including the Food & Drugs Act, that protect human health and the environment. (<http://renewal.hc-sc.gc.ca>).

Canada's political and industrial elites have made their choice: corporate profits are to trump the protection of citizens' health. Federal health protection agencies have been captured by the industries they are supposed to regulate. These agencies as well as the 'Smart Regulation' plan are now rigged to deceive the public.

Canadians are not prepared to support deregulation and harmonization with the Bush White House in the area of health and environmental protection. The federal government knows this and so to reassure us they claim that 'Smart Regulation' will promote and protect health. We are not told how.

...2

Applying 'Smart Regulation' to federal regulation of food, drugs, and medical devices will guarantee that thousands more Canadians will be killed from unsafe health products and food. When federal health protection agencies mix guardian functions with trade and industry promotion - the real objective of 'Smart Regulation' - you create what Jane Jacobs calls a "monstrous hybrid". Lives are unconscionably put at risk. Drugs like Vioxx get speedy approval and then crash, killing thousands. Blood product gets contaminated with 'market-friendly' importation of prison blood, killing thousands. The grim truth is that 'Smart Regulation' puts profits before health.

Applying 'Smart Regulation' to biotechnology will pave the way for marketing products and technology with unknown hazards, uncontrollable risk, and irreversible harm, including: genetically modified and 'novel' food, gene therapies, bio-pharmaceuticals, reproductive technology, xenotransplantation, cloning and life patenting. No evidence of safety will be required and current legal duties to protect health (in the Food & Drugs Act) will be gutted. The objective is to create a competitive advantage for these industries by means of weaker safety standards.(See Ill Health Canada: Putting Food and Drug Company Profits ahead of safety, Ottawa: CCPA, 2005, <http://www.healthcoalition.ca/>)

The centrepiece of this corporate takeover bid of health regulation is the shift to a narrow risk-benefit approach that abandons the Precautionary Principle. The method used in this industrial risk approach to health hazards has a built-in bias in favour of technological benefits and against the risk factors. Instead of preventing disease and ill health from happening in the first place, 'Smart Regulation' will manage the damage after the fact. The damage to be 'managed' is preventable illness and death.

Following the tainted blood disaster killing thousands of Canadians, Justice Krever warned the Government that health regulators should regulate only in the interests of public health and never in the interests of the regulated industries. 'Smart Regulation' in federal health protection agencies stands the Krever Report on its head. The External Advisory Committee knows their plan will mean more lives lost in the pursuit of corporate greed. It recommends immunity for Health Canada staff in abandoning their duty to protect Canadians. (Recommendation 46, <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/smartreg-regint/>).

This is not the kind of Canada that Canadians want. Canadians don't want their health protection weakened in pursuit of a biotechnology pipedream and the insatiable greed of Big Pharma. 'Smart Regulation' will not only put lives at risk; it will also destroy Canada's international reputation. The end result will be to brand Canadian products as 'Dangerous'.

The Canadian Health Coalition therefore insists that the current legal framework, the Food & Drugs Act, remain in place and be enforced. Furthermore, the Government of Canada must adopt the Precautionary Principle as the basis for a broad, transparent, and independent assessment of risk to protect those least able to protect themselves from health hazards – especially children and future generations.

In a healthy democracy, business and government elites don't determine the future based on unexamined assumptions that benefit the powerful at the expense of the public good. The Canadian Health Coalition is determined to unmask these assumptions. This is why we are organizing a national roundtable in Ottawa on May 9th 2005. The topic is: The Precautionary Principle and Canada's Approach to Risk. For further information: www.healthcoalition.ca. This event will examine the courses open to Canada, other than an economy focused on exporting hazards and risk. Citizens should not leave it to corporate lobbyists to determine regulatory objectives.