

# Big Green: bravos, boos

Prop. 128 will avert ecological disaster, or wreak its own havoc

**Ted Smith**

## The lesser risk

Treat the Earth well. It was not given to us by our parents; it was loaned to us by our children.

— Kenyan proverb

**A**S we approach the 21st century, we are in danger of defaulting on the most precious loan that our children have entrusted to us.

Imagine the landscape predicted by the nation's best scientists:

- ✓ 80 million new skin cancers as a result of the destruction of the ozone shield from man-made chemical emissions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. One in 90 of us may suffer from skin cancer within 10 years.

- ✓ Over 1 million unnecessary cancers from pesticide residues in our food, according to the National Academy of Sciences.

- ✓ The childhood cancer rate has escalated 22.5 percent since the 1950s and is climbing.

- ✓ Projections warn that man-made gases may melt the polar ice caps.

Each of these disaster scenarios is preventable. We are at a turning point. We not only can identify environmental problems but we also can propose solutions that will prevent massive suffering and global deterioration. Do we have the political will to do so?

Proposition 128, Big Green, provides a framework for the preventive medicine that we need to avert public health disaster. Written by environmental experts, Big Green identifies five critical problems and proposes bold solutions:

- ✓ Phasing out 20 cancer-causing pesticides still used on foods in California.

- ✓ Phasing out chlorofluorocarbons and other chemicals that are destroying the ozone layer; particularly important in the Santa Clara Valley which has ranked near the top in CFC emissions.

- ✓ Protecting the coast from oil spills and toxic discharges.

- ✓ Reducing by 20 percent emissions of global-warming gases.

- ✓ Protecting old-growth redwoods from clear-cutting.

Big Green provides \$40 million to research alternatives to pesticides and chemicals that will be phased out. This is public policy at its best — it forces technological innovation and provides funding to develop safer alternatives to chemical dependency. It also creates an elected office of environmental advocate to enforce its provisions, so that good legislation won't be undercut by lobbying.

Sure, there are risks and uncertainties. But the risks of inaction are much worse. You pay now or you pay later. Especially as long as the hogs are still in the creek.

*Ted Smith is executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition and vice president of the National Toxics Campaign.*

**C. Everett Koop**

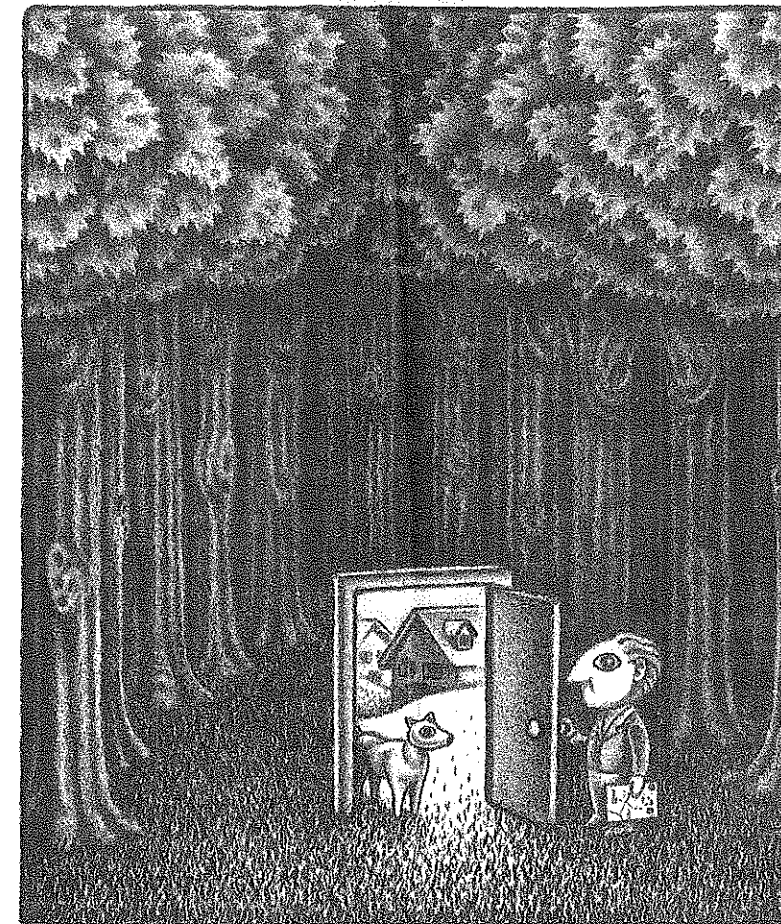
## No health aid

During my tenure as surgeon general of the United States, I was willing to take unpopular, and sometimes politically "unsafe," positions.

For years, I have been admonishing Americans to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. I have followed most closely the studies of pesticide applications and their effects on human consumers. After careful consideration of all the data, I am convinced that California's farmers — indeed, all farmers in our country — are *not* poisoning the produce they sell. Nor do I believe the new restrictions in Proposition 128 make good scientific sense.

Currently, most in the scientific community agree it is the dose or the amount of anything (be it a pesticide, pharmaceutical product, the sun or even those toxins found naturally in our foods) that constitutes the risk. Nearly everything, below certain levels, can be considered safe, even though at high enough levels, health concerns might be justified.

We have based our approval of drugs used in medicine and chemicals used in farming on the prem-



Kevin Kreneck — Roanoke Times & World-News

ise that the appropriate criterion for assessing potentially hazardous compounds is the prevention of any "significant risk." Proposition 128 discards that science and substitutes a new criterion — the "zero risk" base where no level of exposure is acceptable, even obviously trivial amounts where there is no proof that such amounts cause any harm.

Clearly this is not reasonable and not what is intended by the 128 authors. I don't use it to trivialize the concerns of those who drafted this initiative, but it points up the folly of using a non-scientific approach to important scientific and health concerns.

Proposition 128 would *not* protect Californians' health.

*C. Everett Koop served as surgeon general of the United States from 1981 through 1989.*

**Al Meyerhoff**

## Hit the source

Proposition 128 will break new ground on how we approach some of the principal threats to our environment. Rather than dealing with pollution piecemeal, the California initiative will prevent or reduce at the source primary causes of environmental degradation.

A major producer of the nation's food, with \$16 billion in sales annually, California agriculture adds more than 600 million pounds of pesticides to the environment annually. Over 3,000 drinking water wells are contaminated as are numerous rivers and estuaries. Farmworker pesticide poisonings have doubled in 20 years.

In five to eight years, Proposition 128 will phase out the use on food of pesticides (previously classified by government) as known to cause cancer or reproductive harm. Food grown outside California containing these chemicals also will be prohibited from sale. According to the University of California, there already exist alternatives for all but two of these pesticides.

To address global warming, Big Green provides for reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 20 percent by the year 2000 and 40 percent by 2010. These CO<sub>2</sub> reductions will be accomplished by increased fuel and energy efficiency and conservation measures, most likely targeting the automotive industry.

These measures will also substantially decrease emissions of air pollutants presenting serious hazards to human health.

Proposition 128 also will phase out the sale of products containing ozone-layer-depleting chemicals such as CFCs by 1997, a quicker pace than contained in the pending Clean Air legislation but slower than the schedule of some industry leaders, such as IBM.

California's coastline is one of the most beautiful in the world. It is also a serious risk. Two million gallons of poorly treated or untreated sewage are discharged into coastal waters and estuaries daily; four billion pounds of toxic waste are dumped annually.

On an average day, 33 million gallons of oil sail in and out of California's harbors. An independent study has found more than a 90 percent chance of a massive oil spill off the California coast within 20 years. The initiative establishes deadlines for carrying out the federal Clean Water Act's secondary sewage treatment provisions while creating a comprehensive oil spill prevention and cleanup program.

Big Green represents an effort by the environmental community to translate the promise of Earth Day into essential reform.

*Al Meyerhoff is a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council and a co-author of Proposition 128.*

**Anne Chadwick and Cary Walker**

## Act globally

Backers of Big Green say they want a safer food supply, but their efforts are misdirected. They should instead rally around a global initiative to strengthen food safety standards worldwide.

Pesticide provisions of Big Green conflict with attempts to improve international health and environmental rules through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The 97 members of the GATT, an organization which sets the rules for trade, are pushing the internationally recognized standards as a basis for national regulations on chemical use. The GATT proposal would motivate most countries to raise standards to meet guidelines adopted by the United Nations.

The California initiative misses the mark on food safety. California cannot clean up planet Earth by itself; it must enlist the cooperation of other countries. The GATT proposal presents an opportunity to increase safeguards in the United States and in other countries.

It is better than Big Green for business, trade and consumers. Big Green would damage much of California's vital commerce. Its tight restrictions, which would exceed federal requirements, would limit the ability of American states and foreign countries to sell products in California.

Several foreign government representatives already have complained about the initiative's proposed import restrictions. If Big Green becomes law, it may face a constitutional challenge on the basis that it would interfere with interstate commerce and disrupt international trade.

Big Green thinks locally; GATT acts globally.

*Anne Chadwick and Cary Walker are Washington representatives of the California State World Trade Commission, part of the Governor's Office.*