

Department of Environmental Protection - ECO/ECO: Maine's Environmental Priorities Project

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After 18 months of planning and several additional months of negotiating the ground rules and composition of the steering committee, Maine's Environmental Priorities Project is finally about to be launched. Governor McKernan is expected to formally initiate the project in May with the announcement of appointees to a 36-member project steering committee. As of this writing, nearly all of those invited to fill slots on the steering committee had accepted.

This comparative risk evaluation project is the result of a collaboration between the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and ECO/ECO, a non-partisan public interest coalition of more than 100 business and environmental leaders sponsored by College of the Atlantic. (The process for the project is similar to one used in Vermont; see the December 1991 MPR for a discussion of that process.) This effort is an attempt to create an effective process for evaluating and comparing possible threats to health, the environment, and the quality of life in Maine. Results may allow state officials to direct limited resources to those environmental problems that pose the most serious public risks. Ultimately, the objectives of the project are to provide quantitative and scientific information and qualitative judgments that will support the resulting priorities list and will increase public understanding of environmental risk.

The project's steering committee, which is expected to meet initially in late May or early June, will be supported by three technical advisory committees. These working groups will focus on issues of human health, ecological health, and quality of life, respectively, and will analyze a comprehensive list of environmental problems developed through existing data sources and a series of regional public meetings. The project, which is being supported by a two-year Environmental Protection Agency grant totaling \$100,000, as well as by private foundation grants, will have a \$350,000 total operating budget. A final Comparative Environmental Risk and Priorities Report is expected to be issued in January 1995.

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