More than a month ago, in RHWN #342, we urged our readers to think like their adversaries. We offered a view of the world that we believe many polluter's secretely share. We asked readers to imagine how they would behave if they were polluters who held these views. The following compendium is written from the viewpoint of polluters. If you are put off by the negative tone of some of these ideas, remember that they were suggested by real people fighting for their lives.

1) DENY that environmental and health problems are real. This is ESSENTIAL to our success. If the public believes we're endangering their health, we're in serious trouble.

This idea is so important that it warrants an orchestrated campaign. If possible, a major metropolitan newspaper, one known for objectivity and good reporting, should kick off the campaign.

We should commission a half dozen books, written by former public officials, particularly aging white males with Ph.D. degrees in science or engineering, challenging the belief that ecosystems are endangered, and ridiculing the notion that small exposures to chemicals harm people.

We'll also need a couple of slick magazines devoted to business and the environment.

As we get into this campaign, we'll need to characterize our adversaries with epithets and labels, such as chicken littles, or simply chickens; chemophobes; hysterical housewives; irresponsible doom-sayers; crazies; and so forth. This part can be fun.

We will also need to initiate some strategic lawsuits against people who accuse us of harming them. We can never keep them entirely quiet, because they are too numerous, but we can learn something important from organized crime. Organized crime does not beat up every one of its adversaries. A single heavily-publicized beating goes a long way toward bringing everyone into line. Everyone has a price: most of our adversaries will not be swayed by money, but will respond well to fear.

Lastly, we will need a federal agency that we can rely upon to conduct scientific studies that show pollution never harms communities. ATSDR [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry] is a good candidate, though EPA has often served us well too.

Anyone who doubts our ability to get proper results from government, should recall the EPA and the waste industry. During the past decade at least 50 highly-placed officials of EPA, including 3 past administrators, have created and enforced regulations tailored to benefit the waste industry, and have then left government to take lucrative jobs in the waste industry. This revolving door provides all opportunities to conceal their actions, and have then left government to take lucrative jobs in the waste industry. This revolving door provides all opportunities to conceal their actions. Any time, any place, any issue.

2) DELAY the inevitable. Learn from the tobacco industry: they've avoided the obvious for 40 years. Examine how they have achieved their phenomenal success. Here are a few strategies that work:

Corporate philanthropy: tobacco companies support the arts, sports events, and local schools, even as they are getting the kids addicted to a product which, if used as directed, will ruin their health and eventually kill them.

Crush your adversaries in court. Hire lawyers born of a marriage between the bulldog and the shark. Take no prisoners. Vigorously defend your absolute right to make and sell any product, no matter who may be harmed. Defend at all costs your right to harm people; it is the essence of a truly free market.

If possible, have the federal government label your product "hazardous." This will shift liability onto the government, and onto the user of the product.

Fund scientific research, especially irrelevant scientific research. The public has no idea what's relevant. Funding research gives the appearance of caring, and provides a basis for any claims you might want to make. "Our research shows" is a much better introduction than, "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV," which also has been shown to work.

Sow the seeds of DOUBT. A little doubt goes a long way to confuse the public and delay decisive action. If there's any doubt about the science underlying an issue, the media give "both sides" even if one side has only 0.01% support and the other side has 99.99% percent support. Tobacco companies can still find people with science degrees who will look straight into a TV camera and say, "I am not aware of any convincing evidence that tobacco causes cancer."

Our plants in Congress need the merest shred of evidence, the slimmest shadow of a doubt, to justify a hands-off approach.

In these hard times, it is especially rewarding to emphasize ECONOMIC DOUBTS about environmental programs. Claim they're going to wreck the economy, destroy jobs, cost the taxpayer billions of dollars. If it turns out later that these predictions are wrong, it won't matter; no one remembers such things.

3) DIVIDE. Keep your adversaries at each other's throats. If they get together, they're formidable. Divided, they're weak. Our adversaries are racially and cultural diverse. They represent rich and poor alike. Therefore, we have BOUNDLESS opportunities to split them and set them against each other. THIS IS A KEY IDEA, TO BE STUDIED CAREFULLY, ELABORATED, EXPANDED AND EXTENDED.

4) DISSEMBLE. This means lie. Not that anyone likes to lie, of course. But sometimes it's the only expedient way to spread doubt, divide our adversaries, and make points with the media. The media almost never look behind what we say--they report it at face value, so a little lie can go a long way.

5) DESTROY. When all else fails, destroy your adversaries' credibility, cohesiveness, and confidence. Call them commies. Call them hippies. Call them at 3 in the morning and curse at them in Spanish or Korean. Drive them crazy. Have the police "discover" drugs in their cars. Kill their dogs. Burn their homes. Whatever it takes. (But don't get caught.)

6) DECOY. Set up smoke screens. Divert attention away from the real issues. Looking for a site? Announce that you're examining multiple sites, to keep your adversaries spread thin, unable to focus on the site you really want.

Hide in a web of enterprises. The modern trend toward "enterprise webs" instead of old-style corporations (see Robert Reich's book, WORK OF NATIONS) offers great opportunity to leave exceedingly complex paper trails that few can follow. Contracts, subcontracts, leases, subsidiaries--all offer opportunities to conceal who's doing what to whom.

Avoid appearing at public meetings. That's what we have government for, to appear on our behalf.

At all costs, avoid direct confrontation with communities. It takes a miracle to win a direct confrontation, unless of course you can turn the situation violent. A violent confrontation, we can ALWAYS win.

7) DEFEAT bad legislative proposals. Simply put: buy votes and influence. Money spent on lawmakers and judges is ALWAYs a good investment.

8) DEMAND and require government to use risk assessment wherever possible. It is our best tool for having our way with any community. A well-written risk assessment can prove that anything
is safe. Risk assessment, more than any other single tool, has allowed us to continue business as usual. THIS IS A KEY IDEA. We must support risk assessment at all costs.

DEMAND public hearings where the public gets only 30 seconds (if we're generous, 3 minutes) to state its case. Better yet, have "public information sessions" where the public can only "ask questions" and cannot "make speeches." If they "make speeches," cut them off. That way we control the whole meeting, yet give the appearance of a democratic process. Appearing to be democratic is important.

It goes without saying that meetings should be held during the day, whenever possible, so working people can't attend. If you must meet at night, arrange the agenda so the hystericals get to speak late in the evening, after the media have left.

9) DEFLECT liability and responsibility, particularly at the personal level. The key to the success of the business system is that individual investors are not held responsible for anything a corporation does. If things go bad, chapter 11 bankruptcy bails everyone out, as in the asbestos industry. If individuals were ever held strictly liable for corporate behavior, our privilege and power would disappear.

In addition, it is important to DEFLECT attention away from corporate behavior. Keep the public focused on its own personal behavior. Make people feel guilty about their lifestyles. Keep people focused on water-saving toilets, setting up recycling programs, and planting trees. One of the great success stories of all time is the way corporations have effectively disappeared as a public issue. When was the last time you saw a headline, "Legislature limits size of corporations" or "Corporate bad actor loses right to do business." Not since about 1915 have you seen such a headline. Now THAT'S successful deflection.

10) DIRECT AND CONTROL the pace of change. The inevitable IS inevitable, but we can control the pace, which is really all we need.

11) SUPPORT the Big 10 environmental groups when they work to pass unenforceable legislation, as they've done for 20 years. Passing unenforceable legislation undermines confidence in government, splits the environmental movement, wastes taxpayer's money, bloats the bureaucracy, and convinces the public that real change is impossible. PERFECT.

12) Keep regulators focused on controlling chemicals one at a time, instead of controlling whole classes of chemicals. THIS IS ANOTHER KEY IDEA. Controlling chemicals one at a time, risk assessment by risk assessment, will take centuries or longer. Meanwhile, the chemicals are profitably in use while we debate.

13) We need to restrict the first amendment to the Constitution, so-called free speech. Speech isn't free, it's loose. This is one key area where we haven't solidified control, and we need to work on it.

14) Free trade agreements, like NAFTA and GATT, are keys to the expansion of our control world-wide. WE NEED THESE AGREEMENTS. Not only will they let us have our way with the developing world, but they will undermine jobs in the U.S. Who will be blamed for that? Government. The more we can convince people that government is the main problem, the better off we are.

15) We must convince people that it is hopeless to work for change. Always create the strong impression that nothing different is possible. It's important for the public to believe things have always been the way they are today, and always will be.

16) Paint ourselves green, green, green. Green is good. Green is friendly. Green is the color of money.

--Peter Montague

Descriptor terms: business strategies; greenwashing; free trade; nafta; gatt; liability; corporations; corporate charters; risk assessment; first amendment; freedom of speech; free speech;