

Ethical Principles that Guide the Division of Environmental and Occupational Disease Control

The primary duty of the Staff of the California Department of Public Health and the Division of Environmental and Occupational Disease Control (DEODC) is to protect the public's health. In pursuing this goal DEODC staff recognize that as public health professionals we have ethical duties to, and must respect the ethical rights of, the public in general, stakeholders, subjects of research, co-investigators, funding agencies, political representatives of the people as well as coworkers and management.

DEODC staff are committed to considering and balancing four over-arching principles as we protect the public's health. DEODC staff actively seek to: (1) help others, (2) avoid doing them harm, (3) enhance the ability of individuals and communities to make informed choices, and (4) seek solutions that are fair and efficacious.

DEODC staff are committed to identifying problems, interpreting evidence, and providing information in an ethical, impartial, and trustworthy manner. All DEODC branches are heavily involved in identifying problems, providing and interpreting information on environmental and/or occupational health risks, and finding ways to avoid or minimize them. DEODC staff provide this information to stakeholders with different informational needs that spring from different interests, cultural values, and ethical viewpoints. These viewpoints can be as divergent as valuing "the best results for the most people at the least cost" on the one hand, to valuing "the duty to protect the most vulnerable regardless of cost" on the other. To satisfy the former viewpoint, one provides information to assess impacts on the population as a whole, while to satisfy the latter, one provides information about impacts on the most exposed and most vulnerable and who they are. Within the resources available, DEODC staff strive to pursue the following strategies, aiming to meet the informational needs of all stakeholders in an impartial and trustworthy manner:

Democratic Process

Encouraging stakeholder involvement in what we do, and advocating for the budget and staffing required to attend to societal differences in power and access.

Transparency

Providing information and the rationales for conclusions in a way that is transparent and intelligible to everyone regardless of language, culture or education. Making clear how we have balanced the risks of falsely exonerating and falsely incriminating the agents we have evaluated or studied.

Truthfulness

Telling the unadorned, impartial truth, and formatting our degree of certainty about it to accommodate stakeholders who might take action even when we are not virtually certain.

Policy Relevance

Ascertaining what will be needed ahead of time, and providing as much policy relevant information as we can, including facts about who is exposed and who is vulnerable, both of which are relevant to fairness.

Application of Foresight

Helping stakeholders to explore and evaluate alternative strategies for minimizing risk, even before we have virtual scientific certainty about the relevant facts.

Freedom from Conflicting Interests

Making sure that our personal finances or the way our projects are funded and managed, do not pose a real or apparent conflict of interest.