

Breastfeeding is preferable to any alternative

Industrial pollution means that toxic substances, including dioxin and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), are found in our food, in our bodies and throughout the environment.

PCBs have also been found, along with other pollutants, in some samples of cow's milk and breastmilk.

However, WHO (World Health Organization) has concluded after a careful evaluation of environmental toxins and the risks to children, that the advantages of breastmilk far outweigh any possible risks.

WHO, therefore recommends breastfeeding as

preferable to any alternative.

Studies show that although exposure to toxins in the womb can impair short-term memory, a child's memory improves in direct proportion to the duration of breastfeeding.

Most reassuring of all, perhaps, are reports from Canada, Germany, Luxemburg, Norway, Sweden and the UK, which show dramatic falls in the levels of toxins found in breastmilk. For example, figures from Norway and the UK show that dioxin concentrations in breastmilk fell by around 35 per cent between 1988 and 1994.

Disposal methods pollute air, land and groundwater

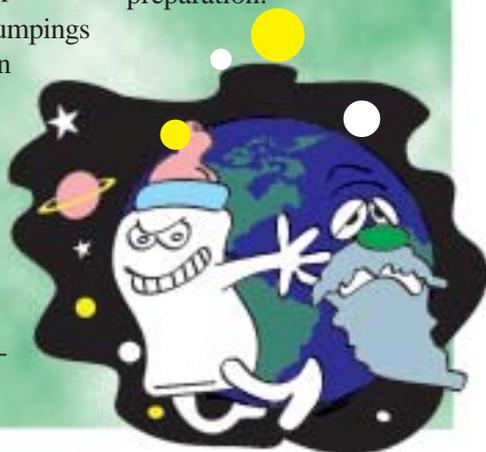
The packaging used for baby foods, along with feeding bottles, teats and pacifiers, is commonly thrown away after use. Normally these are not biodegradable. Plastic feeding bottles, teats and pacifiers take 200 to 450 years to break down when disposed in landfills. Glass feeding bottles take an undetermined amount of time to decompose.

Landfill, ocean dumpings and incineration are the most common disposal methods.

Landfill sites can pollute ground water, and there is a shortage of suit-

able sites in some countries. Incineration releases pollutants into the air. For example, if plastic bottles are burned, the fumes may contain dioxin and other toxic substances.

Breastfeeding is entirely free of waste. One need not worry about refuse disposal, since breastmilk needs no packaging or preparation.



“Mobilization means stimulating and supporting a process requiring continuous dedication and producing daily results; it is not limited to putting on events and calling on people to demonstrate. Mobilization is raising consciousness, sharing knowledge and points of view, making decisions jointly and acting together in search of a common goal.”

(Bernardo Toro, Colombia)

Building an Action Plan

To support the goals of World Breastfeeding Week 1997 each of us should look at how we can make a difference. The following suggestions can help people organize campaigns at various levels.

Networking and Coordination

WBW experiences in various countries have shown that when activities are well planned, better results are achieved and more people become involved, organized and coordinated. The actions described here can be carried out in your neighborhood, your city, your state or even your country. Whatever you do, try to plan ahead!

The first step is to identify potential partners in your city or region. This year's WBW theme leads us to look for allies among environmentalists, teachers, youth and children; and it is also important to involve your neighborhood associations, women's groups, NGOs and religious organizations.

Choose a person or a group of individuals to oversee the coordination of activities, and make an inventory of existing and potential resources your group has. Use your creativity to plan activities. Finally, get in touch with your regional, national or the international WBW coordinator. By communicating and coordinating, your work will have greater visibility and wider impact because you will be linked to others all over the world.

Information and Communication

The challenge this year is to show the connection between breastfeeding and the environment; pointing out the need to protect scarce natural resources. It needs to be discussed and explained. Throughout your WBW campaign try to emphasize how infant feeding products and accessories harm the environment and waste resources, and how breastfeeding protects the environment.

It is essential to make our actions visible using the mass media. Appoint a Media Officer who will keep TV, radio, newspapers and magazines informed about your activities and supply them with data on “breastfeeding and the environment”.

Often we do excellent work, but few people outside our immediate circle know about it, because we don't document and disseminate our accomplishments. It is important to write reports about what you did, with photos, newspaper clippings, etc. and to send them to the WBW coordinator.

Thus your work will become a part of the history of WBW and will give new ideas to other groups all over the world. Networking is all about gathering information, reporting and sharing.