Article 1:

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Most people would be surprised to discover that the laws, regulations, and mandates designed to protect our environment may actually be harming it instead. Long gone are the days of sooty smog, acid rain, brown sunsets, leaded children, and rivers on fire. The new environmental challenges are almost imperceptible, and until the development of highly-advanced, highly-sensitive atomic mass spectroscopy systems, unmeasurable. To combat these nearly invisible and unmeasurable problems, new regulations and mandates have gone into effect. But these new regulations and mandates may actually be hindering our attempts in dealing with the more measurable and easily observed problems, as well as our economy.

The Earth is like a giant conveyor system. The inside is full of useful things and nastiness, which are emitted from holes in the ground as gases (e.g. water, carbon dioxide, and sulfur dioxide) and solids in the form of volcanic ash and lava. These materials are then absorbed or leached by surface water, and eventually end up inside living things. The living things die and become dirt and then rock, which is very slowly either re-leached by water or pushed back down inside the Earth. Pollution is caused by human activity when we dig up these resources and put them back on the surface of the Earth, faster than water and life can put them back inside. Of particular concern are the gases released from burning fossil fuels; carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide.

Sulfur dioxide is one of the big nasties, responsible for smog, haze, and acid rain. We hear very little about acid rain nowadays, but it still exists. We still emit one-third of the sulfur dioxide we did at the peak of the problem, and our sulfur recovery technologies are just about maxed out. The only way to reduce sulfur dioxide and carbon dioxide emissions further is to use less fossil fuel, which means alternate energy sources or greater energy efficiency, which requires technology, but technology often has issues with those more invisible environmental problems.

After fixing the problems with burning lakes and rivers, environmental protection found a new enemy: toxic metals. Metals are purified from ores that are extracted from the ground. Many different metals tend to be found in the same ores. For example, lead and cadmium are usually found with zinc, and zinc may be found with copper. Much of that zinc (with lead and cadmium) was once part of living organisms, and was concentrated into ore deposits during metamorphic transformation of the limestone (calcium carbonate) that was created by those organisms. How did it get into the living things in the first place? It was leached out of rocks by surface water. All of the toxic metals are found naturally on the surface of the Earth, in water and living things, and frequently at levels higher than what the EPA considers "safe", but significantly lower than what causes adverse health effects.

So what has a radical crusade against toxic metals gotten us? One company wrote a proposal to the Department of Energy to investigate a way to make cadmium telluride (CdTe) solar cells more efficient. Many of the reviewers thought it was a good idea, but one reviewer said, "nothing with cadmium is any good." The proposal was not funded, probably beaten out by a shrimp treadmill, but at least that reviewer prevented all of that cadmium getting from our environment back into our environment. You see, whether it is used to make solar cells or not, all of that cadmium comes as a byproduct of zinc smelting. It has to go somewhere.

Lead is used to make batteries, and batteries are needed to store energy for when the Sun goes down or the wind stops blowing, or when you unplug your electric car. Lead was one of the cheapest metals around until the lead crusade started. Now the batteries alone make solar cells and electric cars too expensive. Yes, putting lead into gasoline and creating a lead vapor smog over the entire world was not a good idea; neither was using lead as a paint pigment, but the crusade continued. Do you seriously expect your child to munch down your cell phone, eat your kitchen faucet, consume your car battery, or rip apart your computer to make motherboard pasta? The lead crusaders did. The result is called RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances), which defines minimum levels of toxic metals in electronic devices, often as 'no detectable amount'. Then along came measurement methods that could detect single atoms. Thanks to Mother Nature, our entire world is a toxic waste dump. We were only just able to notice.

As new health studies observe toxic effects down to levels even below those naturally present, the limits on allowable toxic metals get even lower, and technology gets even more expensive. Talking about lead and cadmium, did you know that the toxic effects of these metals are very similar to chronic calcium deficiency? Their method of action is to displace calcium, and when calcium is lacking, they come in. Did you know that about [70% of children](http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=129387&page=1#.UILJHhTOTSI)and [50% of adults](http://michellemoseley.hubpages.com/hub/Calcium-Deficiency--Are-You-at-Risk)are calcium deficient? What have those studies actually been measuring?

While we torture ourselves with possibly baseless, excessive environmental protection, business has already found its own solutions: foreign countries. When businesses feel as though they are "[under attack from our own government](http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/2012-presidential-debate-full-transcript-oct-16/story?id=17493848&page=10#.UILR6hTOTSI)", they find nicer governments. Many people think that businesses move to China for the cheap labor, but this is simply not the case. The difference is that China does not attack its businesses: the business of China is business. To start a factory in America, you need millions of dollars in lawyers and several years to get through all of the permitting and regulation issues. If you are working with pollutants, you need a workforce that is certified, in multiple ways. Most of your applicants are probably unqualified due to the certifications alone. Meanwhile, all of the unskilled Chinese labor is more than qualified to run a clean shop, in China, if you choose to run a clean shop.

How to fix it? First, we might get rid of certifications. All they do is make our workforce unqualified, and put money into the deep pockets of big education. Look at Chicago's failing public schools, staffed by certified teachers who fail at teaching. Very few of the teachers in private schools are certified, and yet they are generally considered superior. The same is true of all certifications.

Most definitely, listen to the concerns of small businesses. Big businesses like onerous mandates; big government harassment is a good way to kill potential competitors. Just because a business complains about the rules, regulations and mandates does not mean they "[just want dirty air and water](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2011/10/17/obama_gop_wants_dirtier_air_dirtier_water_less_people_with_health_insurance.html)." Business sees a flaming hoop, with no valid justification, not a reasonable rule to prevent pollution. Politicians should listen, not make ridiculous accusations.