

Proposing Environmental Laws

In this lab you will assume the role of a legislator and model the process of drafting an environmental bill.

OBJECTIVES

Prepare an environmental bill.

Model the legislative process for passing a bill into law.

MATERIALS

- federal, state, or local environmental statutes

You have just been elected to Congress. You ran on a strong environmental platform, so your first order of business will be to draft an environmental law. Your constituents are ready to make suggestions about where you should begin.

Dear New Representative,

Congratulations on your recent victory! We share a common interest in the environment, and we would like to be a resource for you in your legislative activities. The following areas are very important to us.

toxic waste disposal	industrial emissions
recycling	landfills
air pollution	ozone depletion
groundwater pollution	protecting public lands
preserving wildlife habitat	
transportation of hazardous materials	
point and nonpoint water pollution	

Good luck in your work. Please let us know how we may be of service to you. If you sponsor any environmental legislation, include us on your list of contacts. Thank you.

Yours for a sustainable environment,

Ken and Cora Constituent

Ken and Cora Constituent

Proposing Environmental Laws *continued*

PROCEDURE**DAY 1—DRAFT A BILL**

Even though you prepared thoroughly for your new role as a legislator, you find the process of actually making bills to be somewhat confusing. Bills can be quite complicated. A bill spells out what is prohibited, what is allowed, and what information must be reported to the government. A bill must also do the following:

- provide a reason for the bill
- define its terms
- describe who is affected and who is exempt
- specify penalties and enforcement procedures
- authorize funding
- specify the time span over which the bill is effective

Bills also may contain many additional provisions relating to the details of their implementation.

1. To get an idea of what laws look like, read through an actual environmental law provided by your teacher.
2. Identify an environmental problem that you think needs to be addressed.

3. Draft a statement explaining the intent of a bill that you will write to address the environmental problem.

4. How will your bill be structured? Will it be primarily a list of prohibited activities, a set of required actions, a new governmental function, or some combination of these?

5. As a new legislator, you have been provided with an official Handbook of Helpful Hints for New Legislators. The box on the next page contains suggestions from the handbook for drawing up a bill. Study these suggestions and consider how they apply to your bill.

Proposing Environmental Laws *continued***HELPFUL HINTS FOR NEW LEGISLATORS**

When drafting a law, bear in mind that laws cannot be drafted to affect a single individual or organization. Carefully consider how your law will affect society. Ask yourself the following questions about your law.

Is it adequate; will it fix the problem?

Is it workable; does it have loopholes?

Is it fair; how would I feel if this law were imposed on me?

Who will be affected by it? Will it cause unnecessary hardships or loss of jobs?

How much will it cost? Where will the money come from?

How will it be enforced and by whom? Consider providing incentives for compliance as well as penalties for noncompliance. Are the penalties just and legally enforceable?

On a separate sheet of paper, write a draft of your bill. Your bill should address each of the points listed in the box above.

DAY 2—PRESENT YOUR BILL IN COMMITTEE

Your handbook continues:

Before a bill is passed into law, it is debated by people representing all sides of an issue. At the federal level, bills are sent to a committee for study and debate. That committee listens to testimony from interested groups or individuals. The committee then either votes to submit the bill unaltered to the full chamber, amends it, tables it (puts it aside for possible later consideration), or kills it.

After a bill has been approved by a committee, it can be submitted to the full chamber of the House of Representatives for a vote. The full chamber should have the chance to study a bill and hear testimony for and against it before voting. Once it has passed the House of Representatives, the Senate has to approve the bill as well.

- 6.** Each lab team will model a legislative committee. Each team member will present his or her bill to the committee by reading it aloud and explaining its key features. Answer any questions the committee members may have.
- 7.** Allow committee members to propose amendments to your bill. Vote on proposed amendments to decide if they will be included in the final bill.
- 8.** After all amendments have been considered, have a committee vote to decide whether to approve each bill. Then select one approved bill to go to the floor of the full legislative body (the class).

Proposing Environmental Laws *continued*

DAY 3—PRESENT APPROVED COMMITTEE BILLS TO THE FULL LEGISLATIVE BODY

9. Your entire class will play the role of a full legislative body. Choose one member of your committee to present the bill that your committee has approved. Allow questions from the full chamber, and then vote on each bill. For sake of time, amendments will not be considered.

Analysis

1. **Analyzing Results** Describe one bill that was passed into law. Identify key aspects which made it successful.

2. **Analyzing Results** Recall one bill that failed to pass the vote in the full chamber. Identify key aspects which made it unsuccessful.

3. **Explaining Events** Which aspects of your bill do you feel are most important? Explain why you included these points in your bill.

Conclusions

4. **Interpreting Information** Formulate an opinion regarding why your bill did or did not make it through the full process to final passage into law.

Extensions

1. **Research and Communications** Critique a current environmental bill. Write a letter to your legislator explaining why you feel the bill should or should not pass into law.