

# Should Corporations Contribute to Nano-Regulation?

What is the best way to regulate nanotechnology? Various groups have participated in the debate, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, environmental organizations, and other national and local governing bodies. Surprisingly, even nano-related industries have contributed to the discussion, such as the 2005 DuPont-Environmental Defense Fund partnership to create a "Framework for Responsible Nanotechnology."

In a June 2009 opinion published in *NanoToday*\*, authors Wetmore and Posner identify some of the benefits and drawbacks to extensive corporate involvement in the development of nano-regulations. Traditionally, industry is supposed to resist regulation, but many companies believe that the right regulations can provide enormous benefits. After all, it is significantly easier for companies to plan for the future when they know what the rules will be.



Furthermore, when regulatory guidelines exist for how companies should behave in a certain area, it becomes significantly more difficult to bring suit against them. Regulations thus limit litigation.

A number of environmental and labor organizations, however, have argued that allowing corporations to create a regulatory framework is a conflict of interest that could undermine the federal government's authority. Most companies serve their shareholders' interests over those of the general public;

therefore, self-serving regulations that bring short-term profits are an ongoing temptation. Corporate control of policymaking would also likely mean that issues that could slow the product development process, like equity, would be even more marginalized.

Nevertheless, a number of corporate engineers and scientists understand some of the technical aspects of nanotechnology better than anyone else, and such information is vital to the development of sound nano-regulations. Corporations should be encouraged to actively participate in the discussion while remembering that they must ultimately look out for the well-being of the general public.

\*doi:10.1016/j.nantod.2009.03.002  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nantod.2009.03.002>

Dr. Jameson M. Wetmore, Assistant Professor  
Center for Nanotechnology in Society, and School of Human  
Evolution & Social Change, Arizona State University

Dr. Jonathan D. Posner, Assistant Professor  
Department of Mechanical Engineering, Ira A. Fulton  
School of Engineering, Arizona State University



Research, education and outreach activities at the Center for Nanotechnology in Society at Arizona State University are supported by the National Science Foundation under cooperative agreement #0531194.