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Exporting Hazards

To make its research easily available to a broad audience, the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy publishes a quarterly newsletter: *QQ—Report from the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy*. Named after the abbreviation for “questions,” *QQ* summarizes and supplements Center books and working papers and features other selected philosophical work on public policy questions. Articles in *QQ* are intended to advance philosophically informed debate on current policy choices; the views presented are not necessarily those of the Center or its sponsors.

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It has been common practice for U.S. firms to market in the third world products and materials that have been banned or restricted in the United States. Pesticides and chemicals too dangerous for American use are shipped to developing countries, where regulatory standards are absent, weak, or poorly enforced. Such banned consumer goods as children's pajamas treated with cancer-causing chemicals have found their way into the cradles of third-world infants.

It has also been common practice for U.S.-based transnational firms to establish factories in third-world countries when minimum wage requirements and health and safety codes in the United States make the move economically attractive. A striking example is the processing of the pervasive product asbestos, long identified as a cause of asbestosis (cousin to “black lung” and “brown lung”) and various cancers. (The same number of Americans die each year from asbestos-related diseases as die in automobile accidents.) Standards covering asbestos processing have been issued by OSHA, and cleaner technologies have become available. But rather than installing the new technologies in U.S. facilities, some corporations are moving the more hazardous (but cheaper) methods into poorer countries, such as Mexico. Thus dangerous jobs are exported as well as dangerous products.

Such exports have been restricted and facilitated by differing U.S. government policies. Five days before leaving office, for example, President Jimmy Carter issued an executive order restricting the export of some U.S. products whose use is banned or severely restricted in this country. A month later, that order was revoked by President Ronald Reagan. Conflict is now brewing between the Commerce and State departments over further elimination of rules