

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2616

As Reported By House Committee On:
Environmental Affairs

Title: An act relating to ground water testing.

Brief Description: Directing the department of health to test ground water in order to seek waivers under the safe drinking water act.

Sponsors: Representatives Linville, Horn, Rust, Foreman, Kremen, B. Thomas, Roland, Van Luven, Basich, Karahalios, Holm, Hansen, L. Johnson, Peery, J. Kohl, Bray, Flemming, Pruitt, Edmondson, Forner, Valle, Shin, R. Meyers, Ogden, Dunshee, Wolfe, Sheldon, Jones, Brough, Sheahan, Romero, Chappell, Dyer, Springer, King, Cothorn and Long.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Environmental Affairs, February 2, 1994, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Rust, Chair; Flemming, Vice Chair; Horn, Ranking Minority Member; Van Luven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bray; Edmondson; Foreman; Hansen; Holm; L. Johnson; J. Kohl; Linville; Roland and Sheahan.

Staff: Rick Anderson (786-7114).

Background: In 1991-92 the Department of Health surveyed public water systems covered by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) to determine the financial needs for the systems over the next several years. The assessment concluded that for the period between 1993-1999 there would be a combined capital need of \$2.22 billion. The assessment includes \$686 million for compliance with the federal SDWA, \$831 million for rehabilitation and replacement of existing infrastructure, and \$707 million for growth. The assessment concluded that 80 percent of the capital costs would be incurred by the large systems but that the costs are greater, on a proportional basis, for the smaller systems. Very small systems, down to 10 connections, may have monthly expenses of over \$50 per connection just to meet the monitoring and operational costs of the federal SDWA.

The federal SDWA allows three types of waivers from testing requirements. First, testing requirements can be waived if a water system can demonstrate to the Department of Health that its aquifer is geologically protected from contamination. Second, a water system can conduct tests to demonstrate the lack of contamination in that water system. Third, testing can be done on selected water systems over a large geographic area, such as a county. Those parts of the county that show low vulnerability to the substances being tested can be waived from full testing requirements. This type of waiver is known as an "area-wide" waiver. An area-wide waiver may be particularly beneficial to small water systems because relatively few water systems must be tested. Waivers typically last three years.

The Environmental Protection Agency has recently updated and expanded its rule for pesticides as required by the federal SDWA. This rule will require local water systems to conduct tests for an increased number of pesticides every three years.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Department of Health is directed to develop a voluntary program to test selected local public drinking water systems for federally regulated pesticides. Public water systems identified as having a low vulnerability for pesticides are eligible for waivers from full testing requirements.

The department must pay all initial testing and programmatic costs and then recover these costs by June 30, 1995 from local systems that use the area-wide waiver. Fees charged to local systems are to be adjusted based on the size of the system but cannot vary by more than a factor of 10. The department is required to prepare a report to the appropriate standing committees of the Legislature on the number of waivers granted, the money saved by local systems, expected fee recovery timeline, and other information.

The eligible uses of the local toxics account are amended to allow the department to carry out its voluntary testing program. The department is required to fully reimburse the account by June 30, 1995.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill adds a provision requiring the department to vary the fees so that smaller systems pay a smaller fee than do larger systems. The substitute bill adds two reporting requirements and deletes a null and void clause.

Fiscal Note: Requested January 20, 1994.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on immediately.

Testimony For: Area-wide waivers will provide significant cost savings to all local drinking water systems, especially smaller systems. A sliding fee schedule should be provided to provide equity to citizens belonging to small water systems.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Gerrit Kuiken, Raspberry Ridge Water Association (pro); Barbara Brenner, Whatcom County Council; Bob Wiegen, Whatcom Water Association (pro); Herman O. Vander Griend, Valley View Water Association; Jill Morley, City of Fircrest (pro); Nancy Irving, Manufactured Housing Communities of Washington (pro); Paul Parker, Washington State Association of Counties (pro); and Bruce Wishart, Sierra Club (undeclared).