

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1667

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to on-site sewage additives.

Brief Description: Prohibiting additives for on-site sewage disposal systems.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Environmental Affairs
(originally sponsored by Representatives Romero, H. Myers, Heavey, Finkbeiner and Wolfe.)

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Environmental Affairs, February 18, 1993, DPS;
Passed House, March 13, 1993, 69-29;
Amended by Senate;
Passed Legislature, April 20, 1993, 70-27.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Rust, Chair; Flemming, Vice Chair; Horn, Ranking Minority Member; Bray; Edmondson; Foreman; Hansen; Holm; L. Johnson; J. Kohl; Linville; and Roland.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Van Luven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member and Sheahan.

Staff: Rick Anderson (786-7114).

Background: Septic tank additives are generally used to control odors and to reduce the frequency in which sludge must be removed.

The active ingredients of these products vary greatly. Septic tank additives generally contain chlorinated organic solvents, strong acids or bases, or relatively innocuous nutrient supplements intended to enhance bacterial growth.

Research indicates that septic tank additives are ineffective at best, and may be harmful. Consumers using additives may be at risk in two ways. First, use of additives may ruin the drainfield and result in costly repair. Second, some additives, especially those containing

chlorinated organic solvents, may contribute to groundwater contamination.

The Department of Health is in the process of developing rules for septic and other on-site systems. These rules, in part, ban the use of septic tank additives containing acids, bases, and chlorinated organic solvents. The proposed rules do not ban the sale or distribution of additives.

Summary of Bill: The use, sale and distribution of septic tank additives is prohibited beginning July 1, 1994. Indoor plumbing fixtures are not included in the definition of an on-site sewage disposal system. The Department of Health may review and approve an additive for sale within the state. Any costs incurred by the department in reviewing the additive are to be paid by the applicant.

The state attorney general and city and county prosecuting attorneys may enjoin violations of the use, sale, or distribution of an additive. The Department of Health is responsible for notifying major distributors and wholesalers of the prohibition on septic tank additives. Distributors and wholesalers of additives are required to notify retailers within 30 days of being notified by the department.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Septic tank additives should be prohibited because they have no apparent benefit, and can damage septic tank systems and create groundwater pollution.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Mark Soltman, Department of Health; Gregg Grunenfelder, Environmental Health Directors; Joe Danials, Washington State Water/Wastewater Association; and Doris Cellarius, Sierra Club.