

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6401

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS, FEBRUARY 4, 1994

**Brief Description:** Requiring a report on environmental risks in relationship to minority and low-income communities.

**SPONSORS:** Senators Franklin, Winsley, Prentice, Rinehart, Pelz, Talmadge, Moore, Drew, Fraser, Moyer, Wojahn and Williams

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS**

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6401 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chairman; Deccio, Moore, Morton, Sutherland and Talmadge.

**Staff:** Cathy Baker (786-7708)

**Hearing Dates:** February 2, 1994; February 4, 1994

**BACKGROUND:**

Environmental equity refers to the distribution of environmental risks across population groups. There is a growing concern that some communities, particularly low-income and racial minority communities, may bear a higher environmental risk burden than the general population.

Environmental equity issues have been a growing concern in other states and at the federal level. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun an administrative effort to address whether current programs and policies contribute to an inequitable distribution of environmental risks. A number of other states are considering legislation that addresses this issue.

It is suggested that a study is needed in order to determine whether such inequities exist in Washington State.

**SUMMARY:**

By June 30, 1995, the Department of Ecology and the Department of Health are to jointly prepare a report to the Legislature providing information on the distribution of environmental risks in relation to minority and low-income communities.

The report shall include demographic information; a survey of environmental facilities; and a list of census tracts ranked in order of the amount of toxic chemicals released each year. For the purposes of the study, the 50 census tracts with the highest toxic releases shall be considered "environmental high impact areas."

For these environmental high impact areas, the report is to include a description of the nature and extent of acute and chronic impacts on human health and a ranking of the relative risks posed by the toxic chemicals present.

The report is also to identify any other issues relating to environmental equity that need further study, and make recommendations on policy options for ensuring fairness in the distribution of environmental risks throughout the state.

**EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:**

The scope of the study is narrowed. Environmental facilities to be inventoried include only: facilities reporting under the federal Community Right-to-Know Act; facilities listed on the state hazardous sites list; and facilities permitted for treatment, storage or disposal of hazardous waste.

A description of impacts on human health in environmental high impact areas will not be included. A ranking of risks associated with toxic substance releases in environmental high impact areas will also not be included.

It is clarified that the study will not apply to toxic substance releases and environmental facilities associated with agricultural operations.

**Appropriation:** none

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal note:** available

**TESTIMONY FOR:**

The bill addresses a timely and relevant issue. The study authorized is an important first step in addressing the problem of low income communities and racial minorities being disproportionately burdened by hazardous and solid waste sites.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST:** None

**TESTIFIED:** Senator Rosa Franklin, prime sponsor; Naki Stevens, Community Coalition For Environmental Justice (pro); Tom Eaton, Department of Ecology (pro); Carl Sagerser, Department of Health (pro)