

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1498

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to extending the pollution liability insurance agency.

Brief Description: Extending the expiration date for the pollution liability insurance program.

Sponsors: Representatives L. Thomas, Wolfe, Dyer, Dellwo, Huff, Tokuda, Basich, Kessler, Blanton, Beeksma, Mielke, Hatfield and Hymes.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Financial Institutions & Insurance: 2/8/95, 2/9/95 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/22/95, 98-0.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS & INSURANCE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives L. Thomas, Chairman; Beeksma, Vice Chairman; Smith, Vice Chairman; Wolfe, Ranking Minority Member; Grant, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Benton; Campbell; Costa; Dellwo; Dyer; Huff; Kessler; Ogden and Pelesky.

Staff: Charlie Gavigan (786-7340).

Background: In 1986, Congress enacted legislation to regulate underground storage tanks (USTs) containing petroleum products. The legislation directed the Environmental Protection Agency to develop a comprehensive regulatory program governing USTs, including standards for improving or upgrading USTs, correcting pollution from leaks from USTs, and for obtaining liability insurance or an acceptable insurance substitute covering liability for clean-up and third-party damages.

After reviewing several proposals to assist owners of USTs in complying with federal financial responsibility regulations, the Legislature adopted legislation creating a state pollution liability reinsurance program in 1989. The program provides insurance to insurance companies (reinsurance) that in turn provide insurance to UST owners and operators. The program is administered by the Pollution Liability Insurance Agency (PLIA).

The state reinsurance program's objective is to improve the availability and affordability of pollution liability insurance for owners of USTs by selling reinsurance at a price significantly below the private market price for similar reinsurance. This discount is passed onto owners and operators of USTs through reduced insurance premiums and increased availability of insurance.

To fund the program, the Legislature imposed a petroleum products tax of one half of one percent on the first possession of any petroleum product in the state. The tax applies to the wholesale value of the petroleum product. Petroleum products that are exported for use or sale outside of the state as fuel, and that are packaged for sale to ultimate consumers, are exempt from taxation. Proceeds from the tax are deposited into the Pollution Liability Reinsurance Program Trust Account to fund the reinsurance program. Collection of this tax must cease whenever the account balance exceeds \$15 million and collection may resume when the balance drops below \$7.5 million. The tax has not been collected since July 1992.

In 1991, the Legislature established the Underground Storage Tank Community Assistance Program (USTCAP) to provide financial assistance to public and private owners and operators of underground storage tanks (USTs) that have been certified by the governing body of the county, city, or town in which the USTs are located as meeting vital local government or public health and safety needs.

Financial assistance cannot be provided unless owners and operators, including local government owners and operators, demonstrate serious financial hardship. Assistance is limited to that amount necessary to supplement owner and operator financial resources and cannot be provided in an amount exceeding \$150,000, of which amount no more than \$75,000 can be expended for clean-ups.

PLIA expires on June 1, 1995.

Summary of Bill: The Pollution Liability Insurance Agency (PLIA) is extended until June 1, 2001. PLIA must publish annually a financial report on the Pollution Liability Insurance Program Trust Account.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 3, 1995.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: The Pollution Liability Insurance Agency (PLIA) is doing a very good job. It is an example of a public-private partnership that works. The programs in PLIA are still necessary and will be for a few more years. The private sector does not have sufficient data and experience to make liability coverage mandated by federal

law available and affordable. This should change over the next few years. Until then, PLIA is extremely important and necessary for the economy and health and safety of communities, especially rural communities.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Mike Sciacca, Washington Oil Marketers Association (pro); Tim Hamilton, Executive Director of AUTO (pro); and Vern Lindskog, Western States Petroleum Association (pro).