

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2703

As Reported By House Committee On:

Agriculture & Ecology

Title: An act relating to occupational safety and health.

Brief Description: Limiting department of labor and industries authority when the department of agriculture has authority to prescribe or enforce occupational safety and health standards.

Sponsors: Representatives Clements, Chappell, Chandler, Koster, Lisk, Thompson and Johnson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 1/24/96, 2/1/96 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Chandler, Chairman; Koster, Vice Chairman; Chappell, Ranking Minority Member; Linville, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boldt; Clements; Delvin; R. Fisher; Honeyford; Johnson; Murray; Ogden; Regala; Robertson; Rust and Schoesler.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: The registration and use of pesticides are regulated at the national level under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). The act is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Under the act, the EPA has adopted a worker protection standard. The EPA's rules state that the standard is designed to reduce the risks of illness or injury resulting from workers' and handlers' occupational exposures to pesticides used in the production of agricultural plants on farms or in nurseries, greenhouses, and forests, and also from the accidental exposure of workers and other persons to such pesticides. The rules also state that the standard requires workplace practices designed to reduce or eliminate exposure to pesticides and establishes procedures for responding to exposure-related emergencies. The standard includes provisions that require the posting of warning signs regarding the application of pesticides on a farm or nursery and that prohibit workers from being in the area sprayed during the application and

during any restricted entry interval associated with the application. The use of pesticides in this state is regulated under the state's Pesticide Application Act administered by the state's Department of Agriculture.

The Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) is administered by the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I). A safety standard for agriculture has been adopted under the act.

State legislation enacted in 1989 requires the posting of warning signs with regard to certain applications of pesticides to labor intensive agricultural crops and requires employees to vacate the area to be sprayed.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The worker protection standard for agricultural workers and handlers of agricultural pesticides adopted by the EPA is controlling in this state with regard to each activity governed by the federal standard. The rules of the Department of Labor and Industries adopted under WISHA and the rules of the Department of Agriculture adopted under the Pesticide Application Act must be consistent with this federal standard. A rule of neither department may be in conflict with the federal standard.

A violation of the EPA's worker protection standard may be investigated by either of the two departments, but not by both. (However, an investigation by the Department of Labor and Industries conducted solely with regard to industrial insurance does not count as an investigation for this purpose.) A citation for a violation of the federal standard may be issued by either of the departments, but not by both. The two departments must jointly establish a formal agreement that identifies the roles of each in conducting investigations of violations of the federal standard.

If the EPA amends the worker protection standard, the two departments must request the Legislature to revise its statutory reference to the standard. A section of law is repealed that requires the posting of certain warning signs if a pesticide with a reentry interval of more than 24 hours is applied to a labor-intensive agricultural crop and requires employees to vacate the area to be sprayed.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill removed the Department of Labor and Industries' jurisdiction over employee working conditions regulated by the Department of Agriculture under the state's pesticide laws. The substitute bill states that the EPA's worker protection standard for pesticides is controlling, requires an agreement between the two agencies regarding their roles under the federal standard, and permits only one or the other of the agencies to investigate and issue citations for violations of the standard. Removed by the substitute bill are the provisions of the original bill that repealed pesticide record-keeping statutes administered by L&I and limited L&I's jurisdiction regarding employee hazard communications. Also removed is the emergency clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on the original bill on January 19, 1996.

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

Testimony For: (Original Bill) (1) At the national level, OSHA defers to worker protection regulation for pesticides provided by the EPA under FIFRA, but at the state level, two agencies enforce conflicting rules: L&I regulates under WISHA and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is required to enforce the EPA's standards under FIFRA. If a division of roles at the national level is good enough for the federal government, why must two agencies do the same job at the state level? (2) The bill will reduce the frustration faced by farmers who are now faced with conflicting rules. The two state agencies have had since 1992 to resolve their differences but have not done so. (3) The WSDA is known as an enforcement agency regarding pesticides; it has specialists in pesticide enforcement. (4) Accord has not been reached on pesticide worker protection standards because the overlapping jurisdiction of the agencies fuels a turf fight; the job should be given to one agency. (5) Claims regarding potential worker exposure to pesticides are currently investigated by four units of state government. The bill will reduce it to three.

Testimony Against: (Original Bill) (1) The bill does not completely remove pesticide activities from L&I; L&I will be involved in workers' compensation issues for pesticides anyway. The two roles should be done together to reduce both injuries and costs for industrial insurance. (2) L&I and the WSDA are trying to harmonize their requirements for worker protection regarding pesticides. (3) Putting the WSDA, an agency that is directed by law to promote agriculture, in charge of agricultural worker protection is like putting the fox in the henhouse. (4) The WSDA does not have "stop work" authority or technical assistance and consultation services for safety and health; agricultural worker safety will decline under the bill. (5) The EPA has only recently stopped changing its rules for agricultural worker protection for pesticides. The departments will now be able to resolve their differences; a problem regarding the posting of signs for pesticide applications on farms has already been worked out. (6) The WSDA receives very few human safety complaints regarding violations of the use of pesticides; its investigations normally involve damage caused to crops.

Testified: (Original Bill) Mike Gempler and Chris Cheney, Washington Growers League; Jon C. Warling, Washington State Farm Bureau; Enid Layes, Washington Horticultural Association; and Pat Boss, Hop Growers of Washington (in favor). Frank Leuck, Department of Labor and Industries; Jim Jesernig, Director of Agriculture; and Jeff Johnson, State Labor Council (against).