

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 5597

As Passed Senate, March 16, 1999

Title: An act relating to occupational health standards for airborne pathogens, bloodborne pathogens, and waterborne pathogens.

Brief Description: Requiring occupational health standards to protect workers from airborne and waterborne pathogens.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Swecker, Jacobsen, Morton, Fairley, Rasmussen and Winsley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environmental Quality & Water Resources: 2/16/99, 2/23/99 [DPS]. Passed Senate, 3/16/99, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY & WATER RESOURCES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5597 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Jacobsen, McAuliffe, Morton and Swecker.

Staff: Richard Ramsey (786-7412)

Background: When inspectors from the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) enter a workplace, they carry a number of authorities and enforcement tools. Most generally, the authority comes from Chapter 49.17 RCW, under which L&I can either inspect as a result of an employee complaint or due to a specific targeting effort in high hazard industries, among other reasons. Employers may also request a free consultation. In rule, the "Safe Place Standard" requires each employer to furnish employees an environment free from recognized hazards likely to cause serious injury or death.

The federal government estimates that health care workers incur between 600,000 and 1 million needle stick injuries per year. Many of these needles have been used and are potentially contaminated. Of all the bloodborne diseases transmitted by used needles, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) usually raises the most concern. However, there are up to 20 other bloodborne diseases that can be transmitted to health care workers as a result of exposure to blood on the job. Of these, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C pose the most serious threat to health care workers. Experts estimate that more health care workers will eventually die due to complications from occupational exposure to Hepatitis C than from HIV.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Labor and Industries must review information regarding the potential risks to workers in the handling, transport, treatment, and disposal of medical waste and make recommendations for action under the department's existing authority and for action by the Legislature. The report is due by December 1, 1999.

The Department of Labor and Industries must develop rules requiring safety mechanisms on sharp instruments and needles used by health care providers. Product evaluations should be conducted by front-line health care workers. Employers must have written exposure control plans and inquiry logs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Labor and Industry inspectors need additional tools when entering the work place.

Testimony Against: Additional standards may not be necessary.

Testified: Regina Delahunt, Washington State Environmental Health Directors (pro); Enid Layes, Washington Biotechnology and Biomedical Association (concerns).