



LANSNET

Environmental News & Notes

YEAR IN REVIEW

Another year has come and gone, and like previous years a lot has happened, or failed to happen. 2005 will start a new legislative session with a number of new representatives and new initiatives. Of course, some of the old initiatives will come back into the limelight as well. The following is a comprehensive look through 2004 at what the environmental community faced.

Great Lakes Water Basin

In January, Governor Jennifer Granholm promised to introduce legislation to control water withdrawals. Senate Bill 1087 (Brater) and House Bill 5634 (Kolb) were introduced to do just that, nicknamed the Water Legacy Act. Under the legislation, all new or increased water withdrawals from surface water or groundwater greater than two million gallons per day or greater than 100 million gallons a year would require a permit. On January 1, 2010 water withdrawal amounts requiring a permit would decrease to 100,000 gallons. Both bills failed to see the light of day in their respective committees.

In May, President George Bush created a Great Lakes Task Force to coordinate federal Great Lakes programs. Additionally, the fight over the Great Lakes Water Basin has continued on without much resolve. The Annex 2001 Implementing Agreements also made the rounds as residents throughout the Great Lakes states commented positively and negatively towards the possible changes. Finally, in a move to appease the environmental community HJR CC (Farhat) was introduced. HJR CC would prohibit all water withdrawals from the Great Lakes. However, after it passed the House it stalled in the Senate Committee on Environmental Affairs and Natural Resources.



Clean Air Diesel Rules

The EPA proposed a number of new rules to reduce emissions from diesel engines in 2004. Including the Clean Air Nonroad Diesel Rule, this would cut emission levels from construction, agricultural, and industrial diesel-powered equipment by more than 90 percent and would

eliminate 99 percent of the sulfur in diesel fuel by 2010. Previously the EPA proposed the Clean Diesel Truck and Bus Rule (which would lower pollution in those vehicles 95 percent by 2007). Both rules were signed into law by President George Bush.



Bottle Deposit Expansion

The Bigger Better Bottle Coalition spent the better part of 2004 pushing for passage of Senate Bill 174 (Switalski), aimed at expanding the state's bottle deposit law. The bill would expand the law to include non-alcoholic carbonated non-carbonated beverage containers made of glass, plastic, or metal. Despite support the bill received from the environmental community it failed to be brought forward for discussion in committee.



Dioxin Continues On

The dioxin issue has continued without much progress as well. Dow Chemical has been blamed for most of the contamination in the Midland area; however, recent evidence shows that it can't be completely attributable to Dow. Nevertheless, Lt. Governor John Cherry, DEQ Director Steve Chester, and Dow representatives have been in closed-door meetings trying to hash out an agreement. Despite a deadline in November 2004, no agreement has been made public.

The Army Corps of Engineers have also put their two cents in, proposing to dredge the contaminated areas in the Saginaw River. If approved, dredging would commence in January 2005. The legislature also got involved in the dioxin issue, refusing to pass any legislation that would create a stringent standard on dioxin levels more than what the EPA already has in place. The issue remains a top concern for everyone in 2005.



Canadian Trash Still Trucking

Despite lawsuits, proposed legislation, and EPA involvement, Canadian trash still flows into Michigan at a rate of 132 trucks a day. Over 5.2 million tons of trash is sent to Michigan a year, making Michigan the third largest trash importer in the nation. The legislature attempted to slow the trash laden trucks by requiring that all imported trash meet Michigan trash standards, however, the trucks just kept coming in. According to one waste management official, all the new law did was create more paperwork.



SE Michigan... Air Problems

Southeast Michigan jumped from the frying pan and into the fire this year. First the EPA suggested that the DEQ implement mandatory automobile emission tests to reduce air pollution in nonattainment areas. However, after the residents and elected officials in Southeast Michigan refused to comply, the DEQ sat down with the EPA to work out a deal to lower emissions. However, according to a recent report by the EPA and DEQ, seven Southeast Michigan counties have also been placed in nonattainment for failure to meet particulate matter standards. Monroe and Wayne Counties have shown the highest levels.



Other Noteworthy News

Former Governor John Engler was named as the Executive Director for the National Association of Manufacturers.

EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt was nominated by President Bush to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The 2005 DEQ budget finally passed through both chambers, only after being held up in subcommittee. Attempts to penalize the DEQ for an unfinished wetlands inventory and require a study of dioxin by an outside institution were vetoed by Governor Granholm.

