

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2001 Session

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 710 (Senators Stoltzfus and Frosh)

Economic and Environmental Affairs

Environmental Matters

Reclaimed Water

This bill provides that it is the policy of the State to promote and encourage the use of “reclaimed water” in order to conserve water supplies, facilitate the indirect recharge of groundwater, and meet the nutrient reduction goals of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) must encourage the use of reclaimed water as an alternative to discharging wastewater effluent into the surface waters of the State. Reclaimed water may be used for irrigation of farmland, golf courses, athletic fields, turf, landscaping, and any other use that MDE considers appropriate. The bill authorizes MDE to establish site specific buffers and setbacks for the use of reclaimed water as specified in the bill. MDE may consult with the State Plumbing Board, as appropriate, on matters relating to the use of reclaimed water for irrigation purposes.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill’s requirements could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: Because the bill requires MDE to *encourage* the use of reclaimed water, the bill would not directly affect local operations or finances. To the extent that a local jurisdiction chooses to modify its facilities and systems in order to increase the use of reclaimed water, local expenditures could increase. Local jurisdictions could presumably implement a fee to offset at least a portion of those costs.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful. To the extent that the bill results in an increase in the supply of water available for irrigation, small businesses that rely on irrigation (such as farmers, landscapers, and golf courses) would benefit, especially in years of drought. Presumably, users could be charged a fee for reclaimed water.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “Reclaimed water” means sewage that: (1) has been treated to a high quality suitable for various reuses; and (2) has a concentration of less than three fecal coliform colonies per 100 milliliters, 10 milligrams per liter of five-day biological oxygen demand, and 10 milligrams per liter of total suspended solids.

Current Law: It is the policy of the State: (1) to improve, conserve, and manage the quality of the waters of the State; (2) to protect, maintain, and improve the quality of water for public supplies, propagation of wildlife, fish, and aquatic life, and domestic, agricultural, industrial, recreational, and other legitimate beneficial uses; (3) to provide that no waste is discharged into any waters of the State without first receiving necessary treatment or other corrective action to protect the legitimate beneficial uses of the waters of the State; and (4) through innovative and alternative methods of waste and wastewater treatment, to provide and promote prevention, abatement, and control of new or existing water pollution.

Pursuant to current regulations, sewage sludge may only be applied to land if certain buffer zones are observed or if the sludge has been treated in certain ways. For example, sewage sludge not treated by one of the designated methods may not be applied to the surface of land within 50 feet of a property line or within 25 feet of a public road. Sewage sludge may only be applied within the buffer zones if it has been treated by a process to further reduce pathogens.

Background: This bill is in response to a problem experienced by the town of Snow Hill, which wants to reclaim its wastewater for irrigation purposes as an alternative to discharging the wastewater into the surface waters of the State. However, current requirements relating to the buffer zones and treatment methods make irrigation difficult.

One of the State’s goals with respect to the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement is to reduce controllable nutrient loads into the Chesapeake Bay by 40%. The 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement calls for a continuation of efforts to achieve and maintain this goal.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of the Environment; Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission; Calvert, Caroline, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George’s counties; City of Annapolis; Department of Legislative Services

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