

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2001 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 523 (Delegates D'Amato and Clagett)
Environmental Matters

Task Force on Mercury Discharge and Control

This bill establishes a Task Force on Mercury Discharge and Control to study the discharge of mercury in effluent from publicly owned treatment works and any other source of mercury discharge and to make recommendations regarding appropriate controls of mercury discharges. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), in cooperation with other appropriate State agencies, must provide staff support for the task force. Task force members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations. The task force is required to submit a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by February 1, 2002.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2001 and sunsets February 28, 2002.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for MDE are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: None applicable.

Background: Mercury is a naturally occurring element that is found in air, water, and soil. In small quantities, it can conduct electricity, measure temperature and pressure, and act as a catalyst in industrial processes. However, it does not degrade and is not destroyed by combustion; rather, it is a persistent and toxic pollutant that bioaccumulates in the environment. Accordingly, mercury can reach dangerous levels in fish, even when released in small quantities. Consumption of mercury-contaminated fish poses a significant health threat. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 37 states have issued fish consumption advisories due to mercury contamination.

Some of the mercury in the environment comes from natural sources such as marine and aquatic environments as well as volcanic and geothermal activity. However, recent studies suggest that anthropogenic sources, such as atmospheric deposition, the combustion of municipal and other solid waste, incineration, manufacturing processes, and accidental spills account for the majority of mercury releases into the environment.

Federal and state agencies across the nation are exploring efforts to curtail the use of mercury in order to focus on prevention opportunities. MDE's regulatory programs govern the management and disposal of wastes containing heavy metals such as mercury as both hazardous waste and non-hazardous solid waste. Other MDE permit programs restrict or limit the release of mercury into the environment through water and atmospheric discharges. According to MDE, several states in the northeast region are in the process of enacting or have enacted legislation to restrict or limit certain products containing mercury or mercury compounds.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Environment, Department of Legislative Services

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