

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2001 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 104 (Delegate Rosso, *et al.*)
Environmental Matters

Private Wells - Radium Contamination - Study Task Force

This bill establishes an eight-member Task Force to Study Radium Contamination in Private Wells. The task force must study the extent of radium contamination in private wells in the State, the means by which the cost of testing for radium contamination might be reduced, and whether any methods exist, other than ion exchange or reverse osmosis, that can be used to remove radium from drinking water. The task force must submit a final report of its findings to the General Assembly by December 31, 2001.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: While the bill does not address staff support for the task force or expense reimbursements for task force members, it is assumed that any such costs incurred as a result of the bill would be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: None applicable.

Background: Radium is a naturally occurring radioactive metal found in rocks and soils. It readily dissolves in groundwater where acidic conditions exist. Various forms of the metal have been found in the groundwater in Maryland. Prolonged exposure to drinking water that has been contaminated with radium in excess of standards set by the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may increase the risk of cancer. While EPA standards apply to drinking water from public water systems, there are no regulations that require private owners of existing private wells to meet those standards.

In 1997 the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), during a study of carcinogens in well water, found that 15 out of 20 private wells in Anne Arundel County exceeded the radium standards established by the EPA. Specifically, contamination was found in northern and central Anne Arundel County, north of Annapolis. In 1998 the Maryland Department of Environment, USGS, and the EPA funded a more comprehensive study by the Maryland Geological Survey and found above normal levels of radium in 60 out of 122 wells tested. In an effort to better understand the extent of the radium contamination in Maryland, a study is currently in progress to develop a three-dimensional model of the region that will identify segments of several aquifers that have radiation levels below the established standard. The final report is expected in the fall of 2001.

Anne Arundel County has a program to assist private well owners in testing water for radium. The results to date indicate two out of every three wells in northern Anne Arundel County exceed the drinking water standard for radium. Water treatment units have been installed where radium levels tested high. Citizens in Anne Arundel County formed a group called Citizens Against Radium Poisoning to monitor the radium problem and to petition the county to link approximately 12,000 residences that use private wells to the county's water system.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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

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