

Department of Legislative Services

Maryland General Assembly

2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 1058

(Delegate Zirkin)

Environmental Matters

**Environment - Task Force to Study the Use of Chlorine in the Treatment of
Drinking Water**

This bill establishes an 11-member Task Force to Study the Use of Chlorine in the Treatment of Drinking Water. The bill describes the composition and duties of the task force and requires the task force to issue a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by May 31, 2003. A member of the task force may not receive compensation but is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) must provide staff support for the task force.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2002 and sunsets May 31, 2003.

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

Bill Summary: The task force must: (1) study the environmental issues surrounding the use of chlorine in drinking water treatment; (2) perform a risk assessment and cost analysis relating to the use of chlorine in drinking water treatment; (3) examine the

security issues surrounding the use of chlorine in drinking water treatment and the storage of chlorine used to treat drinking water; and (4) recommend any changes in the use of chlorine in drinking water treatment or the storage of chlorine used to treat drinking water.

Current Law: MDE is the primary agency responsible for implementation of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) in Maryland. Under the SDWA, drinking water standards are set to control the level of contaminants in drinking water supplies. Standards have been established for several contaminants, including disinfectants such as chlorine and disinfection byproducts.

Background: According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, chlorine is often used as a disinfectant in the treatment of drinking water. However, concern has been raised over the potential health risks associated with the use of chlorine and the byproducts associated with its use. A major challenge for water suppliers is how to balance the risks from disease-causing bacteria and the byproducts formed in the disinfection process.

Another concern related to the use of chlorine is security-related. Many water supply systems use chlorine gas. If released into the environment, the gas can have lethal effects. In light of increased security concerns, water suppliers are raising questions about the advisability of storing large amounts of chlorine gas at facilities. These concerns are prompting utilities to reexamine their operations and consider less risky alternatives. According to one association of water systems, some facilities are opting to use granulated or liquid chlorine disinfectants (such as bleach), which would pose less of a risk in the event of a terrorist attack.

State Expenditures: MDE advises that because it staffs so many task forces each year, general fund expenditures would increase by an estimated \$36,300 in fiscal 2003. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one contractual employee to staff the task force established by the bill. The estimate includes a salary and fringe benefits as well as ongoing operating expenses including contractual services for printing.

Legislative Services advises, however, that the number of bills that will pass during the 2002 session requiring MDE to staff additional task forces cannot be determined at this time. Accordingly, MDE should be able to handle the bill's requirements using existing budgeted resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of the Environment, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems, Department of Legislative Services

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