

Legislative UPDATE

NEWS ON STATE ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES



From State Senator Edwin B. Erickson

SUMMER 2008

Senate Republicans are committed to continuing the legacy of responsible environmental stewardship in Pennsylvania dating back to Republican Governor Gifford Pinchot. Our goal is to protect our environment and economy and provide new recreational opportunities for Commonwealth residents. Over the past decade, the Senate has passed tough new laws to crack down on polluters. We've also significantly increased funding for important environmental programs that will protect our air, land and water. Through these efforts, we have made major headway in addressing serious environmental concerns and ensuring that our state has the tools and resources to promote clean air, land and water and to preserve open space for state residents.

And efforts are ongoing to build on our successes and find new ways to protect our natural resources.

Here are some of the initiatives that have been signed into law, and some we are trying to enact.



Growing Greener

In 1999, the Senate approved the largest environmental investment in Pennsylvania's history: the \$645 million Growing Greener environmental initiative.

Act 68 provided funding to clean up abandoned mines and restore watersheds, protect open space, reduce the maintenance backlog in state parks, and provide new and upgraded water and sewer systems. In 2002, Act 90 was passed which extended Growing Greener into a 13-year, \$1.24 billion program.

In 2005, the Senate passed legislation to implement a \$625 million Growing Greener environmental bond approved by voters. Under Act 45, debt service on the bond is paid by using a portion of the existing fee charged for waste disposal at landfills.

Water Supplies and Recycling

Act 220 of 2002 launched the first comprehensive review of Pennsylvania's water supplies in more than 25 years. In 2006, the Senate approved Act 140, which extended funding of the Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Program until 2012. The recycling fee was scheduled to sunset in 2009.



Funding and Strengthening Hazardous Sites Cleanup

Legislation to provide funding for the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act Fund (HSCA) was signed into law late last year. Act 77 of 2007 transfers about \$17 million to HSCA from legislative accounts for the current fiscal year. Using legislative accounts to fund HSCA for the first half of 2008 ensures that no state program is cut. This approach to HSCA funding does not require higher taxes.

The HSCA Fund finances cleanups at contaminated sites and the investigation of illegal hazardous waste disposals.

Senate Bill 1068 would require the Department of Environmental Protection to deposit any HSCA-related fine money into the HSCA Fund. Any business which causes a hazardous spill or release is obligated under the HSCA statute to pay 100 percent of recovery and cleanup costs and is also liable for significant fines.

Alternative Energy

The General Assembly approved legislation to invest \$650 million over the next 10 years in consumer energy programs, energy conservation, and the development of alternative and renewable energy.

The Alternative Energy Investment Act provides funding for grants and loans to projects geared at improving energy supply and efficiency, improved conservation and reduced demand for energy – with no tax increases.

Special Session House Bill 1 will support research and development of alternative energy technologies, help municipalities and businesses implement clean-energy projects, and provide assistance to consumers to cover up to 25 percent of the cost to install energy-saving equipment.

Climate Change

The General Assembly passed a new law I sponsored that directs Pennsylvania's response to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

The measure will create a stakeholders group to advise the state on climate change issues and identify green economic opportunities in Pennsylvania.

It will also provide a framework for the Commonwealth and its citizens to better understand the potential impact and consequences of climate change, develop an action plan to best respond, and take advantage of economic opportunities that may be created.



Other Environmental and Energy Initiatives

Act 35 of 2007 – This law will steadily increase the amount of solar energy used in Pennsylvania through 2020.

Act 20 of 2007 – This law provides a five-year sunset extension for the Underground Storage Tank Environmental Cleanup Program and Underground Storage Tank Pollution Prevention Program. These initiatives were due to expire in July 2007.

Act 31 of 2007 – This law provides for an increase in fees to pay for safe transportation of nuclear materials.

Senate Bill 76 – This bill authorizes the Department of Public Welfare to provide matching funds for low-income home energy assistance programs that are administered by utilities.

Senate Bill 675 – This bill, which I sponsored, creates the Solar Energy System Incentives Program to provide financial incentives for the purchase and installation of photovoltaic and solar thermal systems. Under this program, residents who purchase and install certain new photovoltaic systems would be eligible for a rebate on a portion of the purchase price.

Senate Bill 355 – This bill requires DEP to post and maintain all clean-air State Implementation Plans on its website and to provide them to the standing Senate and House oversight committees.

The State Implementation Plans are the Commonwealth's formal submissions to the federal Environmental Protection Agency detailing how the Commonwealth will comply with various air quality standards. This legislation would ensure that the plans are readily available for public and legislative review and comment.

To learn more about what Senate Republicans are doing to clean up our environment, go to www.senaterepublicannews.com and click on "Environment & Energy" under "Issues."

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