

By Robert Gray

Senate Panel Backs EPA on Water Security

The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works is urging that EPA retain its leading role in protecting the nation's water infrastructure from threats of terrorist attacks.

Chairman Jim Jeffords, I-Vt., and top Republican member Bob Smith, N.H., said the agency would cooperate with the Department of Homeland Security in meeting that responsibility but should not surrender the responsibility to the new Security department.

At President Bush's request, Congress is in the process of creating the Homeland Security organization from all or parts of a wide range of existing federal agencies.

In communication to the Senate Government Affairs Committee that is dealing with the Homeland Security measure, Jeffords and Smith said that "the President's proposal implies that the new Department will be responsible for water and wastewater infrastructure protection" but it "does not explicitly identify this function as a priority." The committee leaders continued, "It is clear that EPA is already performing many of these functions for the water sector."

Jeffords and Smith told the Government Affairs Committee that EPA should retain water security responsibilities "because of the Agency's unique, specific, technical knowledge about drinking water and wastewater systems that is imperative in evaluating risks and making decisions about the security of these facilities."

Lawmaker Cites 'Second Generation' Challenges

The chairman of a key House panel on environmental policy is urging Congress to prepare for what he calls "the second generation" of the nation's anti-pollution efforts.

Rep. Doug Ose, R-Calif., chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy Policy, National Resources and Regulatory Affairs, said that major progress has been made in cleaning up the industrial and municipal types of wastes that sparked creation of the Environmental Protection Agency 30 years ago.

Many of today's pollution problems, he explained, "come not from large industrial sources but from the actions of everyday citizens, from our cars, our yards, our homes, our cities and our farms."

"These more complex and intractable environmental concerns defy the simple solutions mandated by the first wave of environmental laws," Ose added. "The old 'command and control' approach won't get us where we need to go. It is inflexible and the compliance costs are too high."

The lawmaker commented in connection with his subcommittee's renewed consideration of legislation to raise EPA to a cabinet level position. While there is strong support in Congress

for such a step, the issue remains enmeshed in controversy over passing a straightforward bill making the change or one that uses the opportunity to make basic changes in environmental policy.

Drought Strikes One-Third of Nation

More than one-third of the continental United States has suffered severe to extreme drought this summer, the National Climate Data Center reported.

Noting those conditions, the Agriculture Department says that only the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and the drought of 1950 "stand out as more significant, national-scale droughts since the beginning of the 20th century."

Shifting weather patterns have allowed the drought to remain transient, the department said, and it has shifted from one area to another, hitting some harder than others. In addition, "some parts of the U.S. continue to struggle with a transformation of the drought-impacts picture due to factors such as urbanization and changes in vegetation and water consumption," the report said.



Resource Centers Opening

Eight Environmental Management Systems Local Resource Centers are being established across the country to help local governments treat their wastewater more effectively.

The new centers, which are housed in existing organizations at their respective locations, will extend to local government a service previously only available to private companies seeking assistance on better management of anti-pollution efforts.

The facilities can be located through their respective host institutions: Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.; University of Wisconsin/Stout, Menominee, Wis.; University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla.; Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Ga.; University of Massachusetts, Lowell, Mass.; Texas Natural

Resource Conservation Commission, Texas; Virginia Tech University, Roanoke, Va., and the Zero Waste Water Alliance, Portland, Ore.

EPA Marking Clean Water Act's Anniversary

EPA is launching a year-long celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. The agency said the nationwide campaign would center on an educational program designed to inform the American public about various aspects of clean-water strategy, including watersheds, conservation, monitoring, nonpoint-source pollution and safe drinking water.

G. Tracy Mehan, assistant EPA administrator for water, said, "By informing people of new ideas to solve environmental challenges, we believe the campaign will further our efforts in meeting the Clean Water Act's goals."



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