



**Testimony before Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
on SB 5521**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We bring Oregonians together for a healthy environment.

You are tasked with balancing the next biennium's budget while facing a deficit of more than \$4 billion. As you make very difficult decisions about where to make cuts, we hope you'll keep in mind how critical Oregon's environment and natural resources are to our economy, our health and our quality of life.

Oregonians spend at least \$1.57 billion annually on preventable diseases caused by pollution. Numerous studies have established links between environmental pollution and disease and disability, such as the connection between air pollution and asthma, the connection between benzene and cancer, and the dangerous affect of lead exposure on child brain development. Taking proactive steps to reduce exposures to toxic chemicals creates a healthier environment which leads to healthier Oregonians and ultimately to greatly reduced health care costs for our state. We therefore urge you to minimize cuts to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) because the agency's work saves lives and saves money.

While all agencies must do their part to help balance the budget, DEQ receives very little in general fund support, thus cuts to DEQ won't help much in balancing the budget. It's also important to maintain some general fund support given how heavily dependent DEQ is on fee funding. Fees are restricted to specific programs and can't always be used for the highest priority environmental work. A heavy dependence on fees can also lead to the public perception that DEQ is beholden to corporations who pay fees rather than serving all citizens.

Clean Water. Oregonians value clean rivers and expect safe drinking water. DEQ is responsible for protecting Oregon's water through implementation of the federal Clean Water Act, and the proposed budget cuts will severely erode DEQ's ability to protect public health and the environment. In order to improve the health of our rivers and safety of our drinking water, we urge you to prioritize the following:

- **SB 737 Implementation.** Passed in 2007, SB 737 requires DEQ to develop a list of priority persistent bioaccumulative toxics that harm human health and aquatic life. By June 2010, DEQ is required to submit a report to the Legislature identifying the point, nonpoint and legacy sources of these priority persistent pollutants and source reduction and control methods that can reduce them. This work is funded by a surcharge on the 52 largest municipal wastewater plants in Oregon. In addition to the work directly funded by the surcharge, SB 737 also requires Oregon's 52 large municipal wastewater treatment plants to develop plans by 2011 to reduce persistent pollutants through pollution prevention and toxics reduction. The surcharge and the staff positions it pays for both expire at the end of 2010, and the Governor's budget did not include DEQ's program package that would fund an ongoing staff person to review the reduction plans, provide technical assistance and coordinate the program. This one ongoing FTE

was included in the original fiscal analysis when the legislature passed SB 737. We urge you to fund this staff person to implement SB 737 and keep high priority toxics out of Oregon's waterways.

- **TMDL Implementation.** We urge you to avoid making cuts to TMDL implementation programs in the Willamette and other river basins. Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) identify how much pollution a waterbody can bear without violating water quality standards, and they establish a plan to reduce the contribution of pollution from various sources in order to meet water quality standards. Please prioritize protecting the TMDL implementation staff in DEQ's regional offices. These staff provide technical assistance to help local governments and other designated management agencies develop and implement their water quality management plans. This implementation stage is the most important part of TMDLs, and it is where water quality improvements are made. We would prioritize spending resources on implementing existing TMDLs, rather than doing number crunching to create new TMDLs. Some TMDL implementation staff are funded by general fund, and some are funded by lottery dollars.
- **Groundwater Protection.** Please avoid cutting DEQ's Groundwater Management Area program. This program monitors drinking water wells in areas with documented groundwater quality problems and works to address the source of water contamination. Cutting this program would endanger public health.

Clean Air. Of all the environmental risks that people are exposed to, air pollution is the most difficult to avoid. Of particular concern in Oregon are toxic air emissions – such as diesel, benzene and formaldehyde – pollutants that are linked to cancer, birth defects and neurological damage. In order to make Oregon's air safe to breathe, we urge you to prioritize the following:

- Please avoid cutting funding for the Clean Diesel Initiative, which provides for grants, loans and outreach to reduce diesel pollution. Diesel is an asthma trigger and is linked to lung cancer, upper respiratory illnesses, allergies, and death from heart and respiratory disorders. As one example of how effective diesel retrofits can be, a recent report from Washington State analyzed reductions in asthma attacks for schools that have retrofit their diesel school buses.¹ For school districts that retrofit their buses, there was a 23-31% reduction in children hospital admissions due to asthma or bronchitis compared to pre-retrofit years. School districts not retrofitting their bus fleets did not experience the same decreases. Retrofitting school districts also experienced a 36-39% reduction in pneumonia and pleurisy (inflammation of the mucus membrane covering the lungs and rib cage) cases following retrofitting. The Washington State study estimated that retrofitting school buses presents a benefit-cost ratio of more than 20:1.

Global Warming. Global warming is a serious threat to the state, one that all agencies must take seriously, but one where DEQ is likely to play the lead role. DEQ needs dedicated staff to work on this key priority, including tasking staff with technical work (emissions inventories and GHG reporting), planning work (identifying emission reduction strategies), policy work (engaging on the state-wide, regional and national level), and outreach (public information and technical assistance to businesses). Post session, we expect that a new climate change section at DEQ will be created, and greenhouse gas mitigation will be put on par with other work at the agency.

We know that pollution costs taxpayers billions of dollars in health care, lost productivity, and clean-up costs. These costs and the physical toll of the health problems associated with pollution could be avoided by adequately funding DEQ and making investments in environmental protection now. Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Beatty, T. and J. P. Shimshack. "School Buses, Diesel Emissions and Respiratory Health," September 2008.