

Implementing Senate Bill 737: June 2011 Update

What is Senate Bill 737 and why did the Legislature pass it?

Public concern about toxic pollutants in Oregon's waterways and environment led to public and legislative support for Senate Bill 737, which directed DEQ to identify persistent pollutants, assess their presence in Oregon's municipal wastewater treatment plants, and explore ways to reduce those pollutants. Implementation of SB 737 is one way DEQ is evaluating toxics and sources of those toxics statewide. DEQ is nearing completion of this initial work.

People are concerned because persistent pollutants from a variety of sources last in the environment long after people have used and disposed of them. These pollutants can end up in our waters, where they can persist and travel up through the food chain, in some cases having long-term effects on people and the environment.

How did DEQ study these pollutants?

Oregon is the first state in the nation to undertake such an extensive examination of persistent toxics in its wastewater treatment facility effluent. For this analysis, DEQ worked with Oregon's 52 largest municipal wastewater treatment facilities to sample treated effluent (effluent discharged to land or Oregon waterways) for 117 of the 118 persistent priority pollutants. Municipalities with levels of these pollutants over threshold levels set by DEQ are required to develop pollution reduction plans.

What did DEQ learn about persistent pollutants in municipal wastewater?

The sampling effort focused only on municipal wastewater treatment plants and did not attempt to assess contributions from other sources. The data shows that the pollution reduction measures currently in place are working to keep the majority of persistent pollutants out of municipal wastewater. Wastewater from municipal treatment plants is not a significant source of most persistent pollutants. Most of the listed pollutants were not observed at measurable levels in wastewater effluent. Of the 117 pollutants tested, only five pollutants occurred above the threshold levels set by DEQ. Only five municipalities must develop pollutant reduction plans under SB 737, for arsenic, a naturally occurring metal (Klamath Falls and Ontario), for beta-sitosterol, a plant-based sterol

(Oak Lodge and Hermiston) and for pyrene, a polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon associated with combustion (City of Portland Columbia Blvd plant).

Two naturally occurring byproducts of human (and animal) digestion, cholesterol and coprostanol--both on the list of priority pollutants--were present in all sampled wastewater treatment plant effluent. DEQ suspended reduction plan requirements for those pollutants because of limited information about toxicity and lack of feasible municipal pollution prevention activities or cost-effective treatment options.

What will reduction plans accomplish?

Five of the 52 municipalities are required to develop Persistent Pollutant Reduction Plans under SB 737, for one pollutant each. Reduction plans will vary for each community preparing a plan, depending on pollutants detected and reduction activities the municipality chooses to implement. DEQ is working with municipalities to help dovetail reduction plans with other water quality permit requirements and other pollution prevention programs underway in these communities. The plans may include efforts to better identify sources of the pollutant or specific reduction activities. Since the source of municipal wastewater is the community it serves, reducing or eliminating the use of chemicals in homes and businesses is the preferable method to reduce toxic pollution from reaching Oregon's rivers and streams.

Are the results available to the public?

Analytical results from the municipal effluent screening will be available through DEQ's laboratory analytical storage and retrieval database in July 2011. Contact Lori Pillsbury at DEQ's laboratory for more information at 503-693-5735 or pillsbury.lori@deq.state.or.us.

What else is DEQ doing to reduce toxic pollutants?

This is a small part of the work that DEQ is doing to identify and reduce toxic pollutants in the environment. Other efforts include:

- Supporting statewide and national efforts to develop less toxic alternatives.
- Working with businesses that use and dispose of toxic chemicals to streamline



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processes and replace materials with less toxic alternatives, when possible.

- Educating homeowners about how to reduce their use of, and properly dispose of, hazardous waste.
- Monitoring toxic pollutants in Oregon's environment.
- Cleaning up legacy pollutants from past practices.

Communications

DEQ maintains information about the SB 737 project at www.deq.state.or.us/wq/SB737.

Anyone interested in the project's progress can sign up online and receive e-mails as new information becomes available.

Alternative formats

Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications & Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5696, or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696. The hearing impaired may call 711.