

Public Comments - Draft Industrial Stormwater Permit

Ecology Headquarters Building Lacey, WA

3:38 p.m. March 28, 2007

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Speaking for self as well as other citizens

Quote Gov. Greg

“I think the goals for Puget Sound cleanup are pretty simple. I want families to be able to swim in it, fish in it, and dig shellfish from its beaches” What I am asking in my testimony here, is for the Department of Ecology to do what is needed to do to make that happen, it is that simple. Polling data indicate that the governor has strong public support for this, and it’s clear to me that the same apply to rivers, streams and lakes. I am interested in this as a matter of thinking in terms of the world that I am leaving for my grandchildren.

I am going to use the current situation at the Port of Olympia as an example of problems with Industrial Stormwater. I had an opportunity to tour a part of the Port of Olympia Marine Terminal several months ago. This area handles log exports and some other industrial activities. Several local people have been digging into the permitting situation there, and my comments derive from both the tour and the research that’s been done subsequently.

Five observations first:

1. In some cases it appears that polluted water is going straight into Puget Sound with no treatment of any kind. In other cases there are some minimal sedimentation and skimming of the water, but I stress minimal, little seems to be going on. A lot of gunky water, with log debris, with fluids that drip from log huggers and etc, appears to be going straight into Puget Sound.
2. Information indications that the Department of Ecology has approved testing of stormwater effluent at just one of the number of outfalls. This outfall appears to not be representative of all outfalls. In fact it appears to have less pollution than some of the others.
3. Some of the stormwater pipes in the port area, and these are port stormwater pipes and city stormwater pipes, appear to go through a highly polluted, superfund site. Enter that site, go through the highly polluted sediments and then leave it and discharge into Budd Inlet. There appears to be a very good chance that this pollution from the superfund site, is seeping into the stormwater pipes and then into the sound. This would be due to normal phenomena, such as ground settling and earthquakes. High level of dioxin in recent sampling in Budd Inlet, may well be a result of that situation.

4. When monitoring reveals unacceptable levels of pollution, the reports appear to be just filed at Ecology. It appears that no corrective action is taken; No penalties of any kind, given out.
5. It appears that the range of pollutants tested for, is far more limited than range of pollutants known to be harmful to organisms, and that includes human organisms.

The solutions to these five problems seem obvious, and I will list them in the same order.

1. Disallow the discharge of polluted water.
2. Test at all of the outfalls in order to prevent permittees from sampling only the better outfalls or diverting their effluent to some outfalls that aren't tested. Perhaps better yet, have independent auditors do the testing on an unannounced basis. The process I heard described earlier today, seems to invite people to evade honest and representative sampling. Frankly I found it shocking.
3. Don't allow stormwater pipes to go through highly polluted site. If this is to be allowed, then do a much higher level of testing at those outfalls.
4. Take some action when violations are detected. If we've got no enforcement; we have no protection, we may as well have no law.
5. Test for all pollutants known to be harmful. Better yet, test for all of them except those known to be safe. Play it safe.

Two final points I want to make:

1. This is not just about the Port of Olympia. I am not picking on them. I have to believe that they are representative of industrial stormwater permittees generally.
2. Effective regulation requires two things: good rules and good enforcement. We appear to be failing badly on both.