

Marc Zemel
435 24th Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98112

Via E-mail

Washington Department of Ecology
Water Quality Program
Attn: Cheryl Niemi
PO Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600
swqs@ecy.wa.gov

RE: Comment on proposed water quality standards for toxics

To whom it may concern:

Please accept these comments regarding Washington's proposed water quality standards for toxics. I support the increase in the fish consumption rate but do not support the proposed change to the acceptable lifetime cancer risk. I personally enjoy eating fish, particularly salmon, and often do so 4-5 times per week. I also know that there are many citizens of our state who consume far more fish than I do, with large populations who eat fish multiple times per day, every day. I would like to see Washington's rules amended to protect the most vulnerable in our state. I therefore support the increase in Washington State's fish consumption rate, but am not convinced the increase goes far enough. Not only do I believe there are communities who consume significantly more than 175 grams of fish per day, but the adjustment to the "acceptable" cancer risk may render the increase in Washington's fish consumption rate ineffective and may not produce any real change.

Like many of us in this modern age, I know many friends and family members who have had cancer and died from cancer. I recognize that it is difficult to eliminate all cancer risk when establishing effluent standards, but I believe the smaller the risk the better and if there is any uncertainty whatsoever, the state should err on the side of more protection.

The State of Washington should protect its residents as aggressively as any other state in the union and should therefore maintain its cancer risk at one in a million, if not establish a risk that is more protective. I see no reason to change the acceptable risk to one in one hundred thousand. It concerns me that our fish-eating Oregon neighbors to the south might enjoy greater protection from carcinogenic pollutants in their waters than we do in Washington. The bottom line should be that Washington's rules provide at least the same level of protection as Oregon's. As I understand it, the proposed rules do not provide as much protection as Oregon's rules. The Department of Ecology should immediately remedy that discrepancy and provide a level of protection to Washington residents that is equal to or greater than Oregon's.

In addition, I worry about the environmental implications of the introduction of “variances,” to the extent such variances would permit temporary modifications to a designated use and associated water quality criteria in a way that would permit the discharge of pollutants at a level that is higher than it otherwise would be. It should be the state’s goal that every water body be drinkable, swimmable and fishable. Variances should not be an acceptable tool to permit higher concentrations of pollutant discharges to our water bodies.

Sincerely,

Marc Zemel