

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT DIVISION'S  
ROLE IN WATER POLLUTION CONTROL

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On behalf of the Environmental Improvement Division (EID), we are delighted to have the opportunity to address the Annual New Mexico Water Conference on "Water Quality in New Mexico." As background for this morning's session on water quality concerns in New Mexico, I will provide an overview of the role of the EID in water quality protection and water pollution control.

The Environmental Improvement Act mandates that the EID of the New Mexico Health and Environment Department serve the citizens of New Mexico in areas of environmental management and consumer protection in such a way as to optimize health, safety, comfort and well-being. To fulfill this mission, the division has a broad range of environmental protection and public health programs that deal with such areas as food protection, water supply, refuse disposal, hazardous waste disposal, subdivision control, air quality management, radiation control, and occupational health and safety.

In all program areas, except water pollution control, regulations are adopted and issued after adversarial-type public hearings by the Environmental Improvement Board (EIB) which is appointed by the governor. Water pollution control regulations on the other hand, are promulgated by the Water Quality Control Commission. The division is a constituent agency of the commission, and the division director is one of the eight agency

directors, or their designated representatives, who are members of the commission. The ninth member is a representative of the public appointed by the governor.

The Water Pollution Control Program, one of the division's major programs, is administered by the Water Pollution Control Bureau. The purpose of the Water Pollution Control Bureau is to prevent and abate water pollution in New Mexico. While consultation and training are key ingredients, the bureau's primary emphasis is on the development and enforcement of regulations. The bureau fulfills its responsibilities through five program areas. I will highlight each of these areas briefly.

I will begin with regulation of discharges to surface waters. The bureau enforces state regulations for discharges to surface waters. These regulations are Part 2 of the Water Quality Control Commission regulations. One area given high priority in this enforcement effort has been the protection of New Mexico's mountain streams. These streams provide high quality trout fisheries and may serve as a source of domestic water supply. To protect these streams, enforcement action has been taken against certain towns and sanitation districts.

Enforcement action has been taken against several other municipal and industrial discharges over the past two years.

The bureau also promotes compliance with state regulations and improved operation of wastewater treatment plants through on-the-job training offered through a contract with the Dona Ana Branch of New Mexico State University, and through a regulatory program requiring certification of operators. Under New Mexico law, wastewater treatment facili-

ties, as well as water supply facilities serving 2,500 people or more, must be operated by, or be under the supervision of, a certified operator.

The second area of bureau responsibilities is regulation of discharges to ground water. The bureau enforces state ground water quality regulations, which are Part 3 of the Water Quality Control Commission regulations; except as they apply to certain aspects of the oil and gas industry, geothermal installations and carbon dioxide facilities. These exceptions are regulated by another constituent agency of the commission, the Oil Conservation Division of the New Mexico Energy and Minerals Department.

Under commission regulations, an approved discharge plan is required for any new or newly modified discharge since 1977 and for older discharges upon request of the division. This discharge plan is, in effect, a permit to discharge to ground water. Emphasis is on the prevention of ground water pollution because such pollution is very difficult to correct once it has occurred. Of the 279 discharge plans submitted by April 1, 210 have been approved. Many of these have required extensive modification to ensure protection of ground water quality before they could be approved. Despite the many new or newly modified discharges initiated since the 1977 adoption of the ground water quality protection regulations, only a single case of noncompliance with the regulations has been reported for a discharger operating under an approved discharge plan.

The third area of our responsibilities concerns monitoring and surveillance of surface and ground water quality. The information gained through these activities is used to help direct the bureau's programs. The bureau is in the final stages of completing a regional water quality

assessment of the Grants Mineral Belt. A study of ground water contamination by toxic organic compounds in the South Valley of Albuquerque is leading to a "superfund" state contract with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a remedial investigation and feasibility study that may result in site cleanup. A recent assessment of the scope and extent of ground water contamination by hydrocarbon fuels indicates that this problem is more serious than previously realized. A similar evaluation of toxic substances should be completed this month.

Ongoing surface water monitoring has identified significant standards violations in an estimated 200 miles of the approximately 3,500 miles of perennial streams in New Mexico. These violations are distributed among six stream reaches.

One of the more widely known programs of the bureau is assistance to local communities in planning and construction of wastewater treatment facilities. State grants totalling over \$4 million were awarded to 14 municipalities and one sanitation district between October 1, 1981, and December 31, 1982. The state grants serve as state match for the more than \$28 million awarded in federal grants under the wastewater treatment construction grants program of the Federal Clean Water Act. As of January 1983, projects for three large municipalities, four smaller cities and one sanitation district remain on the state's priority list for wastewater construction grants funding.

The fifth area of bureau responsibilities is planning for program direction and evaluation of effectiveness. A notable, though still ongoing achievement, is the development and updating of the state's water quality management plans which set forth strategies for water pollution

control in New Mexico. A major accomplishment in 1982 was the completion of the biennial report to the U.S. Congress required under the Federal Clean Water Act. This report summarized surface and ground water quality in New Mexico, described state water pollution control programs, and made recommendations to both the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Copies of this report and information on materials on water quality and water pollution control are available.

Additionally, the division is responsible for administering EIB regulations addressing domestic waste discharges up to 2,000 gallons per day to assure adequate protection from individual, on site, liquid waste disposal systems. Also, the division is pursuing authority from the federal government in the areas of underground injection control and hazardous waste management under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.

Now that I have provided an overview of the bureau's activities, I would like to initiate the presentation on water quality concerns by asking members of the panel on "Protection of Water Quality in Mountain Streams" to come forward.