

San Mateo Daily Journal

November 1, 2006

Senator prepares 'green chemistry' legislation

http://www.smdailyjournal.com/article_preview.php?id=66525

By Dana Yates

A package of legislation prepared by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, could put California on the forefront of how government in this country deals with hazardous material.

With two months until the new legislative session begins, Simitian is already in the spotlight for the three to four bills he will introduce that address how the chemical industry is regulated and how the state tracks hazardous materials. Simitian, who chairs the Senate Environmental Quality Committee, wants California to lead the nation in Green chemistry legislation.

Simitian's push already has opponents in the chemical industry on guard. Opponents are warning that any far-reaching legislation could put bans on entire classes of chemicals without good reason.

Simitian is ready for the battle and already has a plan. He will introduce the bills, but at the same time create a larger conversation in the state that will help shape the future of chemical legislation. His pursuit of the bills is based on a report by Michael Wilson, a research scientist at the University of California at Berkeley Center for Occupational and Environmental Health.

The report claims that not enough is being done in the United States to regulate chemicals. It offers no specifics legislative recommendations.

Every day, the United States produces or imports 42 billion pounds of chemicals, 90 percent of which are created using oil. Converted to gallons of water, this volume is the equivalent of 623,000 gasoline tanker trucks, each carrying 8,000 gallons, which would reach from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., and back if placed end-to-end, according to the report.

Global chemical production is expected to double every 25 years for the foreseeable future. Between now and 2033, the Environmental Protection Agency expects 600 new hazardous waste sites to appear each month in the United States and require cleanup, adding to 77,000 current sites, according to the report.

Each month, an estimated 1,900 Californians are diagnosed with a preventable, deadly chronic disease attributable to chemical exposures in the workplace; another 540 Californians die as a result of a chronic disease linked to chemical exposures in the workplace, according the report.

Simitian is concerned that not enough is being done to protect people from the potentially hazardous chemicals.

People are increasingly aware the chemicals we take for granted in our real lives have real a real impact, sometimes good and sometimes bad, Simitian said.

At this point, it is hard to pin point what potential harm many of the chemicals pose.

Assembly Bill 289, by Assemblywoman Wilma Chan, D-Oakland, was signed by the governor this past legislative session. It authorizes the EPA to start reviewing chemicals and develop testing standards. Those in the chemical industry claim it is a good start to tackling hazardous materials. Wilson argues it is not enough.

It is not yet clear how much Simitian's bill will cost and who will bear the burden.

Dana Yates can be reached by e-mail: dana@smdailyjournal.com or by phone: (650) 344-5200 ext. 106.

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