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Senator Michael Dembrow Previews Fuel Disaster Legislation

Senate Bill 1567 Will Protect Lives, Environment During Major Seismic Event

SALEM – Senator Dembrow (D-NE Portland) will be introducing legislation that would help prevent grave environmental and public safety hazards in the wake of a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake. Oregon’s aging fuel storage infrastructure is vulnerable to critical failure in a major seismic event. The Critical Energy Infrastructure (CEI) Hub is located on a six-mile stretch along the Willamette River in NW Portland. The Hub houses over 90% of Oregon’s liquid fuels and poses a significant threat to the region and state.

“A dozen studies and reports over the years have told us that the Critical Energy Infrastructure Hub is a ticking timebomb,” said Senator Michael Dembrow. “We know that this facility was built on unstable soil, soil that will liquefy in a major seismic event. We know that such an event would present an immediate danger to the community and first responders who would be called into the area to contain the damages. We know that millions of gallons of fuel could wind up in the Willamette and then the Columbia Rivers. We know that the state will not have the fuel it will need to recover from the catastrophe. At this point, we don’t know who will pay for the long-term costs of cleaning up after this emergency. But we do know that with the right planning, coordination, and oversight, we can reduce these risks and these expenses. It’s clearly the job of the Legislature to step up and get this work going, and that’s what SB 1567 will do.”

Senate Bill 1567 requires energy terminal owners to submit comprehensive seismic vulnerability assessments and risk mitigation plans to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality no later than June 1, 2024. This legislation also requires the Oregon Department of Energy to develop a statewide Energy Security Plan to better prepare for a seismic event, protect local communities, and align with Oregon’s greenhouse gas reduction goals.

A broad coalition of lawmakers have joined in support of Senate Bill 1567, considering the prospective impacts to environmental conservation and public safety.

“It is so very important that we work to secure the safety of our environment starting with the rivers that have fed generations of Native people here in Oregon,” said Representative Tawna Sanchez (D-NE Portland). “As stewards of the land since time immemorial Native people have never taken more than what we needed from the river, we valued its life-giving resources. It is time to take care of the river to assure that it will survive any natural disaster and not be irreparably damaged by years of neglect of the fuel storage tanks that border the river.”

“Our CEI Hub's current vulnerabilities aren't just a Portland problem, but a problem for all Oregonians who value biodiversity, natural capital, and emergency resilience,” said Representative David Gomberg (D-Central Coast). “If we have learned anything these past two years, it is that we are well past the time to prepare for natural disasters. It's not a matter of if, but a matter of when Oregonians will be faced with a magnitude 9 earthquake. Let's make sure we're ready for it.”

“This is a public safety crisis that has the potential to unleash a disaster equal to the Deepwater Horizon spill, only right here in our City, at a cost to lives and our environment that I'm not sure we can even fathom,” said Representative Dacia Grayber (D-Tigard), herself a veteran firefighter. “The time to take notice and wake up to the very real danger is long past. The clock is ticking, and we must take action.”

“The devastation that will come from this fossil fuel risk hits hardest for North and Northeast Portland, and all the local communities that are forced to face higher health risks living next to these oil terminals,” said Representative Khanh Pham (D-Portland). “We need to protect human health and downriver communities, tribal communities and cultural resources along the Willamette River, Columbia River downstream to the coast.”

“As a physician, mother and State Representative for the district that is home to our CEI Hub, it is clear that the safety and security of the hub is one of the most urgent issues on the minds of people in my community,” said Representative Maxine Dexter (D-NW Portland). “The health impacts of a spill in the event of a Cascadia Subduction Zone Event are almost too expansive to comprehend and it is critical that we take proactive, urgent action to stabilize this infrastructure for the health of not just my community, but the entire region.”

"We are living on borrowed time. We know there will be a catastrophic seismic event. The only question is when," said Representative Paul Evans (D-Monmouth). “SB 1567 is an essential first step in developing a responsible plan for securing the Critical Energy Infrastructure Hub. Resilience starts with an informed understanding the gaps between our challenges and the status quo. I am grateful to be on Senator Dembrow's team advocating for passage of SB 1567."

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