



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Senate Democrats vote for increased penalties against environmental polluters

Senate Bill 105 raises fines for first time in 36 years

SALEM – Senate Democrats claimed a victory for environmental protection this morning by voting for Senate Bill 105, 16-13. For most violations, SB 105 increases the maximum penalty against polluters from \$10,000 to \$25,000 per violation, per day. The bill also considerably increases fines against water polluters and for violations that cause extreme hazard to public health or the environment. Current rates were set in 1973 and have not been adjusted since.

“Oregon currently has one of the lowest maximum penalties allowed in the nation and we have already been notified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that some of our penalties are inadequate,” said Senator Jackie Dingfelder (D-Portland), chair of Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee. “This increased schedule of fees is appropriate and closer reflects Oregon’s reputation as a national environmental leader.”

Increased fines would apply to violations of hazardous waste law, laws governing disposal of solid waste and materials containing mercury, and misdemeanor fines related to air quality, asbestos and underground storage tanks, among others. Additionally, SB 105 increases the maximum penalty for negligently or intentionally spilling oil or hazardous materials into Oregon waters from \$20,000 to \$100,000.

“Many Oregon waterways have become notoriously polluted,” said Senator Mark Hass (D-Beaverton), who carried the bill on the floor. “This legislation is another tool for the state to use to deter future polluters and help clean up our rivers.”

Other elements of the law include increasing the maximum civil penalty for a violation that results in imminent likelihood of extreme hazard to the public health or for a violation that causes extensive damage to the environment from \$100,000 to \$250,000.

“Senate Democrats feel strongly that reckless polluters need to be appropriately penalized,” said Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin). “Fines for violations need to be proportionate to the damage they cause. Otherwise, they don’t serve their purpose as a deterrent to and a punishment for polluting.”

The bill will now go to the House to consideration.

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