



Newsletter

Environmental Connection

January 2009

Contents

- 2009 Legislative Session: DEQ Seeks Reauthorization of Statutory Acts
- DEQ Tightens Belt; Imposes Hiring Freeze: Huntsman Budget Plan Seeks 7 Percent Cut in Spending
- Environment Takes Center Stage with Mayor Becker
- Governor Declares January 2009 as "Radon Action Month": Students Illustrate Dangers of Radon Gas

Sponsored by the Utah Department of Environmental Quality

Donna Kemp Spangler, Editor

2009 Legislative Session: DEQ Seeks Reauthorization of Statutory Acts

During the 2009 Legislature, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will seek to reauthorize key statutory acts that govern air, land and water programs for the next five to 10 years.

Passage is expected since the Legislature's Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment Interim Committee recommended that the – Safe Drinking Water Act, Water Quality Act, Solid and Hazardous Waste Act, and the Used Oil Management Act – be reauthorized by the full Legislature for 10 years. The Committee recommended that the Air Conservation Act be reauthorized for 5 years. These acts will be among numerous ones to be included in the annual "Sunset Reauthorizations and Amendments" omnibus bill.

Even though no other bills are being sought by DEQ this session, DEQ will set the stage for potential legislation in 2010 that could raise the fees for various types of waste disposal in order to fix shortfalls in a fund that pays for oversight of disposal programs.

Over the last few years, the Environmental Quality Restricted Account (EQRA) has dwindled due to a decline in fees collected based on the drop in disposal volumes.

"There are two actions we will be seeking in 2009 that won't require legislation to help stabilize that fund," said Bill Sinclair, acting executive director. "We could raise fees for out-of-state generators seeking to dispose of low-level radioactive waste at EnergySolutions' landfill in Tooele County and make adjustments to the fees collected for oversight of uranium mills."

Legislation would be needed to adjust the statutory fees but DEQ is waiting until after the 2009 session and other adjustments are made to help balance the fund.

Other potential legislation – not initiated by DEQ but may be of interest – could emerge when the 45-day session begins Jan. 19. For instance, bills currently filed, include:

- Changes to methamphetamine cleanup standards;
- Clarification of the Environmental Protection Agency’s certification requirements for natural gas conversion vehicles;
- Electronic Device Recycling; and,
- Local Public Health Funding.

For more information on legislation, visit: <http://www.le.state.ut.us/>

DEQ Tightens Belt; Imposes Hiring Freeze: Huntsman Budget Plan Seeks 7 Percent Cut in Spending

In the face of a dismal national economy, Governor Jon Huntsman unveiled a \$10.6 billion budget plan for 2010 that slashes state spending by up to 7 percent but preserves thousands of jobs by dipping into the state’s rainy day fund.

Like all state agencies, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will have to tighten its belt. Under the Governor’s budget, DEQ is facing nearly \$1 million in General Fund cuts that will mean hiring freezes on some vacant positions and postponing equipment purchases.

“We will look at our overall operations and determine what efficiencies we can make,” said Bill Sinclair, acting executive director of DEQ. “We support the Governor’s spending plan and will provide the Legislature with ways we can help meet these economic challenges.”

Huntsman is also hoping lawmakers will consider an economic stimulus package in the upcoming 2009 session that will “kick-start” the lagging economy.

“In spite of the current situation, Utah remains in an enviable position compared to other states,” Huntsman said in his budget. “I am confident our financial position will rebound quickly to a level of strength consistent with our position in recent years. In an effort to expedite our recovery, we are working on a plan to kick start our state’s economy in critical areas.”

Huntsman’s proposed budget recommends DEQ be funded as follows:

- \$11.3 million for Air Quality
- \$10.4 million for Water Quality
- \$8.1 million for Solid and Hazardous Waste
- \$8 million for Environmental Response
- \$5.5 million for Executive Director’s Office
- \$4.5 million for Drinking Water
- \$3.6 million for Radiation Control

DEQ receives a small percentage of financing from the General Fund – about 25 percent under the proposed budget. The remainder of DEQ’s overall budget is funding by a combination of federal funds (35 percent), restricted funds (22 percent) and dedicated credits (18 percent).

The Governor’s proposed budget would mean no cost of living increases to employees but would fund increases to health insurance plans. For more information on the Governor’s proposal, visit: http://www.utah.gov/governor/news_media/article.html?article=2180

Environment Takes Center Stage with Mayor Becker

The Department of Environmental Quality has an environmental kindred spirit in Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker.

In his first year at the job, Becker is tackling the types of environmental issues that are at DEQ’s core: clean air, clean water and clean land. And he’s doing so by building consensus among leaders statewide and engaging the public in decision making policies.

“As a planner, I tend to look at things from a broad perspective,” Becker told DEQ employees at the Nov. 17 second annual “convocation” speaking series, launched by a leadership development group to hear from high-profile leaders on the environment. Governor Huntsman spoke to DEQ last year.



Rick Sprott (Director, Utah DEQ) & Ralph Becker (Mayor, SLC)

Becker, along with Huntsman and Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon, already have formed a team, working with the Division of Air Quality and clean air advocates to find ways to reduce air pollutants caused primarily by automobiles. Their projects include initiatives like the recent anti-idling campaign that urges drivers to turn off their cars when they are at a standstill.

Over the last few years, the Environmental Protection Agency has required states to reduce the amount of pollution in the air, forcing state regulators to draft plans on ways to meet the tougher federal standards.

“I am a real believer that regulatory programs are at the heart of what we do,” he said. “I also believe educating people is a real key for environmental improvement. We’ve got to have a strong education component and good discourse with the community.”

Becker’s environmental roots took hold as a senior in high school when he first observed the inaugural of Earth Day in 1970. During college, he spent the summers working for the National Park Service. The 1978 University of Utah law school graduate ventured into politics, working in the office of planning and budget under Governor Scott Matheson, the last Democrat governor of Utah. Becker then founded his own environmental consulting firm, Bear West, in 1995. Two years later he was elected to the Utah State House of Representatives, serving first as minority whip, and then minority leader in the House before his election last November as mayor of Salt Lake City.

“It’s been the best job of my life,” he said.

Becker said he has had the opportunity of working with some DEQ employees and praised them for their professionalism and dedication. “I view DEQ as highly professional, dedicated staff,” he said. “I always view DEQ as doing an incredibly professional job.”

Becker has had some legislative successes. He was a co-sponsor of the Quality Growth Act, successfully provided funding for trails, and promoted open space preservation, energy efficiency, water conservation and in-stream flow protection.

He’s now engaged in rewriting the city’s codes to include a comprehensive sustainability ordinance that promotes things as energy efficiency, transit-oriented development and recycling.

Becker’s tucked away money that has helped expand bike trails. He is looking forward to the 2012 completion of an expanded light rail from Salt Lake City to the airport, that will pave the way for redeveloping North Temple into a boulevard.

“If we have a superior quality of life, Salt Lake City will be the home for ever increasing economic opportunities,” he said.

Governor Declares January 2009 as “Radon Action Month”: Students Illustrate Dangers of Radon Gas

Utah students are using their talents to warn others of the dangers of indoor radon gas. During October, the Division of Radiation Control (DRC) received 138 creative art pieces from students entering the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) National Radon Poster Contest.

“This year was a record breaking year for participation,” said Christine Keyser, radon information specialist for DRC. “Each poster illustrated a quality of uniqueness and understanding of the dangers of radon. Winning posters were selected through a public voting process.”

First and second place winners went to Centennial Middle School Students Emma Sorensen and Taite Haynes. Third-place winner Courtney Morgan of South Jordan Middle School's "Rawr!" poster gave life to the invisible gas by depicting a large beast looming in the house. (posters shown below).



On December 3, Governor Jon Huntsman honored the three winners, along with their teacher and parents, for their outstanding work to promote radon awareness. He has declared January 2009 as "Radon Action Month" to raise awareness and encourage Utahns to test for radon.

Radon is a cancer-causing naturally occurring radioactive gas that is undetectable by sight, smell, or taste.

"Testing is the only way to know if you and your family are at risk," noted John Hultquist, radon

manager for DRC.

To order a radon test kit or receive more information, visit: www.radon.utah.gov. or call 801-536-0091.

Radon Action Month Activities

- Jan. 5-11 – KODJ and KOSY Radio will promote the radon campaign;
- Jan. 6 – At noon, there will be a radon presentation at Huntsman Cancer Institute;
- Jan. 20 – Exit Realty Exclusive continuing education course on radon;
- Jan. 21 – At 1:00 pm, Radon presentation at Elder Quest, Chillon Reception Center, 7th East Circle St., Spanish Fork;
- Jan. 19-30 – Public information session at the Salt Lake City Library; and
- Jan. 26 – Park City Board of Realtors, continuing education course on radon.

To schedule a radon class or presentation, contact Christine Keyser at ckeyser@utah.gov or 801-536-0091.



