



Legislation Text

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Clerk 09/07/2023

A MOTION concerning contaminants of emerging concern in wastewater effluent and directing next steps to limit their impact.

WHEREAS, the county's regional wastewater system protects human health and the environment by collecting and treating wastewater while recycling valuable resources for the Puget Sound region, and

WHEREAS, contaminants of emerging concern are chemicals and toxins that have the potential to impact human health and the environment, and

WHEREAS, wastewater treatment facilities are the recipients of contaminants of emerging concern in wastewater discharged from homes and businesses, and

WHEREAS, there are many chemicals used in commerce and contaminants of emerging concern are found in common consumer products, such as pharmaceuticals and personal care products, which are direct exposure points impacting human health, and

WHEREAS, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances chemicals are a group of chemicals used to make fluoropolymer coatings and products that resist heat, oil, stains, grease, and water, and

WHEREAS, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are a group of chemicals commonly referred to as PFAS, and

WHEREAS, PFAS are a group of chemicals that are extremely resistant to complete breakdown in people and the environment are one concerning type of contaminants of emerging concern, and

WHEREAS, some PFAS may impair immune function, cause kidney and testicular cancers in people, and harm aquatic life, birds, and mammals , and

WHEREAS, wastewater treatment facilities are also recipients of PFAS and contaminants of emerging concern, and traditional wastewater treatment or water treatment processes are not designed to remove them, and

WHEREAS, source control is a cost-effective method for limiting or eliminating PFAS and contaminants of emerging concern in wastewater, and

WHEREAS, the King County council in response to concerns about ongoing health outcomes of southern resident orcas in Puget Sound waters added a proviso to the 2021-2022 Biennial Budget Ordinance, Ordinance 19210, requesting a report on toxics in King County wastewater effluent and evaluating the presence of toxics, and

WHEREAS, the county's wastewater treatment division of the department of natural resources and parks briefed the regional water quality committee on February 1, 2023, and the committee of the whole on June 21, 2023 on the report evaluating the presence of toxics in the effluent of King County's wastewater treatment plants and the potential impacts of PFAS, and

WHEREAS, the research team that briefed the regional water quality committee and committee of the whole concluded that wastewater treatment plants are an ongoing pathway for persistent chemicals into Puget Sound, and

WHEREAS, researchers also concluded that such long-lasting chemicals, such as PCBs and PFAS, in King County's treated effluent discharges may accumulate in chinook salmon and could contribute to health effects in southern resident orcas, and

WHEREAS, contaminants of emerging concern represent a paramount challenge for King County and all of Washington with far-reaching consequences that put our people, our economy, and our environment at risk, and

WHEREAS, King County is committed to protecting the health of our residents and Puget Sound;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. King County seeks to identify, prioritize, reduce, and control sources, exposures, and risk from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances ("PFAS") and contaminants of concern to people and the environment in King County. To accomplish these goals, the county's wastewater treatment division of the department of natural resources and parks is requested to take the following actions:

1. Seek operational, capital, or programmatic changes that may address PFAS, in the context of competing priorities, and assessing opportunities for collaborative actions that support our community and external partners;
2. Determine the most significant PFAS sources, pathways and exposures in King County, including undertaking voluntary sampling;
3. Support source control measures as the most effective and equitable solution, including implementation of the Safer Products for Washington program;
4. Inform and support state and federal PFAS chemical action plans;
5. Comment and engage in the development of regulations and legislation related to PFAS and contaminants of emerging concern;
6. Seek funding for projects and research to mitigate PFAS and contaminants of emerging concern in the region, and whenever possible seek producer responsibility for cleanup rather than burdening ratepayers and the public with treatment and cleanup costs;
7. Coordinate and share information and strategy with other jurisdictions in Washington, particularly King County's local sewer agency partners served by the regional wastewater system;
8. Research wastewater treatment technologies to address and reduce PFAS and contaminants of concern in effluent and biosolids for consideration and implementation, with special consideration for how technologies address the final fate and destruction of those chemicals; and
9. Support actions to educate residents and businesses about how they can reduce the use of PFAS and contaminants of concern in homes and businesses, reducing exposure to those chemicals.

B. The department of natural resources and parks shall be available to brief the transportation, environment and economy committee and the regional water quality committee in 2024 and as requested by the council, on its efforts to reduce and control PFAS and contaminants of emerging concern. Beginning with the 2025 sewer rate forecast, the wastewater treatment division shall include in its technical memorandum submitted with the annual sewer rate ordinance a section identifying the cost of activities it has undertaken and plans to undertake to address contaminants of emerging concern, including PFAS.