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by

Peter R. Lucchesi

The General Assembly of Virginia has passed a bill which prohibits the use of detergents containing phosphates. Senate Bill 248, enacted in January of this year and effective January 1, 1988, was originally introduced in January of 1986 and generated an intense lobbying campaign by both the soap and detergent industry and numerous environmental and consumer groups inside and outside the state. Virginia now joins a growing list of states, including Maryland, New York, Vermont, Indiana and Wisconsin, which have passed legislation banning the use of detergents containing phosphates.

The need to reduce phosphate levels in the Chesapeake Bay cannot be overstated. Phosphates are a major cause of nutrient enrichment, one of the Chesapeake Bay's greatest problems, especially in freshwater areas. Nutrient enrichment causes the rapid growth of algae, which in turn results in lower oxygen levels in the water and declines in fish, shellfish, and submerged aquatic vegetation. It is estimated that a ban on phosphate containing detergents could result in as much as a 40% reduction in phosphorous loadings to Virginia's sewage treatment plants, resulting in a major improvement in Bay water quality.

Maryland and the District of Columbia passed similar bans on phosphate detergents in 1985, and already there have been significant improvements. The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), a sewer and water authority which serves Montgomery and Prince William counties, reports that, in the several months following the ban on phosphate detergents, the amount of phosphates in incoming wastewater decreased by an average of 32%. Other improvements include a 50 to 60% reduction in the amount of chemicals needed to remove phosphorous from WSSC sewage treatment plants, and a substantial decrease in the production of sludge, the end product of the phosphate removal process.

The Virginia phosphate detergent ban promises to be a major contribution to the restoration of Chesapeake Bay. Efforts by Virginia and other states to reduce the amount of phosphates in the water will hopefully lead to a cleaner and healthier environment for generations to come.
of phosphates entering the bay from sources other than detergents primarily agricultural runoff, have already reduced the amount of phosphorous entering Chesapeake Bay by an estimated 1.8 million pounds. With the additional ban on phosphate detergents, there will be an even greater improvement in the water quality of one of the nation's greatest natural resources.

END NOTES

2. Id. at 1.
3. Id. at 1.
4. Id. at 1.
6. Id. at 2.