

REMARKS OF SENATOR JOHN HEINZ (R-PA)
CLEAN WATER ACTION'S CORNERSTONE COUNCIL
BERWYN, PENNSYLVANIA
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It is a pleasure to join you this evening and to be with others so committed to preserving our nation's water resources.

I especially want to thank Eric Draper and Flora Macklin for their help in arranging my visit here tonight.

This year, like last, will be a watershed year for environmental policy. Last year, we successfully enacted reauthorizations of the Superfund and Clean Water Acts. Eight and one-half billion dollars were authorized for Superfund's next five years, which will more than quintuple our commitment to containing and cleaning up hazardous waste sites and chemical spills. In the Superfund reauthorization, we also established a trust fund, like the Superfund, to pay for cleanups of contaminated soil and water caused by leaking underground storage tanks.

This past January, I voted to override a Presidential veto on the reauthorization of the Clean Water Act, of which I was an original cosponsor. That Act, now law, will provide Pennsylvania alone with \$95 million per year for sewage construction funding. These monies are the kind most needed -- helping to ensure that future incidents of environmental pollution will not occur by going after the source of the potential problem.

My long-standing commitment to maintaining responsible stewardship of our priceless natural resources has guided my votes on environmental legislation. I believe that it is our responsibility to hand down to our children a legacy of clear streams, uncontaminated land, and clean air.

Environmental controls are necessary to protect natural resources because market forces fail to provide for the costs of keeping the land, air, and water clean. Responsible measures to abate environmental hazards, such as municipal wastewater treatment and proper disposal of solid and hazardous waste, are costly and do not enhance profitability. For this reason, I have consistently supported environmental control legislation. This legislation has successfully brought about technology development that has been effective in reducing pollution. Catalytic converters and no-lead gasoline are examples of pollution reducing technology developed and implemented in direct response to environmental legislation.

Market forces have failed also to foster the development and use of environmentally-sound treatment and disposal practices. Paoli rail yards provides a frightening example of such failure. PCB's used to maintain commuter trains over many years leaked onto and saturated the rail yard soil. The PCB contamination threatened properties surrounding the yard and eventually would pose a groundwater threat. Fortunately, the immediate PCB threat has been averted -- the contaminated soil has been removed, the areas paved over, and the stormwater runoff diverted into a collected system -- thanks to Superfund. In the future, other Paoli's should not occur because handlers of PCB's are required to follow strict treatment and disposal requirements under the Toxic Substances Control Act.

Let me now turn to a specific issue that I know is of great importance to the Clean Water Act's Cornerstone Council, groundwater protection. Groundwater -- ubiquitous but unseen -- is a critically important resource, providing nearly 25 percent of the fresh water used in the United States. It provides

drinking water for 50 percent of all America, and nearly all for rural America. And it meets 40 percent of the country's irrigation needs. It maintains stream flows in dry weather and nourishes countless ecosystems. It is our lifeblood.

We are fortunate that it is in abundant supply, constituting 96 percent of the world's total water resources. But that's no reason for complacency. While still a fraction of our total reserve, America's consumption of groundwater -- about 95 billion gallons every day -- has more than tripled in the last 35 years. More troubling is the fact that virtually every aspect of modern life threatens groundwater purity in one way or another. And, once contaminated, groundwater is difficult, sometimes even impossible, to clean up.

Sources of groundwater contamination include abandoned hazardous waste sites. The EPA has so far identified about 20,000 nationwide. And 405 of those sites studied by the EPA have been responsible for adjacent groundwater contamination. Tyson's Dump in nearby Montgomery County is an example of how difficult it is to remove these kinds of toxic wastes before they pose a threat.

There are 93,000 landfills and 180,000 surface impoundments in the U.S., the majority of which are existing or potential sources of groundwater contamination. Some are even sites directly above or next to major drinking water reserves.

EPA estimates that there are some 10 million underground storage tanks, including over 2 million holding gasoline, of which almost a quarter are leaking. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources issued a report last year based on a survey of 173 underground tank releases indicating that 83 percent resulted in groundwater pollution, with almost one-fifth spilling over 1000 gallons.

Other threats to groundwater include the septic systems of some 20 million households, which handle an estimated 3.5 billion gallons of liquid waste each day, much of it is leaching into surrounding groundwater. Chemical solvents used to clean the septic tanks are also troublesome. Agricultural chemicals -- pesticides, insecticides, and fertilizers -- are major sources of groundwater contamination, as is animal waste. Highway deicing compounds, and road-coating waste oil, accidental chemical and fuel spills, so-called "midnight dumping" and the underground injection of liquids and detergents to increase oil and gas well output all pose serious threats to the quality of our groundwater. Active and abandoned coal and metal mines contain tailings and other materials that leach into the soil. And along our nation's coasts, salt water intrusion and contamination is occurring in those areas where fresh water is pumped out faster than it can be replenished. It appears the myriad threats to groundwater are perhaps as ubiquitous, and in some instances as unseen, as the resource itself.

Most groundwater supplies in this country are of good quality. This is heartening indeed, for groundwater truly has been the "orphan of U.S. environmental policy" (Dr. Edwin "Toby" Clark of the Conservation Foundation). In the pioneering environmental efforts of the '60s and '70s, groundwater pollution is not anything you can see, smell, or taste --- at least at first.

But there are ominous indications of what could become our most serious environmental crisis. Love Canal... Times Beach... public wells closed in many communities across the country ... residents forced to boil water or rely on bottled water. The impact of groundwater contamination can be devastating. Many communities, including all of Long Island, drink from one well -- 3 million New Yorkers rely upon a sole source aquifer. And now the residues of generations of successful, intensive agriculture are beginning to show up as contaminants in local well water. The Texas Eastern situation hearkens to a day when soil was considered the best medium for waste disposal and illustrates how easily - and how cavalierly -- we can imperil precious sources of fresh water.

A lot more needs to be done before we can say these problems have been solved. And it's crucial that we solve them. In working towards a solution, I support the following three legislative initiatives.

I believe that legislation such as the Groundwater Safety Act of 1987, which I cosponsored with Senator Durenberger, is a step in the right direction toward protecting our national water resources. This bill would require monitoring of pesticide contaminants in groundwater, and, in areas where they are leaching into groundwater, would require the Environmental Protection Agency to restrict pesticide use. This legislation is an important first step in devising a national strategy to protect groundwater. But it is only a first step. It is my hope that the Environment and Public Works Committee, and the Agriculture Committee, will report the Durenberger-Heinz bill later this year, and that we can have a vote on it.

Let me now turn to another area that is important to groundwater protection -- that is pipeline safety. Last October's gas pipeline leak in nearby King of Prussia, and the recent revelation that Texas Eastern had dumped PCB's throughout the state along their pipeline, certainly drove home the point that we -- and our groundwater -- all live with potential hazards. Public and private efforts to control last year's gas leak were quick and effective, but the real issue is how groundwater contamination occurs and how we can prevent it. There is an important role for the Federal government in these efforts. We need the new pipeline safety legislation which I introduced earlier this year. This measure would require more frequent inspection and greater precautions along pipeline routes -- including the Texas Eastern pipeline and the Sun Oil pipeline in King of Prussia. We need S. 1419 to prevent pesticide containments. And we need a coordinated, national effort to focus state, local, and federal resource on the problems of goundwater contamination.

At present, over a half-dozen Federal agencies and countless state and local offices are responsible for groundwater policy. As ranking minority member of the Senate Subcommittee on Federalism, I have introduced a bill that would coordinate these efforts, and provide - through an Interagency Council on Groundwater Protection - a 'home' for groundwater programs.

I believe that these three bills are the beginning to developing a comprehensive national groundwater policy. Unless we act now on a national policy, future generations will be forced to change their water consumption habits because of our mistakes. And so we are presented with an opportunity and a challenge. An opportunity to act, not merely react. A challenge to demonstrate foresight. We must meet the challenge because devising a national strategy to prevent groundwater contamination is most assuredly preferable to devising a national strategy to cope with groundwater contamination.

New efforts to protect our natural resources are really efforts not just to protect quality of life, but also to ensure the health and welfare of future generations. Continued input, interest and support from groups like your own has helped me to do a better job of meeting that goal, and I look forward to many more accomplishments in the future.