

**Draft Environmental Roundtable Meeting Notes  
September 17, 2003**

Attendance list:

M. Auten, J. Celenza, S. Dormody, J. Fornaro, R. Friday, L. Goodwin, J. Jellison, M. Komar, G. Loomis, M. McGonagle, Rep. E. Naughton, D. Novak, C. Obert, D. Riley, J. Sherman, P. Sams, J. Torgan, K. Stuart, H. Ward

DEM

T. Bisson, D. Albro, A. Gettman, T. Getz, A. Good, J. Keller, A. Liberti, Steve Majkut, G. McAvoy, B. Migliore, Jan Reitsma, E. Stone, F. Vincent

## **II Old Business**

### **A. Review May 2003 Meeting Notes**

The May meeting notes were accepted as written.

### **B. Greenhouse Gas Update:**

A working group meeting is scheduled in October 2003. Program packets will be available. Janet Keller discussed several options for greenhouse strategies on residential appliance efficiency programs, transportation / land use programs and energy supply.

- The Transportation Working Group will continue working on the vehicle efficiency incentive program, plus will work on a clean fuels/fleets initiative as part of a government action package. The group will also work with the Statewide Planning Program on its transit-oriented development project. Matt Auten, from RIPIRG, indicated that they are supporting the adoption of the California vehicle emission standards with respect to their Low Emission and Zero Emission Vehicle standards. Adoption of the standards will allow Rhode Islanders to purchase more ultra clean and hybrid vehicles that reduces NOx and toxics emissions. He indicated that Massachusetts and New York have adopted the standards.

The group discussed a proposal to ban the sales of diesel vehicles. The director thought that we should evaluate the benefits of low sulfur diesel before we consider banning it. One participant added that bio-fuel is an alternative that should also be evaluated. Steve Majkut noted that there are concerns with the use of bio-diesel fuel and mentioned that California treats diesels like gas-powered vehicles. As long as the technology can meet the standards, it is approved for use. Steve noted the engines do produce more NOx, but are more fuel-efficient. However, the Director said he does not agree with a diesel vehicle sales ban since diesel vehicles can achieve very high fuel efficiencies. He suggested a State House event to engage the legislature in a discussion of this topic.

- The Buildings and Facilities Working Group is working on energy efficiency/clean buildings and green power purchases as part of a government action package and removing barriers to combined heat and power (CHP) projects. The State Energy Office is working through Energy Service Companies to identify energy efficient improvements in businesses. Narragansett Electric is taking the lead on appliance-related initiatives.

### **West Nile Virus Update**

The meeting agenda was changed and this topic was moved forward. Al Gettman provided the group with an update on West Nile Virus (WNV). The Mosquito Disease Committee that has membership from DEM/DOH/URI has been tracking the virus for four years. Nation-wide, the west is reporting a lot of cases of WNV. In Rhode Island, there has been only one human case reported this year in August. The person has recovered and DEM is not aware of any additional human cases pending. He further reported that the virus has killed hundreds of birds. Based on our experience, DEM is scaling back on bird testing. The state will use surveillance of mosquito pools to track the virus. Of the approximately 600 pools tested, the virus was found in only one pool.

The state is monitoring Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). It is a rare disease, but it can have a higher mortality rate than WNV. This year, one horse and an EMU died from the disease.

One participant questioned if DEM would be using the same methods to control mosquitoes. The Director we are still using the same procedure as last year. When questioned about spraying, he replied that adult spraying would be used as a last resort. Spraying is allowed only when approved by the Governor, with consultation with DEM, DOH and the CDC. The director mentioned the spraying protocols are on the DEM website and said there is a provision for notification of sensitive populations. Al Gettman discussed the use of integrated pest management which included altering salt marsh depressions to allow fish movement into areas where mosquitoes breed.

### **C. Comprehensive Solid Waste Plan Update**

Michael McGonagle from the RI Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC) provided the group with an update of their progress in developing the revised plan. He said the full group has met seven times and has formed subcommittees including economics, disposal, municipal and commercial recycling, market development and source reduction. The sub-committees have issued draft reports that will be worked into a final plan. The next meeting will be held in November and will discuss compost and special wastes. Information concerning waste generation and landfill capacity are posted on the website. The Director mentioned the RIRRC does a great job on household hazardous waste collection and municipal recycling. He thought there should be more emphasis on school and commercial recycling. These programs could be improved with additional resources. Mike thought the plan has the elements of a good program, but questioned if resources will be available to implement the plan. He also mentioned the process will end in February and the draft plan will be submitted to the Department of Administration for incorporation of the state guide plan.

A question was raised concerning market development opportunities at Quonset Point. Mike said the report does not mention this and the Economic Development Corporation has not been involved in the process to date. Another participant mentioned there are no incentives for municipal recycling. He further stated that additional funds could be used to fund some of the resource issues identified, since the landfill operates in the black.

#### **D. The Litter Task Force**

Fred Vincent opened the discussion by stating the group was surveying municipalities on their involvement with litter enforcement. He also said DEM sent the survey to Divisions in the Natural Resource Bureau. He thought the group was heading in the direction of Keep America Beautiful, where the focus is on education, litter clean up and enforcement.

### **III. New Business**

#### **A. RIPDES Program Update**

Angelo Liberti provided an update on the RIPDES program. He said that the program focus is in getting the job done, catching up with minor permits and publishing general permits. He said he is now thinking about how to get the message out to the legislature on the work that is accomplished by the program. The director thanked the environmental and business organizations for their support in helping to keep the program. He also said that EPA's national databases do not always reflect the goals that are negotiated at the regional level and the data can give the wrong impression of what we are actually accomplishing. He also said DEM needs to look at other ways to process minor permits including using Environmental Results Programs where facilities certify their compliance with environmental standards.

The director mentioned that EPA does not have the resources to run a state program. This is a state issue and most people were in favor of keeping the program under the direction of DEM. He also indicated that DEM must provide information to the legislature that will make the case that the state is better off running the program than having EPA be in charge.

Charles Obert questioned if watershed councils should be authorized to run the program. The Director stated the councils did not have the enforcement capabilities to run the program. Storm water management might be an issue that municipalities could run if they had access to bonding mechanisms to pay for the program. Storm water districts could be created to implement the program. One participant stated that educating the public is essential in explaining the program to get their support. It was suggested that RIACC and ECRI could assist in public education efforts.

#### **B. Greenwich Bay Update**

The report on Greenwich Bay is posted on DEM's website. The report goes over the causes and measures needed to minimize the problem in the future. There will be a public meeting held Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. in Warwick to discuss its findings and to solicit input from the public and the scientific communities. The Governor will be present at this meeting and the Director indicated the Governor was interested in developing a comprehensive plan for Narragansett Bay. The director indicated this event served as an eye opener for problems in the Bay. In order to prevent future problems additional resources will be needed. One participant raised concerns on the impacts of the incident on soft shell clams.

One participant suggested DEM should use fishers to collect simple water quality data such as dissolved oxygen and bacteria. This information could be used to supplement information collected by DEM. This information could possibly be used as an early warning system for bay problems.

### **C. E. Providence / Providence Waterfront Power Line Update**

David Riley provided the group with an update of burying the power line that is visible from the Providence / E. Providence waterfront. He mentioned that Narragansett Electric had \$15M in a fund set aside for economic development. He indicated that the benefits of the redevelopment of the waterfront area caused by the relocation of the interstate highway were considerable. Funding of this project is minimal when considered in the context of the total benefits of the relocation project.

### **D. TMDL Update**

The group was provided a handout that provided the status of the TMDL Program. The director said that there were significant losses in program staff that resulted in our delaying the development of some TMDLs. One participant indicated that the assessments are important tools in developing strategies to clean up water bodies. This is especially true in for Greenwich Bay. Angelo Liberti indicated DEM is assessing ways to get things done faster, yet maintain the defensibility of the end product. The Director indicated that in some cases it is apparent what needs to be done and DEM should act and then monitor progress while the scientific analysis catches up with the process.

One participant questioned if the lack of a TMDLs has held up permits. Angelo responded that DEM works with facilities cooperatively to reduce nutrient loadings and has been able to issue permits that incorporate these lower levels. He further thought that the nutrient loading for the Fields Point facility could be revisited based on the Greenwich Bay problem. He said that DEM was investigating a seasonal solution to nutrient reduction.

### **E. DEM Enforcement Program Resources**

The group was provided a handout that tracked the personnel levels of the Office of Compliance and Inspection. The Office reported it is almost up to full strength of its authorized personnel level. The director stated that DEM will still not be able to inspect 100% of complaints, due to the fact that it is hard for DEM to determine if complaints are significant or justified. DEM is trying to evaluate if we should investigate all complaints or should we prioritize the inspections. Another concept we are evaluating is to focus more on field enforcement of permit conditions and to de-emphasize the issuance of the "perfect permit".

## **IV. Next Meeting Suggested Topics**

- Affordable Housing versus environment permitting issues
- Update on Open Space / Water Bonds
- Earth Day Update
- Air Quality
- Update on Pawtuxet River sludge spill

## **V. Next Meeting – December 17, 2003**