

Department of Environment and Natural Resources
INTERIM REPORT TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW COMMISSION
AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMISSION
ON
IMPLEMENTATION OF HOUSE BILL 1215 (Session Law 2002-167)

House Bill 1215, enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly in October 2001, has three related components targeted at improving water management.

Section 3 requires the Environmental Management Commission to develop and implement permanent rules governing water conservation and water reuse during droughts and water emergency situations in time to allow review by the 2005 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The rules are to establish minimum standards and practices for water conservation and water reuse for the following classes of water users: publicly owned water systems, privately owned water systems, State agencies, local governments, business users, industrial users, agricultural users, and horticultural users. The Department is directed to consult with these types of water users in developing the rules.

Section 4 establishes a goal to reduce water consumption by State agencies by 10 percent.

Section 5 requires the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to evaluate water conservation measures being implemented in the State and to identify incentives and voluntary programs that can help foster water conservation and water reuse. In conducting its evaluation, the Department is to review measures being implemented or advocated by the types of water users identified in Section 3 of the bill, plus residential users, electric utilities, environmental protection advocacy groups and natural resource advocacy groups.

Some of the tasks outlined in H1215 are already underway. In particular, the goal of reducing water consumption by State agencies is currently being addressed by the Utility Savings Initiative, a recommendation of the Governor's Efficiency Study Commission, and by Governor Easley's Executive Order 26 on water conservation. However, evaluation of water conservation measures, identification of incentive programs and formation of policies governing water conservation and reuse will require significant additional effort.

Three DENR divisions are cooperating on the implementation of H1215. The Division of Water Resources is coordinating the effort and concentrating on municipal water systems. The Division of Soil and Water Conservation has the lead role on agriculture, with the Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance leading on industrial and commercial water use.

On March 7, these three divisions sponsored a meeting, to which representatives of all the groups identified in the statute were invited, to inform water users that the Department would be conducting an evaluation of water conservation measures. Participants were

asked to provide information on water conservation measures currently in use and those that should be included in the evaluation. Participants were also asked to suggest ideas for incentives and voluntary programs that could encourage water conservation and water reuse among any or all water users in the State. Participants were provided questionnaires designed to collect information needed for the evaluation and were encouraged to send in other suggestions and information useful to the evaluation process.

This meeting also served to inform interested parties about the formation of rules governing water use and reuse during drought and water emergency situations as required by Section 3 of House Bill 1215.

More than sixty people, representing almost all groups of water users specified in the statute, attended the meeting. Representatives of several user groups offered suggestions about water conservation with at least one suggestion of a voluntary program that could be used to improve water use efficiency. Departmental staff members expect to receive additional information as participants return questionnaires. Many participants stressed the importance of developing long term water resource management plans to ensure adequate future water supplies, to integrate appropriate water conservation measures and to encourage water recycling. The Department will continue to work with interested parties to determine the best way to develop the desired long-term plans. Participants also stated a desire that efforts at improving water efficiency be give due consideration in the formation of the rules governing water use during droughts. Additional meetings will be held in the coming months after we have had the opportunity to review survey results and determine an appropriate course of action.

To gather additional relevant information, the Division of Water Resources has developed a questionnaire to collect information about water conservation measures from water systems that submit Local Water Supply Plans under General Statute 243-355(l). Water systems are being asked to include information on the effectiveness of water conservation measures they use. This information is expected to provide data on water conservation measures that affect many of the designated water user groups, since many rely on public water systems for their water. Local Water Supply Plans are expected from more than 540 water systems. Water systems are being encouraged to submit local plans by the end of July 2003. The timing of these submissions will provide valuable information for the evaluation of water conservation measures by February 2004 as required by H1215.

The responsible divisions will continue working with water users and other interested parties toward the report due to the General Assembly on February 15, 2004. The next priorities are to gather information about successful incentives and voluntary programs that have been used in other states. Obtaining assistance from the university system and from other sources is being explored.