

GOVERNOR SNYDER PROPOSES WATER RULES CHANGES STRONGER THAN THE FEDS

Under changes proposed by Governor Rick Snyder, Michigan would have water regulations dealing with lead stronger than those of the federal government.

The proposals put forth last week, contain recommendations from a subcommittee of the Flint Water Interagency Coordinating Committee.

They include lowering the lead action level to 10 parts-per-billion (ppb), from the current federal standard of 15 ppb by 2020, requiring annual lead and copper testing for all schools as well as other facilities, requiring "comprehensive lead and copper analysis" before any significant change in water source or treatment of a public water system as well as mandating that water systems be required to follow defined corrosion control treatment standards.

The timeline for implementing the proposed changes are undetermined. However, the changes could come via legislation, the state's rule promulgation process, and more, according to Governor Snyder spokesman Ari Adler.

Meanwhile, members of the Flint water crisis task force, appointed by Governor Snyder, told lawmakers their findings showed flaws in the state water office's culture and the emergency manager law and said that moving forward the state needs to address the culture that allowed the Flint water crisis to happen from the top down. The task force also recommended considerable changes in the emergency manager policy.

DEMS CALL FOR RESTORING CITIZEN OVERSIGHT COMMISSIONS

Some Democrats in the House and Senate have introduced legislation (HBs 5404 through 5406 and SBs 829 through 831) that would restore citizen oversight commissions for both air pollution and water quality.

The commissions would take complaints, have the ability to commence enforcement actions and oversee permitting and departmental policies and rules.

Former Governor John Engler abolished the commissions by executive order. The House voted to reject the order but the Senate never took action and the order stood.

SENATE PANEL VOTES TO CLOSE TWO PRISONS

Two correctional facilities would close under a budget unanimously moved by the Senate Corrections Appropriation Committee.

Subcommittee Chair John Proos (R-St. Joseph) said the subcommittee did not name the exact facilities saying that should be a departmental decision, but added the budget assumes a \$46.97 million savings from their closure.

The plan also calls for adding \$5 million to allow the Michigan Department of Corrections (DOC) to lease the North Lake Correctional Facility in Baldwin as well as \$26.6 million to staff the facility.

DEQ HAS A CHANGE OF HEART ON TOXIC LIST

Citing public concerns, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has reversed itself and decided not to limit its list of air toxics to review in permit applications, in a set of pending rule changes.

The DEQ had proposed criteria for defining toxic air contaminants, which would have resulted in a list of roughly 600 chemicals to review during the air permit application process.

The current rules have the state examining all the chemicals proposed in an application, except those on an exemption list.

“It is our conclusion that legitimate concerns were raised, with compelling arguments and that is the basis for the change in our proposal,” said Barb Rosenbaum, air quality evaluation section chief at the DEQ’s Air Quality Division.

SENATOR MEEKHOF: NO-GO ON MEDICAL MARIJUANA REGULATION...FOR NOW IN THE SENATE

A package of legislation (HBs 4209, 4210 and 4827) on medical marijuana regulations is being snuffed out, at least for now, according to Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof (R-West Olive).

Senator Meekhof said he is not ready to discharge the package from the Senate Judiciary Committee to the full Senate due to broad concerns within the GOP caucus.

He said Senate Republicans are well aware there is science-backed evidence in favor of medical marijuana use but what is less clear is how to regulate it in a manner where it is grown well and treated like a pharmaceutical.

GOVERNOR CREATES ANOTHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

Governor Rick Snyder has created a second education commission this one charged with identifying how Michigan can help students be more career and college ready with the goal to have Michigan in the nation’s top 10 school systems in the next 10 years.

Governor Snyder announced his plan for the 25-person 21st Century Education Commission in this year’s State of the State address.

The group is tasked with devising ways to facilitate STEM education achievement and preparedness for skilled manufacturing jobs.

The commission must have a complete report by November 30 to be provided to the state Legislature and State Board of Education.

BEER, WINE LICENSES MODIFICATIONS SIGNED INTO LAW

Legislation (HB 4895), now PA 84 of 2026, that would allow grocery stores with onsite gas stations to sell beer and wine at both locations has been signed into law by Governor Rick Snyder.

The measure creates a secondary location permit so the retailers can sell beer and wine under an extension of their primary license. The bill also designated merchants to reduce the minimum distance between a fuel pump and point of sale of alcohol from 50 feet to five feet.

The license-holder must also keep an inventory of at least \$250,000 or operate from a location not less than 50,000 square feet.

MID-MAY IS NOW TARGET DATE FOR EDUCATION FUND ADEQUACY STUDY

Although the law creating the Education Fund Adequacy Study mandated it to be done by the end of March, it now looks like it will be mid-May before there will be details on how much it would cost to adequately fund a child's education in Michigan.

The vendor doing the study requested an extension to May 13.

COA: CITIES CAN LEASE DRILLING RIGHTS UNDER PARKS WITHOUT CITIZEN VOTE

The state Court of Appeals has ruled that citizens have no legal right to vote on whether to approve leases for drilling for oil and gas under city-owned parks and cemeteries.

A three-judge panel unanimously rejected a challenge by the non-profit group Don't Drill the Hills, Inc. to a decision by Rochester Hills to lease underground oil and gas rights to one company and to allow another company to relocate an oil pipeline.

An Oakland County judge dismissed the case without trial.

SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES NEW REGIONAL STRUCTURE

The Michigan Supreme Court Administrative Office is implementing a new regional structure that it hopes will better support trial courts.

The plan expands the number of regional administrators and realigns coverage areas so that service to trial courts will be more focused.

DATES ARE SET TO FILL EX-SENATOR VIRGIL SMITH'S SEAT

A special election has been set to replace former Senator Virgil Smith (D-Detroit) who resigned from his Senate seat following a jail sentence for crimes committed last May.

The primary election for Smith's seat is scheduled for August 2, with the general election taking place on November 8, 2016 – the dates falling in line with the state's regularly scheduled primary and presidential elections.

Interested candidates must file for the seat by 4 p.m. Tuesday, May 10.

NEW PREVAILING WAGE BALLOT COMMITTEE IS FORMED

A group, its organizers as yet unknown, has filed to place a new prevailing wage issue on the ballot, but it is not known whether the committee calling itself Citizens for a Safe and Secure Michigan, is opposed to the prevailing wage law, or opposed to current efforts to repeal the prevailing wage law.