

HB 2647 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Prepared By: Anna Glueder, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 2/16

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Declares harmful algal blooms to be a threat to safe drinking water and a menace to public health and welfare. Directs the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) in coordination with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to: develop and maintain a coordinated monitoring and response strategy to harmful algal blooms; prioritize the monitoring of certain high-risk water sources; produce and maintain relevant data and make it available to the public; and develop a protocol for hazard advisory alerts. Directs DEQ in coordination with the OHA to identify water sources that are susceptible to harmful algal blooms and develop a testing and monitoring system for these water sources. Directs DEQ in coordination with OHA to also identify pollution sources contributing to the occurrences of harmful algal blooms, develop strategies to reduce the pollutants, and evaluate and monitor strategy effectiveness. Directs DEQ to study the causes of harmful algal blooms, identify point sources or nonpoint sources making specific water bodies susceptible to them, and develop a pollution reduction plan for identified point sources and nonpoint sources. Requires DEQ to report a quantitative and narrative summary and evaluation of the department's efforts to the Governor and the legislature by September 15 of each even-numbered year.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Reassigns the development and maintenance of a harmful algal bloom monitoring and response strategy as well as the collection, production, and storage of data related to HAB risk level of harm to public health to the responsibilities of the Department of Environmental Quality. Reassigns the determination of drinking water sources susceptible to or potentially influenced by HABs and adds the development of a system for monitoring and testing to the responsibilities led by the Oregon Health Authority. Deletes reporting requirement.

BACKGROUND:

A harmful algal bloom (HAB) (or excessive algae growth) occurs when colonies of microscopic algae grow out of control due to the interplay of favorable nutrient, temperature, light, and habitat conditions. While not all algal blooms are toxic, HABs can cause sickness and death in humans, pets, and livestock that come in contact with or drink the water, and also can result in hypoxia (low oxygen) in water bodies, which can kill fish and other wildlife. HABs occur in many different types of waterbodies, including drinking water reservoirs, lakes, and other ponded waters. Over the past decade, various algae-produced toxins have been detected in the surface waters of rivers and lakes around Oregon as well as in large water storage reservoirs in the Willamette River basin. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has the regulatory responsibility for restoring lakes and rivers and develops pollution reduction plans for water bodies below water quality standards. The Oregon Health Authority and DEQ jointly develop drinking water protection plans by regulating water quality permits, licenses, and certification as well as nonpoint pollution source control.

House Bill 2647 would declare harmful algal blooms a threat to safe drinking water and direct the Oregon Health Authority and the Department of Environmental Quality to identify causes and point sources associated with harmful algal blooms, develop and maintain a monitoring and response strategy, and submit a report to the Governor and the legislature by September 15 of each even-numbered year.