



Dear Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash and Committee Members:

My name is Catherine Thomasson, MD and I live in Portland, OR. I am writing on behalf of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility in favor of SB 1154 to update Oregon's Groundwater Quality Management Act.

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility views clean drinking water as one of the top public health priorities. I have worked on clean drinking water standards as the former Executive Director of PSR in DC and unfortunately, Oregon exceeds those standards in nitrates, arsenic and pesticides.

The number of known impacted wells with high nitrate levels is extremely concerning. Even in the Umatilla Basin where nitrate pollution has been identified for nearly 40 years, the number of private wells still untested is high even in the face of federal involvement, called in because the state was not adequately addressing the issue.

Identifying contaminated wells, however, doesn't address the need to stop the pollution from continuing, keeping levels high. It is well known that inorganic fertilizers and manure applications in fields are the most common causes of this pollution and yet they persist without ameliorating actions in Morrow County. Reductions in levels in Malheur County have occurred most likely due to more aggressive actions such as not adding fertilizer in irrigation water, use of straw or other absorbent material with fertilizers to reduce runoff, among others. Fines after the fact for point source pollution in Morrow County have not stopped winter application of CAFO manure, nor have there been actions taken to stop application of CAFO manure at other times of the year.

Nitrates are known to cause methemoglobinemia in infants. This is a condition where the hemoglobin cannot carry enough oxygen. Not a good thing for a baby's brain or developing organs.

Chronic nitrate exposure increases colorectal cancer, now the 2nd most common cancer in the US, breast cancer, bladder cancer, thyroid disease, and neural tube defects in infants—a truly preventable disease. Colorectal cancer, thyroid disease and neural tube



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defects are increased even in levels not reaching the nitrate water standard upper limits. (NIH 2018-Review <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6068531/>)

In addition, maternal exposure to environmental nitrates may increase the risk of pregnancy complications such as anemia, threatened abortion/premature labor, or preeclampsia. ([CDC. Accessed 4/4/2025](#))

As a physician, I knew to test lead in my urban water source before my child was born. Others don't know or don't have the money. My well-educated brother on a rural well did not test his well, so he and his family had no idea what contaminants were there.

I believe the State of Oregon has been remiss in not taking action to protect public health. I feel that this revision of the Groundwater Quality Management Act takes important steps to improve not just monitoring and notification, but also to take the steps needed to address the pollution and more importantly to take preventive measures before they reach critical levels in areas not designated Groundwater Impacted Zones.

- This bill addresses impacts and reduction of groundwater pollution. The law is strengthened to be more effective in protecting public health. It requires Agencies to develop a plan to address pollution with methods to reduce the ongoing pollution.
- It improves interagency coordination.
- Most importantly, the state agencies responsible for addressing this issue need to be held accountable. This will be accomplished by making a designated agency responsible for coming up with a plan to reduce the pollution. The current law does not do this.
- One agency will be designated as the lead to report quarterly. The interagency team is responsible for coming up with a plan to reduce the pollution and protect public health, not leaving this solely in the hands of a local voluntary group. This is essential!

Thank you for supporting SB 1154.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Thomasson, MD



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On behalf of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility



Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
The US affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize
4110 SE Hawthorne Blvd. #758 Portland, OR
97214 Tel: 503-274-2720 info@oregonpsr.org www.oregonpsr.org