

Kitzhaber stands behind toxic chemical measure

The toxics board plans to make its report public by April 1, 1999

By Nicole Kristal
Oregon Daily Emerald

Governor Kitzhaber promised to support statewide toxics right to know legislation at a Eugene Toxics Board meeting Wednesday.

After expressing his appreciation for the Eugene Toxics Board's efforts, Kitzhaber discussed his plans for a future toxics right to know task force. Kitzhaber also stressed the need for business and environmental advocates to work together.

"If we have a good-spirited dialogue through this task force, we can end up with something that preserves the public health and also does not pose an onerous burden on the business community," Kitzhaber said.

The 13 member task force will represent the interests of the business community, environmental advocates and the general public, according to Kitzhaber.

Kitzhaber intends to preserve citizens' right to know about chemicals in their community, while maintaining a working relationship with the business community as well.

"I think we've got a pretty good process here that's going to hopefully balance the public health issues with the ability of business to comply," Kitzhaber said.

Although the toxin reporting measure was passed last year, the report, which contains information about the use of toxic substances, will not be made public until April 1, 1999. Environmental advocates on the toxics board



CHAD PATTESON/Emerald

Governor John Kitzhaber discusses statewide toxics right to know legislation at a Eugene Toxics Board meeting Wednesday.

expressed various concerns to the governor about the results being made public at such a late date.

"The numbers are what the public has never had," board member Mary O'Brien said. "Not until April 1, 1999 will the public realize what they've been missing."

O'Brien believes that citizens of

Eugene will know more than any community in the nation about toxic emissions in their environment after the report is made public.

According to Kitzhaber, there have been attempts to repeal the toxics measure in 1997, possibly because business proponents fear increased government regulation.

Kitzhaber said businesses are concerned the measure will place them at a disadvantage in relation to competition in other parts of the state. Companies fear they will have trouble collecting the information the board requires for their report and lawsuits and fines will put them out of business.

"The development of a statewide toxic right to know bill is one that has to be done in a constructive fashion and can't be couched as an industry versus environmental debate," Kitzhaber said. "It has to be put higher than that in a discussion of what's in the best interests of public health."

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