

Section 208

.....part of the most comprehensive program ever enacted to clean up the nation's waters

208. Although little known at the present time, the number designates a program which will cast a prominent bearing on area agriculture in the coming years.

Section 208 is part of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972, a law mandating sweeping federal-state-community campaigns aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating water pollution. In short, the legislation—officially titled Public Law 92-500—is the most comprehensive program ever enacted to clean up the nation's waters.

The national goals of the Clean Water Act are to achieve fishable and swimmable waters by 1983, wherever possible, and to eliminate discharges of pollutants in U.S. waters by 1985. The governors of each state have the responsibility for complying with the law. In Oregon, Gov. Bob Straub has assigned the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) the task of developing the state's water quality plan.

The 1972 law identified two sources of water pollution—point and non-point. During the first few years after the law's passage, most of the emphasis was placed on point sources—usually a discharge from a pipe into a stream, generally from a city sewage treatment plant or an industry and in some cases, concentrated animal feedlots.

Point sources are controlled by a national system of permits which prescribe the types and amounts of pollu-

tants that a city, industry or feedlot can dump into waterways. Permits are issued either by the state or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and must include schedules of accomplishment and provisions for self monitoring.

Pollution from point sources received early attention because they were easy to identify and the public could see, and often smell, that there was a real problem.

Billions of tax dollars have been spent and more are budgeted to build sewage treatment plants for towns and cities. Industries are required to clean up their wastes and feedlot designs now include waste collection facilities to prevent discharge into streams.

By 1975, it became apparent that phasing the attack strictly at point sources wasn't the total answer to the problem. A considerable amount of pollution comes from other sources—and that's where non-point pollution comes into the plan.

Non-point pollution sources are a much more difficult problem, just as the term itself is difficult to define. It is sometimes said to include everything that is not point pollution and some examples could include:

Urban stormwater—water running off buildings and streets, carrying with it oil, grease, trash, salts, lead and other pollutants.

Agricultural runoff—rain washing fertilizers, pesticides and topsoil into water.

Construction runoff—earth washed into streams, rivers and lakes from erosion.

Acid mine drainage—water seeping through mined areas.

Forestry runoff—water washing sediments from areas where the earth has been disturbed by logging and timber operations.

Non-point pollution also comes from septic tanks, poor landfills or underground waste areas where water seeps through the soil, picking up pollutants and carrying them into waterways and groundwater. These sources of pollution generally can't be collected and treated—they can only be reduced by greater care in the management of water and land resources.

The importance of controlling non-point water pollution is seen in the statistics released last year by the National Commission of Water Quality which estimates that non-point pollution is responsible for 92 per cent of suspended solids found in water, 79 per cent of nitrogen loading, 53 per cent of phosphorous loading and 98

per cent of the coliform bacteria count.

Obviously, the task is imposing, but much needed. Other

articles in this section deal more with implementation of the program on the county level

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