

3 chemical safety bills pass Senate

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The state Senate has passed and sent to Gov. Blanchard three "right-to-know" safety bills. But some senators warn that one bill violates the Medicaid amendment of the state constitution.

The bills require information be given to workers, firefighters and the general public about dangerous chemicals. All Observers & Excerpts area senators voted yes on final passage.

"It's not a matter of safety for the firefighters. It's a matter of telling the local units of government what they must do," said Sen. Jack Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, objecting to one bill.

WELBORN LOST. His amendment requiring the state to "reimburse local governments for the cost incurred in preparing, distributing and implementing" information plans was defeated, 12 yes and 23 no votes.

Welborn argued that the 1978 Medicaid amendment requires the state to pay for any programs mandated to local government.

Supporting the Welborn amendment were Republicans Doug Cruce of Troy, Robert Geake of Northville and Rudy Nichols of Waterford. Opposed were Democrats William Faust of Westland, Jack Faxon of Farmington Hills and Patrick McCollough of Dearborn.

Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, was absent.

THE MICHIGAN Right to Know Task Force, chaired by Scott Tobey, hailed the bills as "a tremendous victory."

It encouraged "people who are exposed to toxic chemicals in the workplace or in their communities to begin demanding the information that this law will provide."

The bills would require:

- Chemical suppliers to label all hazardous chemicals and to provide material safety data sheets to employers who purchase the chemicals.

- Employers would be responsible for training workers on the hazards. Manufacturing employers must be in compliance by May 26. Other employers must comply by Feb. 25, 1987.

- Local fire chiefs to develop plans for fighting chemical fires and make the plans available to firefighters.

- The Michigan Department of Public Health to make available to the public information on hazardous chemicals used by employers within a resident's county.

Tobey's group labelled the last bill "a stop-gap measure" and called for better legislation.

He added, "We are hopeful that the requirements of this law will prevent the tragic chemical deaths which have occurred in Michigan, as well as the long-term illnesses caused by exposures to asbestos and other harmful substances."

Blanchard signs into law bills of area legislators

Gov. James J. Blanchard has signed into law 3 bills by area legislators:

- SB 645 deleting the condition that construction of M-275 freeway must begin before the Department of Natural Resources can convey unused land to the Multi-Lakes Conservation Association of Walpole Lake.

- Sponsor is Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield. M-275, a controversial plan for a freeway across the lakes area of western Oakland County, has been dropped by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

- HB 4750 inspecting the Building Officials and Creators Registration Act. Sponsored by Rep. W.V. Brotherton, R-Farmington, the law establishes a nine-member advisory board in the state

Labor Department.

- SB 361 to prohibit school bus drivers from transporting more than 110 percent of the number of persons for whom there are seats.

Sponsored by Sen. Patrick McCollough, D-Deerborn, the law is designed to reduce injuries in bus accidents when children are standing in the aisles of crowded buses.

Blanchard quoted the Michigan Federation of Teachers as saying 165 students were injured in nearly 1,500 school bus accidents in 1983-4.

Blanchard also signed a bill to require the Crime Victims Compensation Board to publish a pamphlet informing domestic violence victims of their legal rights and services available to them.

Check point delay only 2 minutes

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Innocent motorists would never have to wait more than two minutes to get through a drunk driver check point, the State Police director promises.

And a driver approaching a check point could turn and go back the other way — although his motions would be watched with great interest by an officer.

Col. Gerald Hough, a strong advocate of check points, last week told a skeptical House Judiciary Committee how the check point system would work, based on experiences in Delaware and Maryland.

Hough expects to begin them in Michigan in late April or early May. He will act under an executive order by Gov. Blanchard, although the Judiciary Committee is considering a bill to strip State Police of that authority.

ONLY A COMMAND officer of high rank could set up a check point in an area identified statistically as a drunk driving accident-probability area, Hough said.

Most likely times would be 1-4 a.m. It will take about a dozen officers to operate a check point. Most points will be operated jointly by State Police and

State police commander Col. Gerald Hough told a skeptical House Judiciary Committee the check point system would work, based on experience in Delaware and Maryland.

county sheriff's officers or local police. Early sites would be in outstate metropolitan counties such as Ingham, Kalamazoo or Saginaw — not the tri-county metro Detroit area. Two-lane roads are most likely starting points.

The teams would post four warning signs over a space of about 2,000 feet approaching the check point.

Five "stations" would operate simultaneously. Officers would stop a car 30 seconds and talk to the driver, handing him a pamphlet from the University of Michigan Traffic Research Center.

"THE DRIVER may refuse to talk or even to roll down his window," Hough said. "The officer will do his best to determine the level of sobriety and let them go through."

After talking to a driver, the officer would make a preliminary decision as to whether the driver has been drinking, Hough said. A preliminary breath test can be administered.

serve cars which turn around and head the other way. They will go after any which "exhibit unsafe driving characteristics," Hough said.

THE PUBLIC will be warned long in advance where check points will be set up.

Hough said advance publicity would be a deterrent to drinking and driving in that area.

This bothered some lawmakers, who said there was confusion over whether the program was meant to result in arrests or scare off drunk drivers.

Frank Ianni, a highway safety expert from Delaware, said in a State Capitol news conference that the arrest rate for check points was one per 7.53 work hours vs. one per 8.33 hours for police patrols — a 5 percent difference.

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