

# PIRGIM puts toxic bill heat on 29 senators

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

(state) chapter of the Sierra Club.

PIRGIM, a consumer and environmentalist group, carried 102,000 signed cards to state legislators asking them to support stalled legislation to crack down on toxic waste dumpers.

"Some 30,000 are from Oakland County alone," said Andrew Buschbaum, program director of PIRGIM (pronounced purj-ee-em), which stands for Public Interest Research Group in Michigan. It's a Ralph Nader-inspired organization claiming 35,000 members.

"The largest bag is from Sen. (Richard) Fessler's district," said Buschbaum, who works out of the group's headquarters on the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor.

Fessler, R-Commerce, facing court action in his Oakland County divorce case, didn't attend meetings Tuesday.

PIRGIM SENT volunteers door to door in 110 communities — mainly Oakland County and college towns — asking them to sign cards calling on their legislators to pass a package of six bills.

Most of the bills have gone almost nowhere in two years.

"Negotiations have been going on five months," Buschbaum said in a State Capitol news conference Tuesday. Involved are Sen. Vera Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, public health committee chairman; Rep. Tom Scott, D-Flint, his House counterpart; Gov. James Blanchard's office; and industry and environmental groups.

The form cards were distributed to 29 of Michigan's 38 senators.

"The bills call for transferring the financial burden from taxpayers and putting it on polluters," said Buschbaum. "They would empower local health officials to act, keeping the strain off the state budget."

"We're concerned that the process not be allowed to drag," said Anne Wolwode, representing the Mackinac

SIMILAR PACKAGES of bills have been introduced in the Senate and House by two of the Legislature's most liberal members — Sen. Lana Pollack, D-Ann Arbor, and Rep. Mary Brown, D-Kalamazoo. As PIRGIM described them, the bills would:

- "Make polluters pay for cleanup of toxic sites by imposing strict, joint and several liability on dumpers.
- "Reduce illegal dumping by giving the Department of Natural Resources power to assess administrative fines of up to \$5,000 a day on violators.
- "Crack down on flagrant violators by imposing criminal penalties of up to 15 years in prison and \$1 million in fines for people or companies who knowingly endanger human life by dumping illegally.
- "Speed evaluation and cleanup of sites by allowing local public health officials access to toxic sites."

The House passed the criminal penalties in June. It is before the Senate Judiciary Committee chaired by Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford.

IN 1986 PUBLIC hearings, business groups opposed administrative fines and "joint and several liability."

"They argued that a surviving company with a small role in a toxic waste site could be stuck with the entire cleanup bill if, as frequently happens, the prime culprit is bankrupt or out of business.

Buschbaum, however, said that business and consumers "aren't two competing interest groups. There are benefits to business. This legislation will help many businesses," he said, citing a violating landfill operator whose costs are cheaper than one operating lawfully.

The state DNR's list of 1,546 sites of environmental contamination is expected to grow to more than 1,800 sites when a new list is produced in December, PIRGIM said.

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