

E. P. A. PLANS CUTS ON WATER CONTROL

Formula Is Worked Out to
Slash Pollution Subsidies

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 21—The Ford Administration has worked out a legislative formula to avoid most of a staggering, if highly theoretical, outlay of \$440 billion to extirpate water pollution from the country.

The plan, which the Environmental Protection Agency says will be sent to Congress soon, would substantially reduce the scale of Federal subsidies that communities have been receiving to build sewage facilities.

Of that \$440 billion total, \$300 billion represented communities' estimates of what it might eventually cost them to cleanse the water run-off from storms — a major cause of waterway pollution. Storm water collection and treatment facilities are now eligible for Federal grants. This item would be eliminated from possible Federal financing under a "package" of proposed Administration amendments to the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972.

Both the Senate and the House have various proposed amendments already before them, and a two-year study by the National Commission on Water Quality, due in March, is expected to produce

more.

Down to \$67 Billion

Alvin L. Alm, E.P.A. assistant administrator, told a news conference that the Administration amendment would trim the \$440 billion to \$67 billion, beyond the \$18 billion Congress appropriated under the 1972 act for the first three-year phase of water pollution abatement.

Only a small portion of the original \$18 billion has been spent, in the form of 75 per cent assistance grants, because of administrative problems, but "obligation," or commitment, of the total is expected by the end of this year.

The E.P.A. has suggested pursuance of the grant program in the form of annual \$6 billion appropriations over seven years but the Administration is awaiting the conclusions of the commission, which is headed by Vice President Rockefeller, before deciding on this.

A second proposed amendment would reduce from 75 per cent to 60 per cent Federal subsidies for construction of "combined" conduits that carry storm water along with sewage to treatment plants.

Two other amendments would end Federal financing of sewage facilities being built to serve future community growth and would give the E.P.A. discretionary authority to withhold funding from projects deemed not to be "cost-effective."

A final amendment would allow the E.P.A. to grant case-by-case time extensions up to six years to communities with difficulties in meeting the 1977 deadlines prescribed by law for installing secondary, or two-stage, sewage treatment facilities.

Problems in Many Towns

The E.P.A. estimates that some 9,000 communities, containing nearly 60 percent of the nation's population, will not be able to meet this requirement, because of problem in design, financing and construction.

In addition to the municipal requirement, the 1972 act calls for industrial establishments to install by 1977 the "best practicable" fluid waste treatment facilities, and by 1983 the "best available" technology, in the hope of bringing the nation's rivers and lakes close to conformance with Federal water quality standards.

However, it has become apparent that many industrial establishments will not reach 1977 requirements. Industry representatives have proposed a blanket deferment of the 1977 deadline, but the E.P.A. has opposed this.

Mr. Alm was asked what would happen if a community compiled with the secondary-treatment requirement but because of lack of money for dealing with storm-water runoff ended up with waterways polluted in violation of Federal standards. Theoretically such a situation could make community officials liable to prosecution.

Mr. Alm called this "a hypothetical question—and a very difficult one, which we'll have to deal with when we come to it."

An E.P.A. water pollution official said that the run-off problem might be dealt with to some degree, short of elaborate treatment facilities, by such source measures as community street cleaning and prevention of oil and gasoline spillage.

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