

PUBLIC SECTOR PERSPECTIVES

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When Garrey phoned me on a beautiful morning in January, he asked me to fill this spot on the program, and I understood that he was covering all the angles, and wanted someone to represent public interest groups. There were more than twenty League of Women Voters members in my house that morning, planning our legislative action organization, and I forgot all about this for weeks. When I finally did begin thinking about this assignment, I wondered: What does this mean, the possible impact on public programs and activities? And how can I avoid saying what other speakers have covered? No matter, I will take my turn at not speaking on the assigned topic.

It turns out that no one knows what the impact will be, except planning and more planning and then some implementation. The benefits from non-point source controls will not be visible for some time. Some presumed impacts on public programs and activities are being discussed for you by other speakers.

How does the challenge of 208 look to the non professional, the private citizen, or even to the agency people? First, it is generating a flood of words and printed matter. There is a carton on the floor by my desk that is already full of 208 stuff. There have been a number of EPA seminars and conferences to provide guidance for state and local officials on (what to; who to, how to, and who to pay for it). I attended one in Dallas in January, and one in Denver last week. We heard some case histories for metropolitan areas, and some smaller communities which were very impressive, but none had problems or conditions similar to those of the southwest arid regions. Mixed with this was much explanation of how to administer the last by mechanisms most appropriate to the local conditions.

Second, it is the opportunity of the decade for EPA to interrelate with other agencies in jargon. This new program is identified by a number, a secret code, whose key is another number, PL92-500, which is not easily understood by the average person, do you say AWWTMP in plain english? Also jargon is used for not answering questions, or for asking questions which may not mean anything. In Denver I listened carefully to a consulting firm man read 18 pages of jargon on financial management. He used such terms as "data collected on existing financial management systems and attendant financial systems; economics of scale; solid base data systems and identify data gaps and strategies for improving base over time; impact input to analysis process; marginal returns; user charge structure; and non-sewered alternatives". I wondered if anyone would know the difference if he got his pages mixed up. All these words make

life difficult for the agency people who must comply with and interpret them. What is the cost to the taxpayer of developing, disseminating and explaining all this jargon? Could it be an institutionalized put-down?

The irony of this is that the primary objective of the 208 program is to involve the public in planning and implementation at the local level, and to gain public acceptance and financial support for the proposals produced. Courageous Lucy will explain how she hopes to accomplish this. There is a tremendous challenge for her to translate the jargon into ideas for action which the public she will be working with can respond to; "in order to attain cost-effective feedback where feasible within the time frame specified by Congress."

A third point is that no one, generally speaking, has heard of 208. Certainly, many people who are aware of the importance of water to the economy, may also be aware of their local pollution problems, or they may think they don't have any. But the man on the street who is directly affected by the cost of pollution abatement and the safety of his water supply, has not seen 208 explained in his newspaper. He may not realize that growth produces problems in his environment. Nor may he know that pollution control spending produces jobs and a new technological industry, and that a million people are now employed as a result of environmental expenditures. PL92-500 was passed in 1972, and still awareness is minimal. There is a way to go for the key issues to be identified and public input to develop the benefits to be derived by individual communities. Informational meetings will be held over the next few months, and if people don't avail themselves of these opportunities, they will have no squawk coming.

Continuing along this line of thought, one remembers that there is a tremendous resistance to federal legislative and regulatory interference with every day life. In New Mexico the land user hostility to the implicit threat of planning, or of any change is a strong political reality. Farmers know that irrigation runoff causes "reasonable degradation" of streams, and they have done nothing about it, because they can't afford to treat the runoff to improve its quality for the downstream user. And the Legislature has concurred. That is why it is called "reasonable". This is a political problem. Will 208 alter this fact of life? Can BMP and federal money persuasion do it?

One anticipated impact of 208 will be the necessary relationship of land use and water quality. Planning for one implies planning for the other. Since non-point sources are often land related and diffuse, long term land use regulatory decisions will be involved in terms of water pollution controls. The hoped for result would be that differing points of view will be reconciled and that planning will be acceptable to local people to protect their resources. And, oh yes, 208 planning must be consistent with other established planning programs. Mr. County Commissioner, are you ready for this?

There is one hopeful element to this challenge which has been placed in the hands of state governments, and that is that EPA understands that each state and region has a wide variety of water management problems and geographical

conditions, and the planning proposals which will be submitted for their approval will all be different. This is new. No blanket nationwide standards are being imposed. Much of the authority to develop plans will lie with existing units of government such as conservation districts.

The planning process will be facing up to such questions as these:

How much development and increased population can be tolerated by the existing or planned waste treatment facility capacity?

What are the health hazards or other environmental effects of growth and development?

What will be the long range impact of pollution?

What activities are increasing the burden of contamination?

How can they best be controlled?

Are some streams to be protected for fish?

Can attitudes be changed by more awareness of water quality problems?

How can available funding assure water quality improvement locally?

How can we protect our scarce water resource for today and tomorrow?

208 offers us the opportunity to make the right decisions to promote wise use of water resources in the public interest.