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Governor's Water and Sewer Task Force Results in Five Bills Passed in 2002 Legislative Session to Impact
Water Quality in Mississippi

The 2002 Legislature passed five water quality enhancement bills that stemmed from recommendations made by the Governor's Water and Sewer Task Force. Governor Ronnie Musgrove established the task force on March 28, 2001, to study the harmful impacts of inadequate water and wastewater infrastructure on economic development, particularly in rural areas of Mississippi, and to make recommendations for improvement in these areas.

"These bills are a success for Mississippians because they will improve the water and wastewater infrastructure needs of rural communities and enable them to better compete for and maintain new businesses and enhance economic development throughout our state" said Governor Musgrove.

The five water quality enhancement bills that were passed by the 2002 Legislature included:

HB 1077: Economic viability determinations will be performed by the Mississippi Public Utility staff on new water and waste water systems to assure that the user charge system (the formulas that are used to determine the rates customers pay) is adequate to repay debt, operate and maintain the system, and is able to provide for emergency repairs.

HB 1397: The Commission on Environmental Quality has been authorized to petition a chancery court to have a chronically malfunctioning domestic wastewater system or public water supply system which is endangering public health or the environment placed into receivership under the continuing jurisdiction of the court.

HB 1830: The Legislature will provide a full state match during FY2003 for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund program and for the Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund program.

HB 936: This legislation creates a program to provide money for loan subsidies. As a result, the water or wastewater system will be affordable by the customers of the system.

HB 1663: The Mississippi Public Service Commission has the authority to include the cost of fire protection in the rate structure when requested by a water system.

The task force membership included representatives of local, state, and federal government, rural water associations, water/wastewater operators, academia and others. Governor Musgrove appointed Charles Chisolm, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), as chair of the task force.

"It is vitally important for the future economic development of Mississippi and also the health of all Mississippians that we have proper infrastructure for providing safe, abundant drinking water as well as proper treatment of wastewater," said Chisolm. "These needs are especially acute in rural areas of the state."

The task force met nine times. During the first several meetings, the task force focused on the current situation in Mississippi regarding drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. The members heard presentations from agencies and organizations that deal with drinking water and wastewater infrastructure issues. During later meetings, the members discussed the issues that had been raised and developed a consensus set of recommendations that were presented to the Governor.

“The goal of the task force was to understand where we are, what factors inhibit economic development, and what factors can and should be changed,” says Chisolm.