

Pound for Pound, Maryland is Pulling its Weight to Reduce Nutrient Loading

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) continues to devise progressive and effective ways to meet The Chesapeake Bay Agreement criteria to reduce nutrient loading to our waterways. As a component of Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.'s. initiative to make Maryland the best place to live, MDE sets policies in air and water pollution management to improve water quality in the Bay.

Analyzed water quality monitoring and modeling results show the nitrogen and phosphorus capacity of the Bay and its tributaries. The "loading cap", which is essentially a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, determines an equitable allocation of the available capacity, and was agreed to by each state.

How to Lose 20 Million Pounds

To date, Maryland has made considerable progress in reducing nutrient loading to the Bay and its tributaries since signing the original 1983 Bay Agreement. To date, we have achieved a 31 percent reduction in nitrogen and 41 percent reduction in phosphorus. To meet updated Bay agreement goals, Maryland must remove an additional 20 million pounds of nitrogen and 1.1 million pounds of phosphorus to meet its share of the Bay loading cap by 2010.

There are strategies developed and implemented by each state to control nutrients from industrial and municipal point sources. This includes urban, suburban and agricultural nonpoint sources to meet each state's share of the goal.

The Bay Restoration Fund, enacted by Governor Ehrlich will allow Maryland to achieve one-third of the necessary additional nutrient reductions. Maryland's 66 major plants discharging to Chesapeake Bay will be upgraded first. Other facilities may be upgraded later, based on consideration of cost effectiveness and other factors. It requires upgrading wastewater treatment plants with En-

hanced Nutrient Removal technology, upgrading conventional onsite sewage disposal systems in the Critical Area with nitrogen removal technology, and planting cover crops to absorb nutrients on agricultural land through a cost-share program for Maryland farmers.

Nutrient Trading

Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania are all currently working on nutrient trading programs and methods to achieve necessary loading reductions, set by the Bay agreement, at the lowest possible cost. It is a new concept for water resources management and is rather controversial. Nutrient trading is an innovative way to further reduce loading to Maryland waterways and build on our progress. Trading allows sources such as large sewage treatment plants to "trade" or purchase nutrient reductions from another source, such as agricultural cropland to achieve an overall loading reduction for Maryland. This way a larger source may be able to meet its nutrient reduction obligations under the Bay goal, at a lower cost. This gives larger sources an incentive to do their part, while providing the same environmental benefit.

Taking Action

Maryland has developed a preliminary draft trading policy document. MDE is actively holding "listening sessions" with environmental groups, municipal wastewater authorities, industry groups and others to encourage public input in developing policy.

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