
[EPA press release - December 28, 1977]

President Carter's signing of the Clean Water Act of 1977 completes the mid-course corrections to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act passed by Congress some five years ago. The changes reaffirm our commitment to the protection of the health of all Americans.

The priority attention given to the control of toxic pollutant discharges is significant. The day is past when our rivers and streams are the dumping place of unwanted chemicals, and the new Act leaves little room for dischargers to avoid their obligation to protect public health.

The commitment to full funding of the construction grant program for the next five years encourages State and local planning, creates thousands of jobs and promotes the development of new treatment alternatives that will ease the taxpayers' burden and conserve water.

The new Amendments provide a decisive signal to the Federal government, State governments, and local and private sectors that the Congress and Administration reemphasize the ambitious goal of attaining fishable and swimmable waters throughout our Nation.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release
December 28, 1977

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am pleased to sign the Clean Water Act of 1977 which amends the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972. This Act reaffirms our national commitment to protect the quality of our waters and the health of our people.

I particularly want to thank Senators Randolph and Muskie and Congressmen Johnson and Roberts for their outstanding leadership in resolving the many difficult issues embodied in this Act. I am also grateful for the consistent cooperation of Senator Stafford and Congressman Harsha, and the other Conferees, and for the dedication of the staff, and EPA Administrator Costle in this effort.

This act culminates three years of hard work by the Congress to make the necessary mid-
course corrections in our national water pollution control program. This is a fine example of
how close cooperation between the Administration and the Congress can produce major
legislation of national significance.

The Clean Water Act of 1977 embraces many of the principles and proposals put forward by
my Administration. The Congress has agreed to long-term funding for the municipal sewage
treatment construction grant program which I urged in my Environmental Message earlier
this year. This will help states and communities plan and implement effectively programs to
clean up backlogs of municipal pollution.

The bill also emphasizes the importance of controlling toxic pollutants which endanger the
public health--a focus which my Administration has urged.

The Nation's wetlands will continue to be protected under a framework which is workable and
which shares responsibilities with the States. Certain farming and forestry activities that were
never intended to be covered under the original Act are specifically exempted from
requirements to obtain permits. I am concerned that Congressionally-approved federal
projects are also exempted from this permit program. Accordingly, I have directed EPA and
other federal agencies to take administrative steps to ensure that federal projects meet
standards comparable to those which non-federal projects must meet.

The bill also:

• Helps small communities meet the requirements of the 1972 Act;
• Encourages industry to experiment with the treatment of wastewater and sludge;
• Allows the Federal and State governments to recover their costs in mitigating
damages from spills of oil and other hazardous substances.

Amendments to the oil and hazardous spill provisions of the 1972 Act will extend domestic
jurisdiction to the ocean beyond the contiguous zone, where the fisheries and other natural
resources of the United States may be adversely affected. Oil pollution is a global problem
and accidents on the oceans prove the need for effective international solutions.

We have been working through international forums to achieve broader acceptance for higher
worldwide pollution standards. I believe that the legislation I am signing today may raise
issues of consistency with international law, and I know that many members of Congress
share this concern. Our clear objective is to achieve maximum consistency with applicable
principles of international law regarding the protection of the marine environment and to
encourage on-going and future international efforts to combat pollution of the ocean. If that
objective should require amendments to the Act that I am signing into law today, I am
confident that the Congress and the Administration will work together next year to make any
necessary adjustments.

This Act also requires Federal agencies to comply with all Federal, State, and local
substantive and procedural requirements concerning the control and abatement of water
pollution. I strongly support this requirement because it demonstrates the Federal
Government's own commitment to cleaning up the water while also recognizing that certain
exemptions may be needed in the national interest. For example, during this period of energy
crisis, it may be necessary to exempt certain activities such as the Strategic Petroleum
Reserve program from the strict application of this requirement. The amendments which I am
signing today do not limit my authority to grant exemptions which may be needed to avoid
unnecessary delays in implementing the important energy program.