

Senate addresses chemical spill and water contamination in WV

On February 4, the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Subcommittee on Water and Wildlife held a hearing on safe drinking water supplies. This was one of a series of hearings convened as a direct result of the Freedom Industries chemical spill in West Virginia in January 2014 that spilled up to 10,000 gallons of 4-Methylcyclohexene Methanol (MCHM) and polyglycol ethers (PPh) at Elk River near Charleston, WV. The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure held a field hearing in Charleston, WV, to examine the same issue.

Freedom Industries has filed for bankruptcy in order to finance class action lawsuits from some of the 300,000 citizens whose drinking water was contaminated when the chemical plume reached the downstream supply intake of American Water Company utility.

EPW Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) in her opening statement articulated that the current Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) classifies MCHM as “low priority.” She argued the currently debated Chemical Safety Improvement Act introduced in 2013, would preclude states from acting and citizens from pursuing litigation on a low-priority contamination, such as the Freedom Spill. Sen. Boxer’s bill, the Chemical Safety and Drinking Water Protection Act, would improve state inspections of above ground storage facilities and implement emergency response protocols in the event of a spill.

Sources: American Water Utility Company; E&E Daily; Environmental Protection Agency; Senate Environment and Public Works Committee; House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; USA Today
