

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES**

2013 ANNUAL REPORT

**CURRENT STATUS OF THE
PETROLEUM RELEASE COMPENSATION FUND
AND
AVAILABILITY OF PRIVATE INSURANCE**

RECOMMENDATION

The Petroleum Release Compensation Board's recommendation is to continue having the South Dakota Petroleum Release Compensation Fund (PRCF) serve as the primary financial assurance mechanism in South Dakota as that will continue to provide the broadest coverage for all petroleum tanks in the state, and ensures a level playing field for all owners and operators of regulated petroleum underground storage tanks who must meet the federal financial assurance requirements.

BACKGROUND

In 1984, Congress enacted federal legislation requiring the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to develop regulations to address the installation, use, and management of petroleum underground storage tanks. The resulting regulations included requirements to upgrade or replace operating underground storage tanks by December 22, 1998. The regulations also required that corrective action be taken if there was a release from an underground storage tank. In response to concerns regarding future unfunded environmental damages, additional federal legislation was enacted and regulations adopted establishing federal underground storage tank financial responsibility requirements. Owners or operators of petroleum underground storage tanks were required to demonstrate financial responsibility for taking corrective action and for compensating third parties for bodily injury and property damage caused by releases. Most sites are required to demonstrate financial responsibility of at least \$1,000,000 per occurrence.

With the enactment of the federal regulations, private insurance essentially abandoned the pollution liability market in the late 1980's. The insurance industry responded to these requirements by adopting "pollution exclusion" clauses in their policies. With private pollution liability insurance essentially unavailable, most of the state's underground storage tank owners had few, if any options for demonstrating financial responsibility.

The South Dakota Petroleum Release Compensation Fund (PRCF) was established by the 1988 Legislature to fill the void left by private insurance, to financially assist tank owners with the cleanup costs of petroleum releases and to meet the federal and state environmental financial responsibility requirements for regulated underground tank owners. The EPA has approved the PRCF as an acceptable mechanism for tank owners to demonstrate financial responsibility for corrective action and third-party compensation as required by state and federal law. The EPA Region VIII further identified the PRCF as a "model program". No additional pollution liability

insurance or other method of demonstrating financial responsibility is required by petroleum tank owners in South Dakota.

The PRCF cleanup coverage is comprehensive in that all petroleum tank sites, including abandoned tank sites and aboveground tank sites, as well as underground storage tanks, are covered. While other methods of demonstrating financial responsibility such as self-insurance or private insurance are available to a limited group, the PRCF is the only mechanism that is presently available to every petroleum tank owner or operator in the state.

A five-member advisory board appointed by the Governor makes recommendations on program policies. Revenues are generated by a \$0.02 per gallon tank inspection fee on petroleum products received in the state. While the fee generates about \$15 million per year, the PRCF receives 10.65% of the fee, or about \$1.75 million per year, with the remainder going to the Ethanol Fuel Fund and the Capital Construction Fund.

The PRCF provides reimbursement of cleanup expenses and third-party liability claims up to \$990,000 (\$1,000,000 less a \$10,000 deductible). Only necessary and reasonable cleanup expenses incurred after April 1, 1988, are eligible for reimbursement. Reimbursement for third party claims can only be made for certain petroleum releases reported after April 1, 1990. The PRCF also pays for all tank removal and cleanup costs incurred through the Abandoned Tank Removal Program, which was enacted through Senate Bill 197 in the 2000 Legislature.

AVAILABILITY OF INSURANCE

Pursuant to SDCL 34A-13-48, "the board [Petroleum Release Compensation Board] shall endeavor to integrate private insurance as the primary or secondary risk taker... ". This statute also requires the board to meet at least annually with members of the insurance industry who have registered with the board. The purpose of the meeting is to evaluate the availability of private insurance coverage for petroleum contamination cleanup and third party liability coverage. After meeting with the public on this matter, the board is required to report its findings to the legislature by January 10th of each year. This year the meeting was held in Pierre, South Dakota on December 12, 2013.

Preparations for the Meeting

In preparation for the meeting, written invitations were extended to members of the insurance industry and associations representing industry groups in South Dakota with a possible interest in the program. This year input was sought from the following representatives of insurance and associations:

- Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota;
- Western Dakota Insurers;
- Federated Insurance Company;
- National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors;
- Petroleum Marketers Management Insurance Company;
- Zurich North America Environmental;
- South Dakota Truckers Association;

- SD Association of Realtors;
- SD Municipal League;
- SD Bankers Association;
- SD Association of County Commissioners;
- SD Petroleum & Propane Marketers Association;
- SD Association of Cooperatives;
- SD Agri-Business Association; and
- SD Farm Bureau.

Comments from Insurance Industry Representatives

This year, written comments were received from Federated Insurance and Petroleum Marketers Management Insurance Company. The written comments from Federated Insurance indicate that they can provide pollution liability insurance for tank owners who meet their underwriting criteria and who purchase their property and casualty insurance coverage. But as long as the State of South Dakota continues to provide storage tank cleanup and liability coverage, Federated's plan is to continue offering additional environmental coverage to their existing clients to wrap around any gaps left by the fund. The written comments from Petroleum Marketers Management Insurance Company indicate that they currently provide coverage to approximately 1,800 petroleum tank facilities in several different states. Pat Rounds of Petroleum Marketers Management Insurance Company provided testimony to the Board. Mr. Rounds testified that insurance coverage is available in the private market for most petroleum storage tank systems, and if South Dakota transitions to private insurance Petroleum Marketers Management Insurance Company is interested in selling insurance coverage for tank systems in South Dakota that meet their underwriting criteria. Mr. Rounds also testified that if South Dakota were to consider transitioning to private insurance, there would need to be a transition plan to include testing the existing sites and systems to find out what the liabilities to the fund. The liabilities existing at the time of transition to private insurance would need to be covered by the PRCF, and private insurance would cover clean sites and releases determined to occur after the transition date. If this is not done properly Mr. Rounds indicated, there will be a laps in coverage and tank owners may never obtain complete coverage in the future.

Discussion

Since its enactment in 1988, the PRCF has provided \$84.6 million for corrective action at 4,490 petroleum release sites in South Dakota. Under the direction of the five-member citizen board, the PRCF has accomplished this over the past 25 years while reducing annual cleanup costs from a high of nearly \$7 million to less than \$750,000, while reducing staff from a high of 15 to the current staff of five. Additionally over this time period the revenue allocations to the PRCF have been reduced from a high of \$0.02/gallon to about 1/5 of a penny per gallon. The PRCF has worked effectively with industry and federal, state and local regulators to accomplish risk-based cleanups at significantly less than the national average cost and completion time, and has one of the lowest average payment processing times nationally. In addition to paying for cleanups, the PRCF has also worked with industry and state regulators to provide training to owners and operators of underground storage tanks to reduce the frequency and size of petroleum leaks. Currently 100% of the regulated underground tank owners and operators in South Dakota have received training in the proper operation and maintenance of underground tank systems.

While much of the past and on-going efforts have been to finance corrective action at old release sites, the PRCF's mission continues to be that of providing ongoing financial assurance for tank owners so that they can demonstrate financial responsibility as required by federal law. The PRCF covers all petroleum tank systems in South Dakota regardless of regulatory requirements and preexisting conditions. And no insurance company will be willing to do that, which would create disparity in coverage between the petroleum tank owners.

In reviewing the letters from Federated Insurance and Petroleum Marketers Management Insurance Company, and considering testimony and discussion at their meeting, the Board recognizes that private insurance may be available for new construction and for some tank owners who meet qualifications of the insurance companies. However, testing would need to be performed at every existing tank site, and dual coverage would be required for sites with existing releases and for those that did not meet the insurance companies' underwriting criteria. The Board concluded they could find no reason to change their recommendation from last year. The Board saw no advantage to the public or tank owners of going to private insurance to meet the financial assurance requirements for underground petroleum tank owners.