

**TESTIMONY OF RICHARD ECKENROD  
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**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION POLICY,  
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, AND THE CENSUS  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

***PHOSPHOGYPSUM: SHOULD WE JUST LET IT GO TO WASTE?  
MARCH 15, 2004***

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee on the subject of beneficial uses of phosphogypsum and some of the environmental issues associated with those uses. I am Dick Eckenrod, Executive Director of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. Tampa Bay is one of 28 estuaries of national significance participating in the National Estuary Program, established pursuant to Section 320 of the Clean Water Act. Tampa Bay was designated an NEP in 1990 by President George Bush and has subsequently developed a clean-up and restoration plan for Tampa Bay. That plan is now being implemented by the Program's partners in the public and private sectors. The Estuary Program is an independent special district of the state of Florida, organized through an Interlocal Agreement under the authority of Section 163.01 of the Florida Statutes. The nine-member governing body of the Estuary Program, known as its Policy Board, consists of elected officials or senior administrators from the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater, the counties of Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Manatee, the USEPA, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

The Estuary Program does not generally take positions on environmental permits or other regulatory matters, but endeavors to serve as a source of reliable information and unbiased advice to all interested parties. It is in that spirit that I offer the following comments.

Among the priority issues addressed by the Estuary Program are: (1) controlling excessive nitrogen loading to Tampa Bay in order to maintain water clarity and foster expansion of submerged aquatic vegetation or seagrasses in the bay; (2) reducing chemical contamination of bay sediments and protecting relatively clean areas of the bay from contamination; and (3) developing a long-range dredged material management plan for the bay that will minimize adverse environmental impacts and maximize beneficial uses of dredged material.

Reusing or reclaiming liquids and solids that in the past were considered waste materials and threats to the bay is a key element of the Estuary Program's strategy to achieve its water quality and habitat restoration goals. The Program's local government partners have, for example, made major strides toward nitrogen load reduction goals by reclaiming domestic wastewater for irrigation of residential, commercial, agricultural, and public properties. In addition to reducing nitrogen loadings to the bay, reclaiming wastewater is helping to offset demands on ground and surface water supplies for potable use.

Another Estuary Program partner, the Army Corps of Engineers, is selectively using dredged material from ship channel construction and maintenance to create emergent wetland habitats, restore eroded beaches, and improve the quality of submerged habitats in previously disturbed areas. Sediments once regarded as spoils or wastes are being transformed from environmental liabilities into environmental benefits for Tampa Bay.

Managing the huge and ever-growing inventory of phosphogypsum in Florida similarly offers opportunities as well as challenges. Using all or a portion of the estimated 30-million tons of phosphogypsum generated each year for safe and appropriate uses would reduce the volume of contaminated process water that will ultimately need to be disposed of. And, as the recent experience at the Piney Point facility in Manatee County has shown, reducing the volume

of stored process water also reduces the potential magnitude of accidental releases. Options for beneficial use of phosphogypsum should be actively pursued along with the research needed to reasonably assure protection of public health and the environment.

In addition to potential impacts on nutrient loads, evaluation of potential beneficial uses of phosphogypsum in the Tampa Bay watershed should take into consideration toxic contaminants that have been documented at levels of concern in Tampa Bay. An ecological and human health risk assessment conducted for the Estuary Program by Parsons Engineering Science, Inc. in 1996 concluded that polychlorinated biphenyls, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and specific metals (chromium, copper, mercury, nickel, and silver) were priority contaminants of concern in one or more segments of Tampa Bay. Potential human health and environmental risks of other contaminants of concern associated with phosphogypsum should also be thoroughly assessed before specific uses are approved.

In summary, beneficial uses of materials formerly regarded as wastes are now making important contributions to the recovery of the Tampa Bay ecosystem. Potential beneficial uses of phosphogypsum should be similarly explored together with appropriate health and environmental risk assessments.

That concludes my prepared remarks. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee.