

EPA deals blow to state permitting initiative

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Gov. Arne H. Carlson and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Commissioner Peder Larson have objected to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recent decision to halt an agreement that would allow states to adopt innovative permitting of environmental regulations.

The effect will be the *status quo*, often meaning long delays for golf courses and other projects.

On Feb. 26, Larson and five other state environmental agency commissioners sent a letter to EPA Administrator Carol Browner and Deputy Administrator Fred Hansen stating that members of the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) were shocked to learn that EPA had made a "unilateral decision" to immediately pull back from public review the draft "Joint EPA/State Agreement to Pursue Regulatory Innovation."

ECOS consists of environmental secretaries, directors and commissioners from 49 states and six territories. Larson is co-chairman of the ECOS Regulatory Innovation Work Group that, along with EPA, developed the draft agreement.

For ECOS members this means that months of hard work of the joint EPA/ECOS Work Group have come to a jolting halt.

"I am frustrated because just as the states and the EPA are about to find ways to streamline environmental regulation, the EPA gets cold feet," said Larson. "The EPA is imposing conditions to halt, or severely impair all future efforts to help business comply with environmental regulations while producing cleaner results in an economically feasible way."

When asked for his reaction to the EPA's recent decision, Carlson said: "It is my duty to the citizens of Minnesota to create the most

efficient system possible for achieving our environmental goals and ensure the best protection of public health and the environment for the least cost. However, the EPA's decision to impose conditions on all future efforts brings future uncertainty to a process that held great promise."

"ECOS members are disappointed that the EPA decided to

impose these unreasonable and counterproductive measures," said Larson. "We believe that the EPA's position shows a lack of commitment to meeting President Clinton's charge of reinventing environmental regulations. The EPA has said publicly that its goal is to apply common sense, flexibility and creativity to move past its one-size-fits-all mentality.

Clearly, the EPA's actions create great barriers to true innovation. I am very disappointed."

Larson said it is ironic that the draft agreement has fallen prey to the very problem the states hoped it would solve. Larson hoped the draft agreement would cause some improvement in the relationship between EPA and the states, which has been increasingly strained in the past few months.

"ECOS hoped that through the principles and process described in the draft agreement that EPA and the states could create a shared commitment to dealing openly with each other and being accountable for our actions," said Larson. "We are instead left with damaged trust and questions about EPA's commitment to working in partnership with states to create a better environmental system for our citizens."

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Architects survey

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Meanwhile, surveyed about whether the pipeline of new courses shows any signs of drying up, golf course builders agreed that it does not.

"All indications," explained Joe Niebur of Niebur Golf, based in Colorado Springs, Colo., "show 1997's construction activity remaining constant with the past year's."

Bill Kubly, president of Landscapes Unlimited Inc. in Lincoln, Neb., seconded that motion, saying, "If anything, the pace is picking up. We have never seen so much activity. There seems to be a lot of renovation work coming up as well."