



PRESS RELEASE

SENATOR MARTHA M. ESCUTIA

30th Senate District

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ESCUTIA SEEKS FIX TO HUMAN AND FISCAL TOLL FROM ENVIRONMENTALLY-RELATED CHRONIC DISEASES

Expert Working Group Presents Strategies for Establishing an Environmental Health Tracking System in California

Sacramento – Two years ago, Senator Martha Escutia (D – Norwalk) succeeded in creating a working group of technical experts on environmental health tracking to reduce the human and financial toll of chronic diseases related to the environment. Today, a report released by the SB 702 working group reveals not only the various approaches to establishing a statewide environmental health tracking system, but also the fiscal toll that Californians face if we fail to act.

“For only nine environmentally-related chronic diseases (including childhood asthma, cancer, and lead poisoning), the SB 702 expert working group estimates that Californians pay over *\$10 billion per year*,” explains Escutia. “If we could reduce the cost of environmentally-related diseases by just 1%, Californians could save over *\$100 million annually*, just for those diseases.”

Armed with this finding, Senator Escutia is making it her mission to fill the information toolbox through environmental health tracking. “Reliable information is the most basic tool for prevention of these diseases,” reports Escutia. “Without information obtained by tracking health and links to environmental hazards, California will continue to fight chronic diseases with costly treatment, rather than cost-effective prevention.”

According to the expert work group, the State of California currently has an inadequate surveillance system to describe trends with environmental hazards/ exposures and environmentally-related diseases. There are inadequate resources to carry out special studies to explain the trends. Multiple state agencies collect and manage health and environmental data, which could be used for tracking, but which need to be updated and made uniform. Furthermore, there is no systematic analysis of these data.

“I am grateful to the SB 702 EWG for its insightful long-term blueprint for California, and look forward to reviewing their recommendations in detail,” says Escutia. “Meanwhile, I have introduced legislation (SB 1446) to avoid any delays in developing an implementation plan for a much-needed environmental health surveillance system. SB 1446 seeks to respond to one of the major recommendations in the report – formation of an interagency office to oversee the implementation of the EWG’s recommendations and to use limited state resources more efficiently.”

Effective public health and environmental policies begin with accurate information about exposures and diseases. “An efficient tracking system could monitor the frequency and geographic distribution of these illnesses and exposures, protect public health, and reduce health care costs,” says Escutia. “Communities confronting environmental exposures or disease clusters need environmental health tracking, and California needs to reduce escalating health care costs through prevention of chronic diseases triggered by environmental hazards.” oOo