

Council on Environmental Quality

At a Glance

SUSAN D. MERROW, Chair

KARL J. WAGENER, Executive Director

Established - 1971

Statutory authority – Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 22a-11

Central office - 79 Elm Street,

Hartford, CT 06106

Number of employees – Two

Recurring operating expenses – \$164,582

Organizational structure – Nine-member appointed council

Mission

The Council on Environmental Quality's three main duties are to prepare and submit to the Governor the state's annual report on the status of Connecticut's environment, to advise other state agencies and to receive and investigate citizen complaints. It also has specific responsibilities under the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, or CEPA (Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 22a-1 through 22a-1h), and other statutes. The Council is within the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) for administrative purposes only. Members of the nine-person Council are appointed by the Governor (5, including the Chair), Speaker of the House (2) and President Pro Tempore of the Senate (2). Members serve without compensation.

Public Service / Improvements / Achievements 2013-2014

The Council submitted *Environmental Quality in Connecticut* – the state's annual report on the condition of the environment – to Governor Dannel P. Malloy in May 2014. To help the public make sense of potentially confusing and conflicting technical data on environmental trends, the Council continued its use of easily understood environmental indicators that chart the state's progress clearly. The charts in this year's report display data interactively.

The Council investigated the apparent upturn in the number of proposals to use state park, forest and wildlife management lands for other purposes, and concluded that state conservation lands are not protected sufficiently. This led to the publication of *Preserved But Maybe Not: The Impermanence of State Conservation Lands* in early 2014, which in turn led to recommendations for legislation.

From time to time the Council asks staff to conduct research to evaluate progress since previous reports. One example is a staff review of the compliance rate for alternative sewage

treatment systems, which the Council had last looked at in 2007. The result was a special report, *Testing the Effluent: Some Systems Pass, Some Don't, and Some Won't Say*, in early 2014.

All agencies submit their environmental impact evaluations (EIEs) of proposed projects for the Council's advice. In 2013, the Council submitted detailed comments on a highway interchange and commercial development project that involved several agencies; the comments are leading to improvements in evaluating the impacts of multi-agency projects. For several years the Council has been encouraging agencies to prepare concise EIEs that are easily read and understood; in 2013 it commended the Board of Regents for Higher Education for adopting that approach. In December, the Council wrote to the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection with recommendations to evaluate five specific obsolete regulations; one of the five recommended for review is the CEPA regulations, which have not been updated in 35 years.

Sometimes the Council's investigations of citizen complaints (see below) intersect with the Council's duties to advise state agencies. When the Council held a public forum in Mansfield in 2011, it was reminded that the University of Connecticut still had not moved its hazardous waste storage facility out of a drinking water supply watershed despite years of plans, EIEs and public input. In 2012, the university again announced a plan to evaluate alternative locations; the Council advised the university to put a priority on sites outside the watershed, and followed the site evaluation process closely. An EIE was completed in 2014 and a site was selected outside of the drinking water supply watershed.

The Connecticut Siting Council is required to solicit comments from this Council, which submits comments on proposed projects in cases where the applications do not provide satisfactory information about scenic and ecological resources.

Citizen Complaints: Citizens of Haddam have spoken repeatedly to the Council about contamination of land and groundwater that has existed in their community for more than 30 years. The Council decided to follow this case closely to learn why the start of remediation in some communities is delayed for decades (if it ever occurs). In September 2012, the Council submitted a detailed letter to Governor Dannel P. Malloy to update him on the problems in Haddam "and the broader problems made evident by this case." In November 2013, the Superior Court ruled that the owner of a former industrial facility in the community was indeed required to abide by DEEP's requirements.

The many complaints investigated in the past year included disposition of a state-owned brownfield that was also to be classified as open space, and management and transfers of state-owned conservation lands. The Council researched all of the complaints it received and offered recommendations to the relevant state agencies, where warranted.

In November, the Council released its required recommendations for corrective legislation in draft form, and invited the public to weigh in. Public officials, businesses, advocacy organizations and individual citizens spoke to the Council at a public forum held in the Legislative Office Building in Hartford, and many others submitted written comments. Their insights, technical advice and opinions helped the Council greatly in preparing its final recommendations, which were submitted to Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the General Assembly in January 2014.

All reports are published on the Council's website. By encouraging people to read its reports online, the Council has been able to eliminate printing and thereby conserve money and resources. Residents can receive e-mail notices of all new publications, as well as public meetings, by signing up for free e-alerts through the website.

The Council's total expenditures in FY 2014 were about three percent lower than in FY 2008 (in nominal dollars not adjusted for inflation).

Twice each month the Council publishes the *Environmental Monitor*, an online publication that replaced the Connecticut Law Journal as the official publication for CEPA notices. All state agencies post their notices that are required by CEPA on the *Environmental Monitor* website. The *Environmental Monitor* is distributed to all municipal clerks as well as any citizen who subscribes to e-alerts through the website. This electronic publication saves considerable sums by eliminating printing and mailing costs.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Council is required to submit the annual report to the Governor on the status of Connecticut's environment with recommendations for changes to state environmental laws and programs. Those reports and additional, special reports are available on the Council's website (www.ct.gov/ceq). The Council sends the *Environmental Monitor* twice monthly to all municipal clerks, as required by CEPA. The Council is required to recommend legislation for "identifying the deficiencies of existing programs and activities;" the Council submitted those to Governor Dannel P. Malloy in January 2014.