

The Nature Conservancy

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Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations

In Support of Bill 343

AAC THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE SAFETY PLANS OF CERTAIN CHEMICAL FACILITIES IN THE STATE AND RESIDENTS OF DISTRESSED MUNICIPALITIES.

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy's Connecticut Chapter, I would like to express our strong support for Bill 343, which would require:

- facilities producing or handling hazardous chemicals that are at risk of flooding to address how they are planning for sea level rise and flooding risk in their evacuation and hazard mitigation plans; and
- the Governor's Council on Climate Change to report on disproportionate impacts of climate change on distressed municipalities and recommend projects and measures to lessen such impacts.

The Nature Conservancy's interest in planning for sea level rise is our contention that the failure to do adequate preparation for rising waters will likely result in:

- more development in inappropriate, flood-prone sites;
- property owners resorting too often to protecting their buildings with methods, such as sea walls, which are harmful to abutting tidal marshes, mud flats, and other habitats;
- a lack of planning for the active protection of marshes and dunes which can help protect infrastructure;
- increased loss of human life and property.

Bill 343 addresses another crucial reason for such planning, the fact that certain types of facilities, including sewage treatment plants and chemical facilities, when breached or damaged by flooding, can have devastating impacts on nearby neighborhoods and natural resources.

The reference in Section 1(e) to the "sea level change scenarios" in existing statutes, which are based on a NOAA report that is now six years old, highlights the need to pass the sections of another bill being heard today, Bill 7, which would provide a critical update to the sea level trends we are seeing in Long Island Sound.

Storm Harvey, which hit the Houston area last August, provided a stark example of what can happen with inadequate planning at chemical plants and an underestimation of what kinds of storms we may face now or in the future. As this November 15th article in the Houston Chronicle, about the Arkema chemical facility, reported:

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Arkema-documents-show-planning-mechanical-12358188.php>

“Prior to the chemical fire at its Crosby plant, Arkema underestimated the potential for storm damage and failed to keep essential backup power protected from rising floodwaters, documents obtained by the Houston Chronicle show.

“Poor planning and a series of cascading equipment failures led to dangerous chemicals erupting into flames in late August during the height of Hurricane ^(over) Harvey. The miscalculations indicate the company's lack of preparation for more than 3 feet of flooding, reflected by an emergency management plan that barely addressed how to handle such a storm.”

“...Aug. 29, the workers were ordered to evacuate. Local government officials ordered everyone within 1.5 miles of the plant to leave, affecting about 300 homes. During the next two days, three refrigerated trailers lost the ability to cool the chemicals, causing the first fires that burned over Crosby.

“The first fire started in the middle of the night of Aug. 31. Fumes from one trailer swept over the evacuation zone, where sheriff's deputies were patrolling. Law enforcement officers manning the perimeter and medical staff responding to the scene doubled over, vomiting and gasping for breath, according to a civil lawsuit filed against Arkema by the first responders.”

An Associated press article: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-houston-harvey-plant-toxic-chemicals-20171002-story.html> reported:

“Scientific testing of samples — some collected several miles outside the 1.5-mile evacuation zone — found materials from multiple families of toxic chemicals, according to the letter signed by lawyer Mark F. Underwood.

The toxins identified include volatile organic compounds, which can be possible causes of cancer, and harmful polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons formed during the incomplete burning of organic substances. The letters said tests also detected some amount of dioxins and furans, which the EPA has said may change hormone levels in those exposed.

We strongly support Section 2 of this bill, which would address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on low income communities. As noted in the article on the website of the Union of Concerned Scientists:

<https://www.ucsusa.org/publications/catalyst/fa15-where-climate-change-hits-first-and-worst#.WqXb768m7ml>

“Studies show that low-income and communities of color in the New York-New Jersey area were among the hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy, and continue to struggle to find housing. One study of an African-American community in Maryland affected by Sandy found that residents there experienced flooding in their streets for days longer than other communities, and had more difficulty accessing food and housing. In New Orleans, where Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failure and flood killed hundreds, the majority of people who were trapped in the city and left waiting for rescue and aid were overwhelmingly African-American and poor.”