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SMITH-DORIA BILL TO SPEED ALONG CONTAMINATED SITE REMEDIATION APPROVED

TRENTON - A bill sponsored by Senators Bob Smith and Joseph V. Doria which would allow municipal governments to take over contaminated site cleanups within the municipality when the property owners have delayed remediation was approved by the Senate Environment Committee by a vote of 4-0, with one abstention.

"In many of our State's urban areas, economic and environmental blight are very serious problems that local officials are trying to tackle on an everyday basis," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset. "However, when those efforts are thwarted by large industrial polluters who have simply abandoned environmentally-damaged sites, local officials want to do something to speed up cleanups in their towns. This bill gives municipalities the power to speed along cleanups, and thus, redevelopment and remediation of their communities."

"By giving municipalities the ability to move forward on site cleanups, we're expanding the municipal toolbox to improve the quality of life for our residents," said Senator Doria, D-Hudson, who also serves as Mayor of Bayonne. "In my hometown, we've had a lot of success working with polluters to remediate and redevelop formerly contaminated sites to make them useful parts of the municipal redevelopment plan. However, when a contaminated site owner is not complying with cleanup requests in a timely manner, and is not willing to work with a municipality, then the local officials should have the authority to move ahead."

The bill, S-2851, would authorize the State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to authorize a municipality to take over a site remediation from the property owner if they have not begun cleanups in a timely fashion. Under amendments adopted by the committee, if a property owner does not begin remediation within five years of entering into an oversight document with the DEP, municipalities may, upon demonstrating sufficient resources, perform the cleanup. The cost of the cleanup would still be borne by the polluter, unless special circumstances require otherwise.

"Many of our local governments have a vision for redevelopment, but that vision is hampered by slow-moving hazardous site remediations," said Senator Smith.

"Brownfields and other contaminated sites are a drain on the momentum to clean up and re-energize our State's cities. However, by giving municipalities the ability to push remediation projects that are stuck in place, they can begin to wipe out environmentally-blighted landscapes from their towns."

"As a local official, I can attest to the frustration we feel, when hazardous site owners drag their feet on cleaning up their property, sometimes for many, many years," said Senator Doria. "They're not the ones that have to live and face these environmental threats and economic hardships on a daily basis, but rather, brownfields affect the people living next door, and the local officials that want to see a brighter future for their cities. The bill would allow us to realize that brighter future, and give us the tools to do something about the blight in our own communities."

The bill now heads to the full Senate for consideration.