

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 1997 SESSION

CHAPTER 667

An Act to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 10.1-1186.1, relating to environmental mediation.

[H 2790]

Approved March 21, 1997

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 10.1-1186.1 as follows:

§ 10.1-1186.1. Additional powers of Boards; mediation; alternative dispute resolution.

A. The State Air Pollution Control Board, the State Water Control Board and the Virginia Waste Management Board, in their discretion, may employ mediation as defined in § 8.01-581.21, or a dispute resolution proceeding as defined in § 8.01-576.4, in appropriate cases to resolve underlying issues, reach consensus or compromise on contested issues. An "appropriate case" means any process related to the development of a regulation or the issuance of a permit in which it is apparent that there are significant issues of disagreement among interested persons and for which the Board finds that the use of a mediation or dispute resolution proceeding is in the public interest. The Boards shall consider not using a mediation or dispute resolution proceeding if:

1. A definitive or authoritative resolution of the matter is required for precedential value, and such a proceeding is not likely to be accepted generally as an authoritative precedent;

2. The matter involves or may bear upon significant questions of state policy that require additional procedures before a final resolution may be made, and such a proceeding would not likely serve to develop a recommended policy for the Board;

3. Maintaining established policies is of special importance, so that variations among individual decisions are not increased and such a proceeding would not likely reach consistent results among individual decisions;

4. The matter significantly affects persons or organizations who are not parties to the proceeding;

5. A full public record of the proceeding is important, and a mediation or dispute resolution proceeding cannot provide such a record; and

6. The Board must maintain continuing jurisdiction over the matter with the authority to alter the disposition of the matter in light of changed circumstances, and a mediation or dispute resolution proceeding would interfere with the Board's fulfilling that requirement.

Mediation and alternative dispute resolution as authorized by this section are voluntary procedures which supplement rather than limit other dispute resolution techniques available to the Boards. Mediation or a dispute resolution proceeding may be employed in the issuance of a permit only with the consent and participation of the permit applicant and shall be terminated at the request of the permit applicant.

B. The decision to employ mediation or a dispute resolution proceeding is in a Board's sole discretion and is not subject to judicial review.

C. The outcome of any mediation or dispute resolution proceeding shall not be binding upon a Board, but may be considered by a Board in issuing a permit or promulgating a regulation.

D. Each Board shall adopt rules and regulations, in accordance with the Administrative Process Act, for the implementation of this section. Such rules and regulations shall include: (i) standards and procedures for the conduct of mediation and dispute resolution, including an opportunity for interested persons identified by the Board to participate in the proceeding; (ii) the appointment and function of a neutral, as defined in § 8.01-576.4, to encourage and assist parties to voluntarily compromise or settle contested issues; and (iii) procedures to protect the confidentiality of papers, work product or other materials.

E. The provisions of § 8.01-576.10 concerning the confidentiality of a mediation or dispute resolution proceeding shall govern all such proceedings held pursuant to this section except where a Board uses or relies on information obtained in the course of such proceeding in issuing a permit or promulgating a regulation.

Nothing in this section shall create or alter any right, action or cause of action, or be interpreted or applied in a manner inconsistent with the Administrative Process Act (§ 9-6.14:1 et seq.), with applicable federal law or with any applicable requirement for the Commonwealth to obtain or maintain federal delegation or approval of any regulatory program.