

SUBJECT: Requiring irrigation systems to have rain shutoff devices

COMMITTEE: Natural Resources — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Puente, Callegari, Hope, Campbell, R. Cook, Geren, Hamilton, Hardcastle

0 nays

1 absent — Wolens

WITNESSES: For — Carole D. Baker and Tony Gregg, American Water Works Association; Harvey Everheart, Mesa Underground Water Conservation District; Calvin Finch, San Antonio Water System; Ken Kramer, Sierra Club, Lone Star Chapter; John Schwartz, Texas Turf Irrigation Association; Tom “Smitty” Smith, Public Citizen

Against — David Brannan, Texas Turf Irrigation Association

On — David Mintz, Texas Apartment Association

DIGEST: HB 487 would require the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to adopt standards requiring that a newly installed or modified irrigation system have a rain shutoff device to override the irrigation cycle of the system when a certain amount of rain had fallen.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 487 would require rain shutoff devices on newly installed or modified sprinkler systems. By shutting down sprinklers during rainfall, these devices can save a substantial amount of water that otherwise would be wasted. Moreover, they save property owners money on their water utility bills, especially large industrial parks or apartment complexes with abundant green space. Some cities, such as Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas, already have adopted municipal ordinances requiring their installation. In fact, the city of Austin has provided the devices for free.

Rain shutoff devices are becoming increasingly common. Most devices include a cup or sponge that collects rainfall. The system is calibrated to shut off in the event of a specific amount of rainfall, such as one-quarter or one-half inch. They add little to the overall cost of a sprinkler system installation. Effective, easy-to-install devices are available for \$10 to \$30.

TCEQ would adopt appropriate rules governing rain shutoff devices, such as specifying the amount of rainfall for shutoff. The agency has vast experience in adopting such rules, and there is no reason to believe that it would adopt rules considering a minor sprinkler repair to be a system modification.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Requiring rain shutoff devices to be installed on modified systems could create problems. If TCEQ adopted rules broadly defining what constituted a modified sprinkler system, it could require a sprinkler installer to put in a rain shutoff device while performing a simple repair, such as replacing a broken sprinkler head. The bill either should define a modified system or apply the requirement for a shutoff device only to newly installed systems.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 780 by Armbrister, was considered in a public hearing by the Senate Natural Resources Committee on April 15 and left pending.