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Statement of Senator Edmund S. Muskie on Phosphate Detergents

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FOR RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Friday September 17, 1971

MUSKIE CALLS PHOSPHATE DECISION 'POOR POLICY'

The Administration's decision to encourage the use of phosphate detergents in our homes and work places is poor public policy.

It is not enough to say there are no simple solutions to the problems posed by phosphate detergents and to urge a return to the use of these products.

It is not enough to say that another chemical should not be used now because we do not know its long-term effects upon our health and environment or that it is a cause for serious concern.

And it is not enough to study those bodies of water damaged by phosphates and to promise Federal aid for reducing phosphate damage by treating municipal wastes.

The Administration's decision simply dumps the phosphate problem into the consumer's lap. It draws upon the Federal treasury to clean up the waste. It only asks manufacturers to continue research for better detergents. And it fails even to suggest we could have less damage if we used less phosphate, less detergent.

We must do better than that, and we can. My own bill, S. 573, pending before the Committee on Public Works, offers a better solution.

It recognizes that many manufactured products may contain substances which affect adversely the quality of our air and water.

It recognizes that control of these adverse effects is not feasible at points where products are used in our homes and work places.

And it gives the Environmental Protection Administrator the power to regulate use of these substances before products are put on the market.

The Administration's figure, \$500 million in Federal funds, underestimates the cost of cleaning up waters damaged by detergent phosphates. No figures are given for State and local costs, but matching funds are required by the Federal program. No indication is given as to where those Federal funds will come from.

Phosphates used in detergents should be required to bear a portion, if not all, of the costs of clean up. We could, for example, recover at least a portion of

(more)

(2)

these costs by imposing a tax upon the phosphate content of detergents.

Three steps should be taken promptly:

- 1) Early consideration of my bill to require pre-market testing of products containing hazardous and toxic substances is essential;
- 2) The Administration should tell us how much more the treatment of detergent phosphates and the disposal of phosphate sludge is going to cost and should request an additional authorization and appropriation for these purposes in the pending water pollution control legislation; and
- 3) Congress should consider imposing a tax on the phosphate content of detergents to offset the costs of phosphate removal in public treatment plants.

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