

February 5, 2024

House Committee On Emergency Management,
General Government, and Veterans
900 Court St NE
Hearing Room C
Salem, OR 97301

Re: House Bill 4044

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Tran and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to urge your support for House Bill 4044. In October of 2023 Multnomah County released the attached report, *Risks of Earthquake-Induced Hazardous Materials Releases in Multnomah County, Oregon: Two Scenarios Examined*. The report documented major risk from toxic inhalation hazards in Multnomah County. These dangerous airborne chemicals, if released in an uncontrolled manner, can cause immediate harm, up to and including death.

The report, which was prepared by Portland State University, shows the scope and scale of risk posed by toxic inhalants in our community. Seventy (70) facilities in Multnomah County store substantial amounts of toxic inhalants, so-called type II facilities. Most of those facilities are located in areas of the County subject to extreme seismic risk in the form of soil liquefaction and lateral spread. Chemicals at these facilities are stored in pre-existing non-conforming tanks that are very likely to fail during a seismic event.

When these tanks holding toxic inhalants fail, the consequences will be devastating. In the study, researchers modeled only 4 of the 70 facilities for potential releases and dispersion patterns. Even still, under the “best” case scenario the modeling estimates over 1,200 possible asphyxiation deaths from exposure and thousands of possible injuries. The report only covers Multnomah County, but given the extent of seismic vulnerability throughout the state, and the prevalence of these facilities, it is reasonable to assume the risk is far graver than what has been documented to date. This level of risk is unacceptable and unnecessary.

A strong and comprehensive policy response from the state is required. I am heartened by the swift action of Chair Grayber and the Governor’s Office on this issue. The first step to addressing this issue is to understand the extent of the problem throughout the state, and that is exactly what HB 4044 will accomplish. The bill will essentially extend Multnomah County’s analysis to the rest of the state.

Understanding the problem won't be enough, however. We will need your ongoing engagement and support to use the information produced by HB 4044 to ensure meaningful steps are taken during subsequent sessions. We have the opportunity to prevent a disaster. HB 4044 is the first step, I urge your support for the passage of this important bill.

Sincerely,

Jessica Vega Pederson
Chair, Multnomah County Board of County Commissioners