

**Fifty-seventh Legislative Assembly of North Dakota
In Regular Session Commencing Tuesday, January 9, 2001**

HOUSE BILL NO. 1297
(Representatives Porter, R. Kelsch)
(Senator Cook)

AN ACT to create and enact a new section to chapter 23-20.3 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to liability of property owners for hazardous waste on their property; and to amend and reenact section 23-31-01 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the recovery of costs of environmental emergencies.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:

SECTION 1. A new section to chapter 23-20.3 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as follows:

Limited liability for subsequent owners of property.

1. Notwithstanding any other provision of law and except as expressly provided by federal law, a person who acquires property is not liable for any existing hazardous waste or substance on the property if (a) the person acquired the property after the disposal or placement of the hazardous waste or substance on, in, or at the property, and at the time the person acquired the property that person did not know and had no reason to know that any hazardous waste or substance was disposed of on, in, or at the property, (b) the person is a governmental entity that acquired the property by escheat, by tax sale, foreclosure, or through any other involuntary transfer or acquisition, or through the exercise of eminent domain authority by purchase or condemnation, or (c) the person acquired the property by inheritance or bequest and that person did not know and had no reason to know that any hazardous waste or substance was disposed of on, in, or at the property.
2. To establish that the person had no reason to know, the person must have undertaken, at the time of acquisition, all appropriate inquiry into the previous ownership and uses of the property consistent with good commercial or customary practice in an effort to minimize liability. For purposes of this requirement, a court shall take into account any specialized knowledge or experience on the part of the person, the relationship of the purchase price to the value of the property as uncontaminated, commonly known or reasonably ascertainable information about the property, the obviousness of the presence or likely presence of contamination at the property, and the ability to detect the contamination by appropriate inspection.
3. A person who has acquired real property may establish a rebuttable presumption that that person has made all appropriate inquiry if that person establishes that, immediately before or at the time of acquisition, that person performed an investigation of the property, conducted by an environmental professional, to determine or discover the obviousness of the presence or likely presence of a release or threatened release of hazardous waste or substances on the property.
4. The presumption does not arise unless the person has maintained a compilation of the information reviewed in the course of the investigation.
5. This section does not diminish the liability of any previous owner or operator of the property who would otherwise be liable under this chapter and nothing in this section affects the liability under this chapter of a person who, by any act or omission, caused or contributed to the release or threatened release of a hazardous waste or substance that is the subject of the action relating to the property.

6. As used in this section, environmental professional means an individual, or entity managed or controlled by an individual, who, through academic training, occupational experience, and reputation, such as engineers, environmental consultants, and attorneys, can objectively conduct one or more aspects of an environmental investigation.

SECTION 2. AMENDMENT. Section 23-31-01 of the 1999 Supplement to the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

23-31-01. Environmental emergency cost recovery. The ~~Except as provided in section 1 of this Act,~~ the state department of health may recover from the parties responsible for an environmental emergency the reasonable and necessary state costs incurred in assessment, removal, corrective action, or monitoring as a result of an environmental emergency in violation of chapters 23-20.1, 23-20.3, 23-25, 23-29, 61-28, or 61-28.1. As used in this chapter, "environmental emergency" means a release into the environment of a substance requiring an immediate response to protect public health or welfare or the environment from an imminent and substantial endangerment and which is in violation of chapters 23-20.1, 23-20.3, 23-25, 23-29, 61-28, or 61-28.1, and "reasonable and necessary costs" means those costs incurred by the department as a result of the failure of the parties responsible for the environmental emergency to implement appropriate assessment and corrective action after receipt of written notice from the department. If assessment, removal, monitoring, or corrective action must be initiated prior to identification of the responsible parties, the department may assess those prior costs to the responsible parties at the time they are identified.

Speaker of the House

President of the Senate

Chief Clerk of the House

Secretary of the Senate

This certifies that the within bill originated in the House of Representatives of the Fifty-seventh Legislative Assembly of North Dakota and is known on the records of that body as House Bill No. 1297.

House Vote: Yeas 94 Nays 0 Absent 4

Senate Vote: Yeas 34 Nays 13 Absent 2

Chief Clerk of the House

Received by the Governor at _____ M. on _____, 2001.

Approved at _____ M. on _____, 2001.

Governor

Filed in this office this _____ day of _____, 2001,

at _____ o'clock _____ M.

Secretary of State