

## 6. POLICY POSITION

### THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT (NIE)

#### BACKGROUND

The United States spends over \$115 billion annually, or roughly 2 percent of GNP, on pollution control. The federal government invests only \$3 billion a year on environmental research. Today, federal laws and regulations require that state governments and industries spend enormous sums of money on environmental clean up and restoration that are often technically inappropriate or economically inefficient. This occurs because environmental policies based on inadequate scientific information can lead to unnecessary economic burden on state governments and private industries.

Many critical policy questions still remain unanswered in the present debate on Congress' reauthorization of the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Superfund. How clean is clean? How do we carry out meaningful risk assessment? Should environmental standards be based solely on regulatory guidelines or should it also be based on market-based incentives? What we appear to lack is a comprehensive analysis of many city and state government's environmental problems and compliance needs.

Too often state government is excluded from the process of determining environmental research goals and priorities. A multi-stakeholder and non-adversarial climate that includes states is necessary to allow for less confrontation and ensure that priorities reflect the needs of all decision-makers. Many of the nation's most innovative and effective environmental programs are carried out by state agencies. The federal government must include representatives from state government in the process of determining the direction of environmental research.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The Southern Legislative Conference strongly endorses the establishment of a National Institute for the Environment (NIE) to improve the scientific basis for making decisions about environmental issues.

The proposed NIE will provide high quality and credible science and assessment to address our most critical and complex environmental problems. It will provide better and more timely information to assist decision-making at the federal, state and local level. The NIE also will strengthen our capacity to address future environmental challenges by sponsoring higher education and training at universities and private colleges.

Further, the Southern Legislative Conference urges President Clinton and the Congress to establish a National Institute for the Environment to provide sound scientific information about the environment and to include representatives from state government on the governing board of NIE.

Adopted by the Southern Legislative Conference, July 19, 1994, Norfolk, Virginia.