

§ 143-215.94B. Commercial Leaking Petroleum Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund.

(a) There is established under the control and direction of the Department the Commercial Leaking Petroleum Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund. This Commercial Fund shall be a nonreverting revolving fund consisting of any monies appropriated for such purpose by the General Assembly or available to it from grants, other monies paid to it or recovered on behalf of the Commercial Fund, and fees paid pursuant to this Part.

(b) The Commercial Fund shall be used for the payment of the following costs up to an aggregate maximum of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per occurrence resulting from a discharge or release of a petroleum product from a commercial underground storage tank:

- (1) For discharges or releases discovered or reported between 30 June 1988 and 31 December 1991 inclusive, the cleanup of environmental damage as required by G.S. 143-215.94E(a) in excess of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) per occurrence.
- (2) For discharges or releases discovered on or after 1 January 1992 and reported between 1 January 1992 and 31 December 1993 inclusive, the cleanup of environmental damage as required by G.S. 143-215.94E(a) in excess of twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) per occurrence.
- (2a) For discharges or releases discovered and reported on or after 1 January 1994 and prior to 1 January 1995, the cleanup of environmental damage as required by G.S. 143-215.94E(a) in excess of twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) if the owner or operator (i) notifies the Department prior to 1 January 1994 of its intent to permanently close the tank in accordance with applicable regulations or to upgrade the tank to meet the requirements that existing underground storage tanks must meet by 22 December 1998, (ii) commences closure or upgrade of the tank prior to 1 July 1994, and (iii) completes closure or upgrade of the tank prior to 1 January 1995.
- (3) For discharges or releases reported on or after 1 January 1994, the cleanup of environmental damage as required by G.S. 143-215.94E(a) in excess of twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) if, prior to the discharge or release, the commercial underground storage tank from which the discharge or release occurred met the performance standards applicable to tanks installed after 22 December 1988 or met the requirements that existing underground storage tanks must meet by 22 December 1998.
- (4) For discharges or releases reported on or after 1 January 1994 from a commercial underground storage tank that does not qualify under subdivision (2a) of this subsection or does not meet the standards in subdivision (3) of this subsection, sixty percent (60%) of the costs per occurrence of the cleanup of environmental damage as required by G.S. 143-215.94E(a) that exceeds twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) but is not more than one hundred fifty-seven thousand five hundred dollars (\$157,500) and one hundred percent (100%) of the costs above this amount, up to the limits established in this section.
- (5) Compensation to third parties for bodily injury and property damage in excess of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per occurrence. Claims for third-party property damage shall be based on the rental costs of comparable property during the period of loss of use up to a maximum amount equal to the fair market value. In the case of property that is actually destroyed as a result of a petroleum release, reimbursement shall be at an amount necessary to replace or repair the destroyed property.

- (6) Reimbursing the State for damages or other costs incurred as a result of a loan from the Loan Fund. The per occurrence limit does not apply to reimbursements to the State under this subdivision.
- (7) Recordation of residual petroleum as required by G.S. 143B-279.11 if the Commercial Fund is responsible for the payment of costs under subdivisions (1) through (4) of this subsection.
- (8) The costs of a site investigation required by the Department for the purpose of determining whether a release from a tank system has occurred, whether or not the investigation confirms that a release has occurred. This subdivision shall not be construed to allow reimbursement for costs of investigations that are part of routine leak detection procedures required by statute or rule.
- (9) If the owner or operator cannot be identified or fails to proceed with the cleanup.
- (10) That was taken out of operation prior to 1 January 1974 if, at the time the discharge or release is discovered, neither the owner nor operator owns or leases the lands on which the tank is located.
- (11) Where the owner of the commercial underground storage tank is the owner only as a result of owning the land on which the commercial underground storage tank is located, the owner did not know or have reason to know that the underground storage tank was located on the property, and the land was not transferred to the owner to avoid liability for the commercial underground storage tank.
- (12) Compensation to third parties for bodily injury and property damage in excess of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per occurrence caused by releases from noncommercial underground storage tanks reported to the Department prior to October 1, 2015, if the claim for compensation is made prior to July 1, 2016. Claims for third-party property damage shall be based on the rental costs of comparable property during the period of loss of use up to a maximum amount equal to the fair market value. In the case of property that is actually destroyed as a result of a petroleum release, reimbursement shall be at an amount necessary to replace or repair the destroyed property.

(b1) In the event that two or more discharges or releases at any one facility, the first of which was discovered or reported on or after 30 June 1988, result in more than one plume of soil, surface water, or groundwater contamination, the Commercial Fund shall be used for the payment of the costs of the cleanup of environmental damage as required by G.S. 143-215.94E(a) in excess of the multiple discharge amount up to the applicable aggregate maximum specified in subsections (b) and (b2) of this section. The multiple discharge amount shall be calculated as follows:

- (1) Each discharge or release shall be considered separately as if it were the only discharge or release, and the cost for which the owner or operator is responsible under subdivisions (1), (2), (2a), or (3) of subsection (b) of this section, whichever are applicable, shall be determined for each discharge or release. For each discharge or release for which subdivision (4) of subsection (b) of this section is applicable, the cost for which the owner or operator is responsible, for the purpose of this subsection, shall be seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000). For purposes of this subsection, two or more discharges or releases that result in a single plume of soil, surface water, or groundwater contamination shall be considered as a single discharge or release.
- (2) The multiple discharge amount shall be the lesser of:

- a. The sum of all the costs determined as set out in subdivision (1) of this subsection; or
 - b. The product of the highest of the costs determined as set out in subdivision (1) of this subsection multiplied by one and one-half (1 1/2).
- (3) If an owner or operator elects to cleanup a separate discharge or release for which the owner or operator is not responsible, the responsible party for the other discharge cannot be identified, and the discharges are commingled, the owner or operator shall only be responsible for those costs applicable to the discharge for which the owner or operator is actually the responsible party.

(b2) In the event that the aggregate costs per occurrence described in subsection (b) or (b1) of this section exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000), the Commercial Fund shall be used for the payment of eighty percent (80%) of the costs in excess of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) up to a maximum of one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000). The Department shall not pay or reimburse costs under this subsection unless the owner, operator, or landowner eligible for reimbursement under G.S. 143-215.94E(b1) submits proof that the owner, operator, or landowner eligible for reimbursement under G.S. 143-215.94E(b1) has paid at least twenty percent (20%) of the costs for which reimbursement is sought.

(b3) For purposes of subsections (b) and (b1) of this section, the cleanup of environmental damage includes connection of a third party to a public water system if the Department determines that connection of the third party to a public water system is a cost-effective measure, when compared to other available measures, to reduce risk to human health or the environment. A payment or reimbursement under this subsection is subject to the requirements and limitations of this section. This subsection shall not be construed to limit any right or remedy available to a third party under any other provision of law. This subsection shall not be construed to require a third party to connect to a public water system. Except as provided by this subsection, connection to a public water system does not constitute cleanup under Part 2 of this Article, G.S. 143-215.94E, G.S. 143-215.94V, any other applicable statute, or at common law.

(b4) The Commercial Fund shall pay any claim made after 1 September 2001 for compensation to third parties pursuant to subdivision (5) of subsection (b) of this section only if the owner, operator, or other party responsible for the discharge or release has complied with the requirements of G.S. 143B-279.9 and G.S. 143B-279.11, unless compliance is prohibited by another provision of law.

(b5) The Commercial Fund may be used by the Department for the payment of costs necessary to render harmless any commercial underground storage tank from which a discharge or release has not occurred but which poses an imminent hazard to the environment if the owner or operator cannot be identified or located, or if the owner or operator fails to take action to render harmless the underground storage tank within 90 days of having been notified of the imminent hazard posed by the underground storage tank. The Secretary shall seek to recover the costs of the action from any owner or operator as provided in G.S. 143-215.94G.

(c) The Commercial Fund is to be available on an occurrence basis, without regard to number of occurrences associated with tanks owned or operated by the same owner or operator.

(d) The Commercial Fund shall not be used for:

- (1) Costs incurred as a result of a discharge or release from an aboveground tank, aboveground pipe or fitting not connected to an underground storage tank, or vehicle.
- (2) The removal or replacement of any tank, pipe, fitting or related equipment.
- (3) Costs incurred as a result of a discharge or release of petroleum from a transmission pipeline.

- (4) Repealed by Session Laws 2015-241, s. 14.16A(d), effective December 31, 2016.
 - (5) Costs associated with the administration of any underground storage tank program other than the program administered pursuant to this Part.
 - (6) Costs paid or reimbursed by or from any source other than the Commercial Fund, including but not limited to, any payment or reimbursement made under a contract of insurance.
 - (7) Costs incurred as a result of the cleanup of environmental damage to groundwater to a more protective standard than the risk-based standard required by the Department unless the cleanup of environmental damage to groundwater to a more protective standard is necessary to resolve a claim for compensation by a third party for property damage.
 - (8) Costs in excess of those required to achieve the most cost-effective cleanup.
- (e) The Commercial Fund shall be treated as a special trust fund pursuant to G.S. 147-69.2 and G.S. 147-69.3, except that interest and other income received on the Fund balance shall be treated as set forth in G.S. 147-69.1(d).
- (f) Expired October 1, 2011, pursuant to Session Laws 2001-442, s. 8, as amended by Session Laws 2008-195, s. 11.
- (g) The Commercial Fund may be used to support the administrative functions of the program for underground storage tanks under this Part and Part 2B of this Article up to the amounts allowed by law, which amounts may be changed from time to time. In the case of a legislated increase or decrease in salaries and benefits, the administrative allowance existing at the time of the increase or decrease shall be correspondingly increased or decreased an amount equal to the legislated increase or decrease in salaries and benefits.
- (h) The Commercial Fund may be used to reimburse the owner or operator of a commercial petroleum underground storage tank for annual operating fees that were paid under protest pursuant to G.S. 143-215.94C(f) to the extent the Department has recovered the fees from the previous owner or operator from whom the annual operating fees were due. The Commercial Fund may be used only to reimburse those fees that the owner or operator paid to eliminate an unpaid annual operating fees balance that had been accrued by and was the obligation of a previous owner or operator.
- (i) During each fiscal year, the Department shall use up to two million dollars (\$2,000,000) of the funds in the Commercial Fund to fund necessary assessment and cleanup to be conducted by the Department of discharges or releases for which a responsible party has been identified but for which the responsible party can demonstrate that undertaking the costs of assessment and cleanup will impose a severe financial hardship. Any portion of the two million dollars (\$2,000,000) designated each fiscal year, which is not used during that fiscal year to address situations of severe financial hardship, shall revert to the Commercial Fund for the uses otherwise provided by this section. The Commission shall adopt rules to define severe financial hardship; establish criteria for assistance due to severe financial hardship pursuant to this section; and establish a process for evaluation and determinations of eligibility with respect to applications for assistance due to severe financial hardship. The Commission shall create a subcommittee of the Commission's Committee on Civil Penalty Remissions as established by G.S. 143B-282.1 to render determinations of eligibility under this subsection.
- (j) When a state of emergency, as defined in G.S. 166A-19.3, has been declared by the Governor due to a natural disaster such as a hurricane, tornado, or flood, or due to a pending disaster, the Department may, with the consent of the owner, operator, or landowner, issue reimbursements to contractors or third parties who are under contract with the owner, operator, or landowner to address occurrences as described in subsections (b) and (b1) of this section. (1987 (Reg. Sess., 1988), c. 1035, s. 1; 1989, c. 652, ss. 4, 16; 1991, c. 538, ss. 2, 3; 1991 (Reg. Sess.,

1992), c. 817, s. 1; 1993, c. 400, s. 15; c. 402, s. 1; 1995, c. 377, s. 5; 1998-161, s. 2; 2001-384, ss. 4, 5, 8; 2001-442, s. 1; 2003-352, ss. 2, 3; 2007-323, s. 12.1(a); 2008-195, s. 11; 2008-198, s. 7(a); 2011-394, ss. 11.1, 11.2, 11.3(a); 2012-200, s. 13(a); 2014-100, s. 14.21(g); 2015-241, s. 14.16A(a), (d); 2015-263, s. 20(c); 2021-180, s. 12.6; 2024-53, s. 4C.9.)