

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6725

As Passed House:

February 28, 1996

Title: An act relating to exempting electrical switchgear and control apparatus from chapter 70.79 RCW.

Brief Description: Exempting electrical switchgear and control apparatus from chapter 70.79 RCW.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Energy, Telecommunications & Utilities (originally sponsored by Senators Sutherland, Finkbeiner and Hochstatter).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Energy & Utilities: 2/20/96, 2/21/96 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/96, 92-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Casada, Chairman; Crouse, Vice Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Patterson, Ranking Minority Member; Poulsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler; Kessler; Mastin and Mitchell.

Staff: Margaret Allen (786-7110).

Background: State law requires boilers to conform to the rules formulated by the Board of Boiler Rules regarding the safe and proper construction, installation, repair, use, and operation of boilers and unfired pressure vessels.

The chief inspector of the board has the authority to inspect boilers and unfired pressure vessels throughout the state for conformity with the rules, and to issue, suspend, or revoke inspection certificates. Each boiler or unfired pressure vessel is to be inspected at regular intervals, unless the kind of boiler or vessel is exempt from the regulations.

Examples of exemptions include exemptions for boilers and unfired pressure vessels operated by a railroad subject to the Interstate Commerce Act, low-pressure vessels

not found in public places, domestic hot water tanks, and electric boilers with pressure relief systems and a maximum allowable working pressure of 80 pounds per square inch.

Several electric utilities in the state use high-voltage circuit breakers that use sulfur hexafluoride gas under pressure. The gas is contained within pressured tanks at approximately 75 pounds per square inch. Generally, the tanks are located in restricted areas such as electric substations.

A June 1993 decision by the Board of Boiler Rules held these circuit breakers to be pressure vessels and subject to board rules.

Summary of Bill: Electrical switchgear and control apparatus that have no external source of energy to maintain pressure, and are located in restricted access areas under the control of an electric utility, are added to the list of kinds of boilers and unfired pressure vessels exempted from regulation by the state board of Boiler Rules.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill clarifies that these circuit breakers are electrical apparatus, not boilers or unfired pressure vessels. These electrical apparatus meet or exceed any standards to which they would be subjected by the Board of Boiler Rules, and will continue to be subject to the national electrical safety code after passage of the bill. They are located in restricted areas. Inspections of these electrical apparatus pose significant operational hazards and burdens, including the need to drop lines so some customers are without power during inspection. The inspections are expensive and offer no corresponding increase in safety to the public.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Sutherland, prime sponsor; Collins Sprague, Washington Water Power; Kristen Harte, Snohomish County PUD; and Mike Tracy, Puget Power and Light.