

Focus on Well Construction Updates



WHY IT MATTERS

Changes in statute will create new efficiencies to reduce the regulatory burden on the well drilling industry; this will increase Ecology's ability to protect Washington's groundwater resources and the health and welfare of communities and the environment.

The Well Construction Program is funded primarily through water well fees that are not balanced with environmental well fees. The proposal will provide a more balanced and stable funding source for the program.

Contact

Dave Christensen
360-407-6647

Dave.Christensen@ecy.wa.gov

Scott Malone
360-407-6648

Scott.Malone@ecy.wa.gov

Proposed Legislation

Creating efficiencies, reducing regulatory burden, and balancing the fee structure.

The problem

Ecology protects consumers, well drillers, and the environment by regulating and inspecting well construction and decommissioning under authority in chapter 18.104 RCW. A portion of the work is done in partnership with delegated counties who inspect water well drilling activities.

The proposed update to the statute would address technological changes to well construction and drilling practices, and provide significant business efficiencies for the well drilling industry. The proposal would also reduce the regulatory burden on the industry, as determined in a recent Standard Cost Model pilot study conducted in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Regulatory Innovation and Assistance.

Currently, fees charged for water wells cover a disproportionate amount of the program's costs for oversight of all types of well construction and decommissioning. Balancing the fee structure will create a more equitable funding approach, reduce the program's dependence on the state general fund, and increase the program's funding stability.

Ecology's proposal

Through collaboration with the Well Construction Technical Advisory Group, Ecology has identified a number of improvements to clarify regulations and reduce the regulatory burden on the drilling industry. The proposal would reduce regulatory project delays, eliminate persistent problems associated with licensing, and begin the process of changing administrative burdens that will also require a change in WAC.

Currently, the Well Construction Program depends heavily on the State General Fund. Recent changes in the well construction industry have led to a decline in water well construction while environmental drilling has expanded. However, notice of Intent fees for environmental wells have not increased since originally set in 1993. The proposal will lead to more balance between fees on environmental wells with fees on water wells and create a more stable funding source. No increase in water well fees are being proposed. Ecology projects that the updated fees will result in \$360,000 of additional revenue per year.

Other proposed changes

- Reduce the Notice of Intent waiting period from 72 hours to 48 hours.
- Simplify the renewal process for operators with drilling licenses for both water wells and resource protection wells by aligning license renewal dates.
- Clarify language that allows pump installers to install pitless adaptors.
- Clarify the difference between environmental investigation wells and geotechnical soil borings.
- Adjust injection point fees to align with business practices.
- Exempt shallow vapor-sampling wells from regulation.
- Authorize Ecology to establish well reporting and tagging requirements in administrative rule to facilitate improvements that reduce regulatory burden.
- Clarify the regulation of ground source heat pump borings.

How it will benefit Washington

As water becomes more scarce and demand for water rises, effectively managing the well drilling industry becomes more critical. The proposal reflects a number of improvements that have been developed in collaboration with the well drilling industry and other stakeholders.

By modernizing oversight of the industry and creating a more stable funding source, Ecology can more effectively manage critical groundwater resources and meet its statutory obligations under the water well construction act to protect the public health, welfare, and safety for Washington communities.

Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation for disabilities, or printed materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-6872 or visit <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/accessibility.html>. Persons with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. Persons with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.