

Adjust existing permit fees to protect our clean water investments

The problem

RCW 90.48.465 requires the Department of Ecology (Ecology) to collect enough fees to cover the cost of administering the water quality NPDES (National Pollution Elimination Discharge System) permit program. Currently, fees fall short and the ratio is not in equity between fee distribution and costs. This is because:

- Ecology initially set some fees too low to fully recover costs.
- Statutes capped some fees.
- Some initiatives limit how Ecology can raise fees.

The solution

Adjust existing fees in the Water Quality Permit Fee Account to allow the state to conduct its Clean Water Act responsibilities. An adequately funded permit program would allow the state to:

- Emphasize compliance and respond to non-compliance.
- Keep pace with new requirements.
- Provide technical assistance.
- Conduct audits and periodic review.
- Use enhanced information technology.
- Conduct inspections at a rate to promote compliance.

Ecology's proposal

Generate an additional \$1,223,000 during FY 2014 and 2015 to adequately fund the state's water quality permitting responsibilities and protect our waters, with these goals in mind:

- User pays.
- Increase revenue to cover program costs.
- Equity among fee payers.

WHY IT MATTERS

Without changes to the Water Quality Permit Fee Account, Washington's ability to protect and maintain clean water will decline.

The state may no longer meet its Clean Water Act and Washington Water Pollution Control Act obligations.

WHAT ARE PERMITS?

Permits are the state's primary tools to prevent water pollution. The permit system is authorized under the Federal Clean Water Act NPDES program to protect water quality.

Ecology strives to meet its Clean Water Act requirement to revise NPDES permits every five years, with each renewal period considering increased environmental protections.

Ecology recoups its permit program costs by charging fees to all permit holders. The fee amount is controlled by the state Legislature.

Contact

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Special accommodations

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Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.

How it will work

1. Raise the annual fee cap for municipal wastewater treatment plant permits from 18 cents to 20 cents per month per residential connection.
2. Allow a minimum permit fee for domestic wastewater facilities to capture some of the costs of supplying permits to smaller facilities.
3. Raise permit fees by 4.5 percent in fiscal year 2014 and by 4.6 percent in fiscal year 2015 for the fee categories that are underpaying permit costs.

How it will benefit Washington

Investments in protecting and cleaning up Washington's environment play a major role in securing Washington's quality of life for families – and strengthening our enviable position in the competitive global economy.

More information

Wastewater/Stormwater Discharge Permit Fees

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/permits/permit_fees/index.html

Department of Ecology website for the Washington Legislature

www.ecy.wa.gov/legislature.html