



# Frequently Asked Questions about Municipal Stormwater Permits

from Ecology's Water Quality Program

## **Q: What is stormwater and why is it a problem?**

**A:** Stormwater is rain water that runs off surfaces such as rooftops, paved streets, highways, and parking lots. As stormwater runs off these surfaces, it picks up pollution such as oil, fertilizers, pesticides, pet waste, and trash and carries this pollution into our lakes, streams, rivers, and bays.

## **Q: Why is Ecology regulating municipal stormwater?**

In 1987, Congress changed the Clean Water Act to include stormwater discharges in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed rules to implement the new stormwater requirements in two phases called **Phase I** and **Phase II**. The Department of Ecology (Ecology) implements these stormwater rules through municipal stormwater permits. The Phase I permit, which went into effect in 1990, covers jurisdictions such as cities and counties serving more than 100,000 people. In 1999, EPA issued the Phase II stormwater permit regulations to cover stormwater discharges in urbanized areas that serve smaller populations. In January 2007, Ecology will issue Phase II permits. There are separate Phase II permits for eastern and western Washington.

## **Q: What is a municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4)?**

**A:** This is the term used for a conveyance or system of conveyances (includes roads with drainage systems, municipal streets, catch basins, curbs, gutters, ditches, human-made channels, or storm drains) that is:

- Owned or operated by a public entity such as a city, town, county, or special district established by the state.
- Designed or used for collecting and conveying stormwater.
- NOT a combined sewer.
- NOT part of a Publicly Owned Treatment Works.

## **Q: Who needs a municipal stormwater permit?**

**A:** The **Phase I** permit covers the cities of Seattle and Tacoma; King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Clark counties; and the ports of Seattle and Tacoma.

**Phase II** requires permits for cities and counties in urbanized areas of Washington and cities with populations more than 10,000 outside of these areas. Washington has 13 census-defined urban areas. The Phase II permits will cover approximately 100 additional municipalities (cities and counties) across Washington.

EPA rules also require permits for public districts that own or operate a separate storm sewer system in Phase I and Phase II areas. Examples of these districts are ports, diking and drainage districts, public universities, flood control districts, prison complexes, and parks and recreation districts. These districts are also called secondary permittees.

A separate general permit will cover the Washington State Department of Transportation.

**Q: How do I apply for coverage?**

**A:** To apply for permit coverage, please submit a completed Notice of Intent (NOI) form, found on Ecology's Web site at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/municipal/index.html>

**Q: What do the municipal stormwater permits require?**

**A:** For both Phase I and Phase II jurisdictions, the EPA rules require operators of municipal separate storm sewer systems (**MS4s**) to develop and implement a *stormwater management program* that:

- Reduces the discharge of pollutants to the "maximum extent practicable."
- Protects water quality.

A stormwater management program involves planning, public education and involvement, illicit discharge detection programs, and passing appropriate ordinances to reduce stormwater pollution.

**Q: Is there a fee associated with these permits?**

**A:** Yes, by state law Ecology is required to collect permit fees to support the NPDES permit program. The permit fees for cities and counties covered under the permits are based on the number of housing units in the covered area. The permit fees for cities and counties range from \$750 to more than \$30,000 per year. The permit fee for secondary permittees such as ports, public universities, and diking and drainage districts is \$1500 per year. Ecology bills for permit fees only after the final permit is effective. For more information on permit fees, contact Bev Poston at 360-407-6425 or [bpos461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:bpos461@ecy.wa.gov).

**Q: What resources are available for developing a stormwater management program?**

**A:** Ecology plans to hold workshops to help Phase II communities understand the new requirements. Ecology also has links to training programs, tool boxes, model programs, workshops, and other resources on its Web site at:

[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/municipal/resources\\_municipalities.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/municipal/resources_municipalities.html)

**For more information, please contact the Ecology employee who manages the permit in the county or counties where your facility or district is located:**

Skagit and Whatcom Counties: **Steve Hood at 360-738-6254**

King, Kitsap, and Snohomish Counties: **Anne Dettelbach at 425-649-7093**

Clark, Cowlitz, Clallam, Grays Harbor, Pierce, and Thurston Counties: **Alison Chamberlin at 360-407-0245**

Benton, Chelan, Kittitas, Douglas, and Yakima Counties: **Terry Wittmeier at 509-574-3991**

Asotin, Franklin, Grant, Spokane, Walla Walla, and Whitman Counties: **Dave Duncan at 509-329-3554**

*If you need this information in an alternate format, please call the Water Quality Program at 360-407-6401. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.*