



Focus

Solid Waste Permit System Review

Legislature Requires Review of Solid Waste Permitting Systems (ESHB 1419)

The 1997 Legislature charged Ecology, in conjunction with the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC), to conduct a comprehensive review of Washington's permitting system for handling and managing solid waste (ESHB 1419 – Solid Waste Permit Renewal). Ecology has until Dec. 15, 1997, to provide the Legislature with proposed specific legislative and regulatory changes to the solid waste permitting system. Areas to be addressed in the review include alternatives to statutory definitions, permitting requirements, risk assessment, and the overall regulatory system as it pertains to solid waste and recyclables.

Why Do We Need to Do This Now?

Solid waste management in Washington has changed dramatically since the first solid waste law was written in 1969. The statutory and regulatory system (chapter 70.95 RCW, the Solid Waste Management Act) was developed in response to solid waste management conditions at that time. The law used comprehensive solid waste management plans and "disposal sites" permits to carry out the objectives of the act. Changes to the act in 1989 made recycling a fundamental part of solid waste management. The amendment also established a "50% reduction-rate-by-1995" goal and changed the state's waste management priorities.

Recycling has increased tremendously since 1989. This increased recycling has expanded the types of recyclable materials from what was initially considered. While recycling certain types of these materials, such as wood waste, is being encouraged and permitted, there has been inconsistent application of solid waste regulations to "recyclable" materials.

The increased recycling statewide has occurred predominately in the household area, under the oversight of local government. Reuse or recycling of industrial, commercial, agricultural and other waste is, however, also increasing statewide. This trend away from landfilling has created considerable confusion about which recycled materials and wastes, and management practices are regulated.

What Is the Goal?

Ecology and the SWAC are seeking clear solid waste laws; supporting rules; and guidelines that help local government and all who generate, treat or otherwise handle solid waste material. An additional goal is a means of regulating commodities destined for use or reuse, which is less burdensome than the current permit system. Any solid waste management decision made must ensure that human health and the health of the environment are protected, while encouraging economically sound solid waste management and beneficial uses.

The proposed legislative and regulatory changes coming out of this review process should:

- Eliminate duplicative and unnecessary regulations.
- Provide a reasonable balance between regulation and risk.
- Ensure clarity and understanding of laws, supporting rules, and guidelines.
- Preserve and enhance local authority for planning and coordinating solid waste and recycling.
- Provide a means for adequate public sector funding for facility permitting, review and inspection.
- Develop and maintain an infrastructure for economically sound recycling and the encouragement of beneficial reuse.

What's Next?

The SWAC and Ecology have been researching and discussing the permit system and possible new directions for more than a year. Now is the time to take the next steps, including seeking additional input from interested parties. What is needed is a full sense of what the issues are in relationship to what the Legislature directed Ecology and the SWAC to consider. Based on that sense and identified potential solutions, the best set of recommendations can be crafted to move toward implementing changes in our regulatory system.

How Can You Participate?

Ecology must report to the Legislature by Dec. 15, 1997. A draft report for public review is planned by the end of August. This is a tight timeline, but with your help it is not an impossible one. Now is the time for your ideas on how to improve the current solid waste permitting system. This fact sheet is just the preliminary step in a summer-long effort to gather input from interested parties throughout Washington. Please let Ecology know if you wish to be kept informed about this project.

Please direct your responses and comments to:

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