

# Focus on: Water Quality Permit Fees



## Fees for water quality permits

Wastewater and stormwater discharge permits are the state's primary tool to prevent water pollution. Ecology uses the permit system, authorized under the federal Clean Water Act National Pollutant Elimination Discharge System (NPDES) and the state waste discharge programs, to protect water quality. The permits set conditions to prevent discharges from harming lakes, rivers, streams, and marine waters.

Ecology is required under RCW 90.48.465 to establish by rule annual fees to recover the cost of administering the wastewater and stormwater permit programs. Ecology recovers most of its permit program costs by charging fees to permit holders.

## Determining permit fees

The law requires that fees are based on factors related to the complexity of permit issuance and compliance, may also be based on pollutant loading and toxicity, and are designed to encourage reducing the quantity of pollutants.

Permit fees are collected according to the fee categories listed in Chapter 173-224 of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC). There are more than 60 fee categories and 165 distinct fees for the different types of discharges, reflecting the complexity of the permits. Ecology also considers the affordability of permit fees for small businesses, small dischargers, and hardship cases.

Every two years, Ecology reviews permit fees to ensure they reflect the costs of administering water quality permits. We ask for feedback on our proposed changes as part of the rulemaking process. We then adopt any changes to the permit fee schedule by amending Chapter 173-224 through the administrative rulemaking process.

## Where do the fees go?

Fees paid by permittees are deposited into a dedicated account called the Water Quality Permit Account (Fund 176) to cover program costs. Each biennium, the state Legislature authorizes Ecology, in the operating budget, to spend funds from this account for fee-eligible activities.

## What work do permit fees support?

The law limits the use of fees collected for water quality permits to the following activities:

- Review permit applications and issue new permits coverages
- Issue permit modifications and renewals
- Conduct inspections and provide technical assistance to permittees
- Review submittals from permittees for monitoring and compliance
- Support permits during administrative appeals proceedings
- Support permit databases, such as the [Permit and Reporting Information System \(PARIS\)](#)
- Administration including rules, policies, procedures, and guidance documents

Ecology is required to report to the legislature every two years on the revenue collected from and spending of permit fee money. The 2022-2023 [Permit Fee Program report](#) can be found on Ecology's website.

With approximately 6,500 permittees, the water quality permit program protects the water from a wide range of potential pollutants, covering everything from vessel deconstruction to wastewater treatment plants.



## Related information

- [General information on water quality permit fees](#)<sup>1</sup>
- [Sign up to receive email notices about permit fees](#)<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-quality-permits/Fees>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/EmailList/WQfee>  
Publication 23-10-010