



Public Participation Plan

Georgia-Pacific West Cleanup Site Bellingham, WA

Toxics Cleanup Program

Washington State Department of Ecology

Northwest Region Office

Shoreline, Washington

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Related Information

- Cleanup Site ID: 2279
- Facility Site ID: 14

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[Toxics Cleanup Program](#)²

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ADA Accessibility

The Department of Ecology is committed to providing people with disabilities access to our information and services by meeting or exceeding the requirements of state and federal laws.

To request an ADA accommodation, email Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov, call (425) 240-4353, or call Ecology through the Washington Telecommunication Relay for services including text telephone (TTY) at 711 or through your preferred relay service provider. Visit [Ecology.wa.gov/ADA](https://ecology.wa.gov/ADA)³ for more accessibility information.

Language Access

The Department of Ecology is committed to providing language services, including translation and interpretation, for people whose primary language is not English. To request these services, email Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov or call (425) 240-4353. If you call, ask for an interpreter to be connected with one.

¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/2279>

² <https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Who-we-are/Our-Programs/Toxics-Cleanup>

³ <https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/accessibility-equity/accessibility>

Department of Ecology's Region Offices

Map of Counties Served



Southwest Region 360-407-6300	Northwest Region 206-594-0000	Central Region 509-575-2490	Eastern Region 509-329-3400
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Region	Counties served	Mailing Address	Phone
Southwest	Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Mason, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skamania, Thurston, Wahkiakum	PO Box 47775 Olympia, WA 98504	360-407-6300
Northwest	Island, King, Kitsap, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom	PO Box 330316 Shoreline, WA 98133	206-594-0000
Central	Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, Yakima	1250 W Alder St Union Gap, WA 98903	509-575-2490
Eastern	Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla, Whitman	4601 N Monroe Spokane, WA 99205	509-329-3400
Headquarters	Across Washington	PO Box 47600 Olympia, WA 98504	360-407-6000

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Public Involvement in Contamination Cleanup

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) developed this public participation plan (plan). The purpose of the plan is to promote meaningful community involvement during cleanup of the Georgia-Pacific West cleanup site.

This plan outlines how Ecology will keep the public informed about contamination investigations and cleanup options at each stage of the process. Please review the Appendix for more information about the cleanup process. The plan also details when and how the community can participate in the cleanup process. We encourage the public to engage with the decision-making opportunities and provide input.

Site contacts

To be included in the site record, comments about the cleanup process must be submitted during comment periods. Questions and informal comments or information about the site's history are welcome anytime.

WA Dept of Ecology

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913 Squalicum Way, Unit 101
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Potentially Liable Person (PLP)

Port of Bellingham
1801 Roeder Ave
Bellingham, WA 98225

Ben Howard, Environmental Project Manager
benh@portofbellingsham.com
306-676-2500

If you are unable to reach these contacts, please visit the [Georgia-Pacific West cleanup site page](#)⁴ for up-to-date contact information.

Public Participation Activities

Members of the public may ask questions, submit informal comments, or share site information at any time. Interested parties do not need to wait for a formal public comment period to contact Ecology.

However, to be included in the formal site record, comments about the site investigation, cleanup alternatives, or cleanups must be submitted during formal comment periods. In addition, the public is invited to review site documents before they become final. This is the

⁴ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/2279>

most direct and influential way to learn more about the site and be involved in the cleanup's decision-making.

How we share information with the community

During specific stages of the cleanup, Ecology will mail notices about public comment periods to addresses surrounding the site. The mailing list area will vary depending on the type of contamination and where it's located. However, the list will at least include addresses within a 1/4-mile radius of the site and other interested organizations and individuals. These notices will provide general information about the site, contact information for submitting comments, and times and locations of public meetings or hearings or how to request one if not yet scheduled.

Comment period notices will be available online and at document repositories (for example at the library closest to the site). Notices may also be posted in various locations throughout the community (for example, local businesses, schools, or post offices).

Ecology may also develop documents outside of comment periods to keep the community updated on the site's status. These informational documents will be available online and print copies may be mailed to the nearby community if we feel the message warrants the associated cost and resources.

Postal mailing list

Ecology maintains a mailing list that includes addresses within at least a 1/4-mile radius of the site and relevant local, state, and federal government contacts. All contacts receive public comment notices when draft documents are available.

We will add additional individuals, organizations, and other interested parties to the mailing list as requested. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for this site, please contact Kristen Forkeutis at 425-240-4353 or Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov.

Contaminated Site Register

Public comment periods, events, and other cleanup notices are published in Ecology's [Contaminated Site Register](#).⁵ To receive the *Contaminated Site Register* by email, please [subscribe online](#),⁶ or contact Sarah Kellington at sarah.kellington@ecy.wa.gov or 360-280-3167.

Newspaper display ads or legal notices

We announce public comment periods and events for this site in ads or notices published in the *Bellingham Herald* newspaper. We will also publish notice on our [Public Input & Events Listing webpage](#).⁷

⁵ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/Guidance-technical-assistance/Site-Register-lists-and-data>

⁶ <https://ecology.wa.gov/site-register>

⁷ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Events/Search/Listing>

Email lists

Ecology maintains an email list to update interested persons about this site. If you would like to be added to the email list for this site, please contact Kristen Forkeutis at 425-240-4353 or Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov.

Ecology's website and social media platforms

We maintain a website for the [Georgia-Pacific West site](#).⁸ The website provides site information, and you may download cleanup documents.

We may also share information about cleanup sites through [news releases, our ECOconnect blog, and social media](#).⁹

Automatic site updates

You can subscribe to this site from our [Georgia-Pacific West webpage](#).⁸ You'll receive a weekly email if we change the site's status, add documents to the site's webpage, or open a comment period.

Places to see print documents

During public comment periods, you can find print documents at the following locations:

Bellingham Public Library, Central Branch

210 Central Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225
Phone: 360-778-7823

Washington Department of Ecology

Bellingham Field Office
913 Squalicum Way, Unit 101
Bellingham, WA 98225

To schedule an appointment, please contact the Bellingham Field Office administration staff at 360-255-4400 or ECYDLBFOADMINISUPPORT@ecy.wa.gov.

If you would like to be mailed print documents, please contact Kristen Forkeutis at 425-240-4353 or Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov.

Signs around the cleanup site

We may also install signs displaying information about project status, traffic impacts, and health risks around the cleanup site.

How to share information with us

We hold public comment periods and sometimes public events to learn your thoughts, opinions, and concerns about cleanup at a site. We may also identify public concerns and cleanup goals by meeting with and soliciting information from interested community members

⁸ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/2279>

⁹ <https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/news>

and organizations. To collaborate with us about this site, please contact Kristen Forkeutis at 425-240-4353 or Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov.

Public comment periods

At a minimum, the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA, see page 18 for more information) requires 30-day comment periods to allow interested members of the public to comment on draft documents, legal agreements, and proposed cleanup actions. If there is significant interest, Ecology may extend the public comment period.

When Ecology oversees the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) determinations (see page 18 for more information), we hold comment periods for at least two weeks and may extend to 30 days or more when other cleanup documents are concurrently available for review.

Following a comment period, we publish all the input we received and respond to significant comments and questions, as appropriate. If the comments result in significant changes to the cleanup documents, then the documents will be revised and re-issued for public review. If the comments do not result in significant changes, the documents will become final.

Public events

We hold public meetings, workshops, open houses, and hearings based on community interest. At meetings, workshops, and open houses, attendees can ask questions, learn more about the site, and submit written comments when a comment period is open. At a public hearing, verbal comments are transcribed for the record, and Ecology responds to them after the comment period in our response to comments.

If we have not scheduled an event, we will hold one if 10 or more people request it. This may cause us to extend a public comment period, so that the event occurs during it.

Events are held at locations close to the site that meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards. Public events are always announced in advance using a variety of methods.

Public Participation Grants

Grants may be available to neighborhood committees, non-profits, and other groups interested in the site. For contaminated sites, these funds can be used to:

- Hire an expert to help interpret technical information
- Conduct activities that enhance the public's understanding of, and participation in, the cleanup process

For more information about public participation grants, please contact Laura Busby at 360-280-5088 or laura.busby@ecy.wa.gov and Maria Marlin at 360-407-6083 or maria.marlin@ecy.wa.gov. You may also visit the [Public Participation Grant website](#).¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://ecology.wa.gov/PPG>

Site Information

Site background



Figure 1: Aerial view of the Georgia-Pacific West cleanup site

The 74-acre Georgia-Pacific West cleanup site operated as a pulp and tissue mill from 1926 through 2007. In 2005, the port acquired the property from the Georgia-Pacific Corporation and took on the responsibility of cleaning it up.

Contamination of the site is divided into two separate areas—the Pulp and Tissue Mill Area and Chlor-Alkali Area (see Figure 1). The Pulp and Tissue Mill Area was cleaned up in 2016, the Lignin Operable Unit within the Chlor-Alkali Area was cleaned up in 2022, and the remainder of the Chlor-Alkali Area will be cleaned up next.



Figure 2: Georgia-Pacific Corporation, September 1958
Photo: WA State Archives

As the name suggests, the 36-acre Chlor-Alkali Area included a chlor-alkali plant that operated from 1965 to 1999. Mercury was used to produce chlorine and sodium hydroxide for mill operations, and petroleum was also stored there. These actions contaminated soil and groundwater.

Contamination

Environmental investigations confirmed the following contaminants in soil and groundwater:

- **Soil:** mercury, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and petroleum hydrocarbons
- **Groundwater:** mercury, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), petroleum hydrocarbons, and dissolved metals (arsenic, chromium, copper, and nickel)

These contaminants are above cleanup levels and must be addressed to protect human health and the environment.

Cleanup plans

In 2026 Ecology will finalize the consent decree, a legal agreement between Ecology and the Port of Bellingham. It requires the port to carry out the [cleanup action plan](#).¹¹ Ecology's plan to address contamination at the Chlor-Alkali area of the site. It also settles the port's liability.

Construction of the cleanup action plan is expected to take place between 2026 and 2028.

Bellingham Bay Cleanup

The Georgia-Pacific West site is one of 12 [Bellingham Bay Cleanup sites](#).¹² coordinated through the Bellingham Bay Action Team (BBAT). BBAT is a bay-wide multi-agency effort to clean up contaminated sediment, control sources of sediment contamination, and restore habitat, with consideration for land and water uses.

Neighborhood

The site lies within Bellingham's [City Center Neighborhood](#).¹³ (see Figure 3) and is bordered by the Whatcom Waterway, Granary Avenue, Cornwall Avenue, West Chestnut Street and the Bellingham Shipping Terminal. The site location is zoned for the Waterfront District Urban Village (see Figures 4 and 5) and borders mixed use facilities along Granary Avenue, including new condominiums and Waypoint Park.

The Port of Bellingham (port) owns most of the site. The site also includes a portion of property owned by the state of Washington, City of Bellingham, and BNSF Railway Company.

The property currently houses the popular Waterfront Bike Park and the Portal Container Village, which is home to a vibrant group of local businesses and vendor pop-up shops

¹¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/105055>

¹² <https://www.ecology.wa.gov/BellinghamBayCleanup>

¹³ <https://cob.org/services/planning/neighborhoods/cbd-2>

operating out of metal shipping containers. Future plans for the property are under development by the port.



Figure 3: City of Bellingham City Center Neighborhood [aerial photo](#)¹⁴

¹⁴ <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/CBD-AirPhoto.pdf>

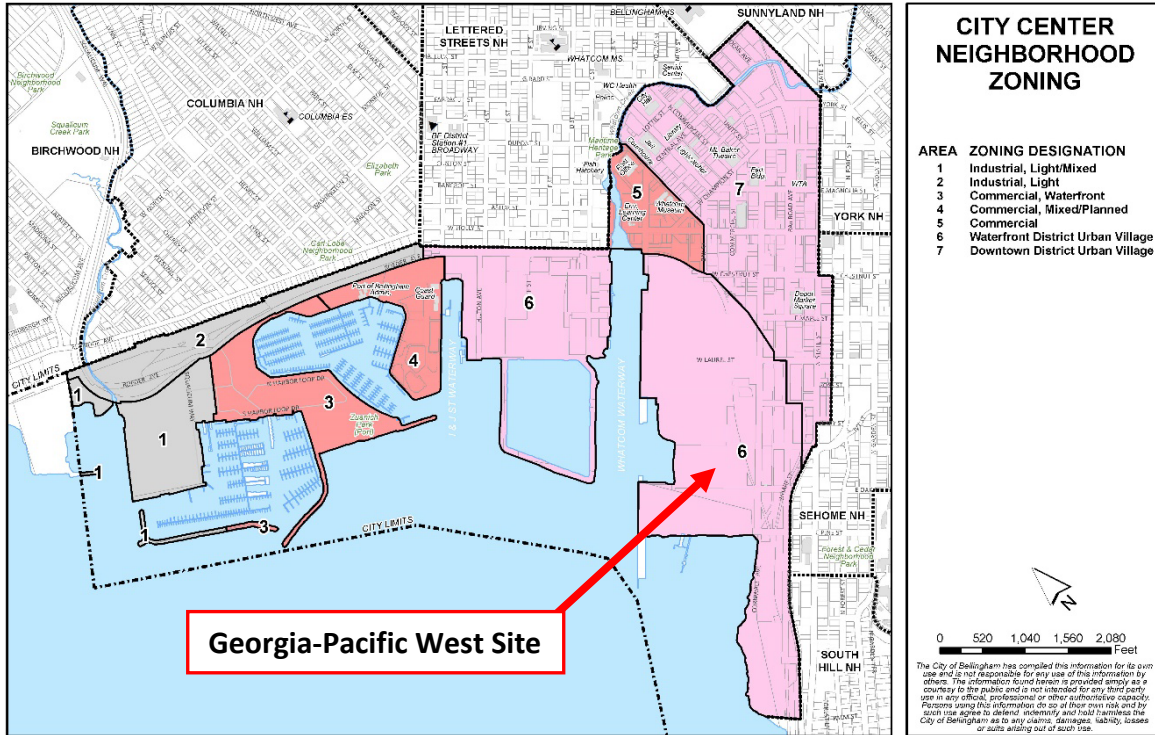


Figure 4: City of Bellingham City Center Neighborhood [zoning map](#).¹⁵

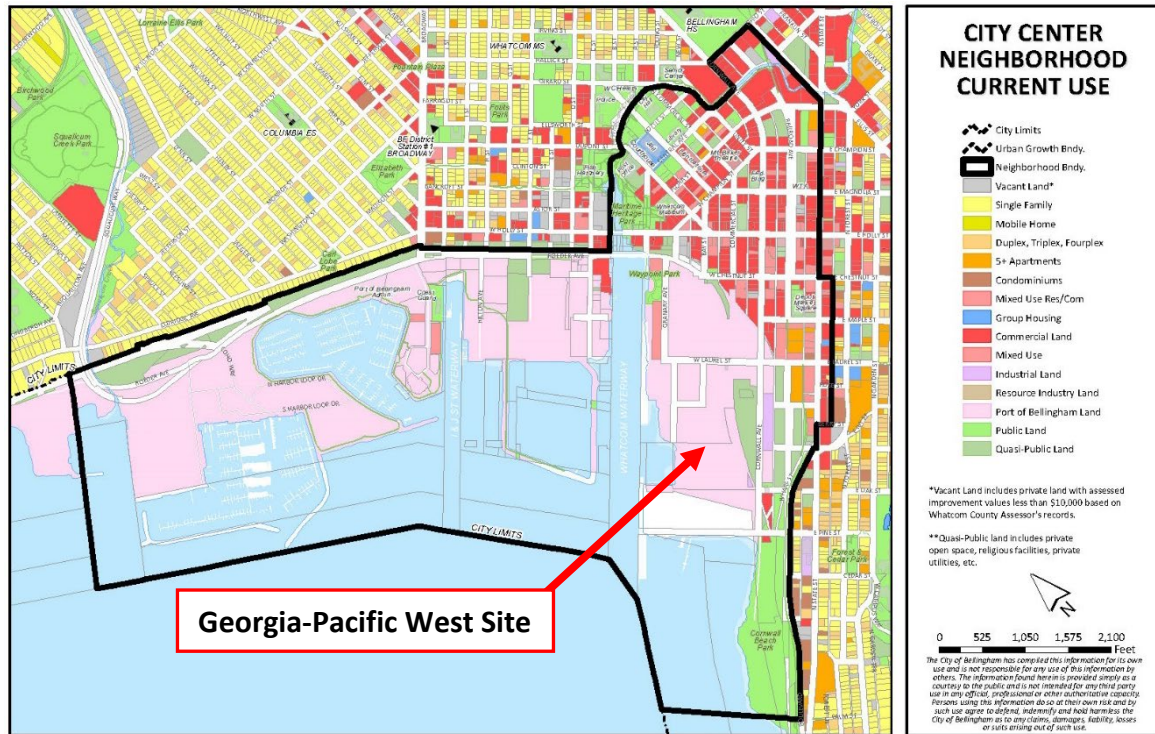


Figure 5: City of Bellingham City Center Neighborhood [current land use map](#).¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/cbd-color-zoning.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/CBD-CurrentUse.pdf>

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. Ecology is committed to addressing environmental and health disparities in communities and ensuring non-discrimination, meaningful public involvement, and equitable access to agency information and services.

Ecology uses external data sources to better understand the environmental and demographic information of the communities impacted by cleanup sites. When appropriate, Ecology considers special accommodations based on the needs of the community.

WA Environmental Health Disparities Map

The [Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map](#)¹⁷ compares communities across our state for environmental health disparities and ranks them on a scale of 1-10 (low to high). Ecology uses this information to identify cumulative environmental health issues. However, we do not interpret rankings as absolute values, and we do not use them to diagnose a community health issue or to label a community.

The Georgia-Pacific West's census tract (000600) has an environmental health disparity ranking of 9 (see Figure 6). The demographic data show White (70.6%), Hispanic (11.4%), and Multi Racial (9.6%) individuals represent the largest racial groups (see Figure 7) while the largest combined age segment include ages 20-34 (see Figure 8).

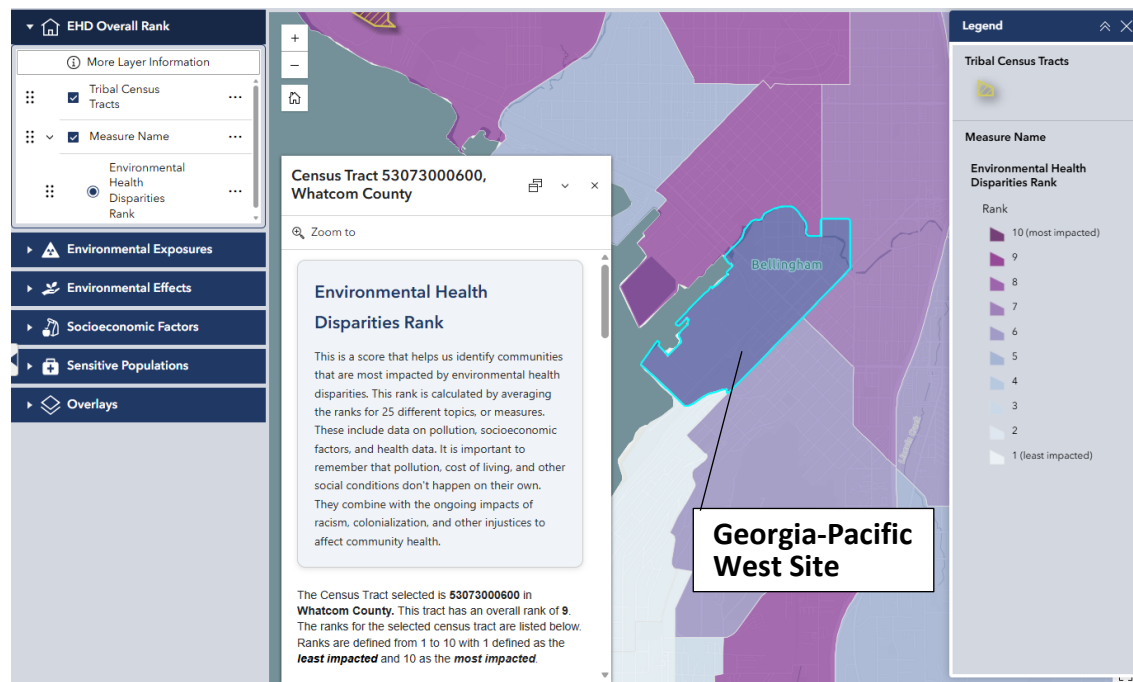


Figure 6: WA Environmental Health Disparities (EHD) Map for Census Tract 000600, EHD Rank 9

¹⁷ <https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/washington-tracking-network-wtn/washington-environmental-health-disparities-map>

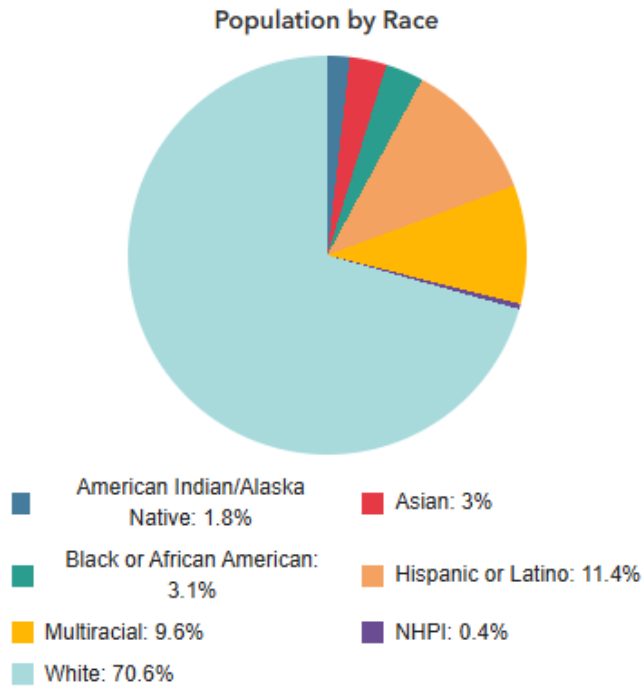


Figure 7: WA Environmental Health Disparities Map for Census Tract 000600, Demographic Details (race)

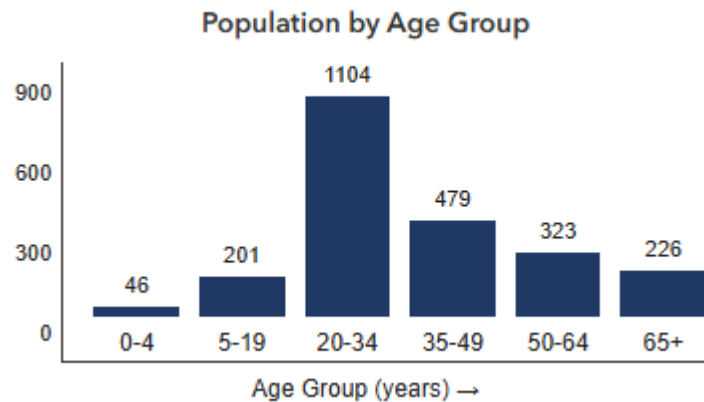


Figure 8: WA Environmental Health Disparities Map for Census Tract 000600, Demographic Details (age)

The Washington State Department of Health mapping tool model was “specifically adapted from CalEnviroScreen – a cumulative environmental impacts assessment mapping tool developed by CalEPA and used in California. It estimates a cumulative environmental health impact score for each census tract reflecting pollutant exposures and factors that affect people’s vulnerability to environmental pollution.

The model is based on a conceptual formula of Risk = Threat * Vulnerability, where threat and vulnerability are based on several indicators.

The threat is represented by indicators that account for pollution burden, which is a combination of environmental effects and environmental exposures in communities. Environmental effects include indicators that account for adverse environmental quality generally, even when population contact with an environmental hazard is unknown or uncertain. Environmental exposures include the levels of certain pollutants that populations come into contact with.

Vulnerability is represented by indicators of socioeconomic factors and sensitive populations for which there is clear evidence that they may affect susceptibility or vulnerability to an increased pollution burden. Indicators in socioeconomic factors measure population characteristics that modify the pollution burden itself. Sensitive populations refer to those who are at greater risk due to intrinsic biological vulnerability to environmental stressors.

In the model, threat is multiplied by vulnerability in order to reflect the scientific literature that indicates population characteristics often modify and amplify the impact of pollution exposures on certain vulnerable populations. The rankings help to compare health and social factors that may contribute to disparities in a community.”

American Community Survey

The [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about.html)¹⁸ is an ongoing survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. It provides updated data on the social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics of the U.S. population. Ecology uses this information to help identify socioeconomic indicators, including limited English proficient (LEP) populations and languages spoken at home.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) Populations

The 2023 ACS 5-year estimates includes the following LEP data for Whatcom County (South), Greater Bellingham City, with a total population of 113,795 people.

- Spanish: 1,586 LEP individuals

Languages Spoken at Home

The percentage of the population that speaks a language other than English at home based on the representative Census Tract follows.

- **Census Tract 6** (location of the Georgia-Pacific West site):
 - **13.2%** of the population speaks a language other than English at home
 - Spanish: 10%
 - Asian and Pacific Island languages: 2.9%
 - Other Indo-European languages: 0.3%

¹⁸ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about.html>

Area Community

Ecology considers the needs of the surrounding community when planning public outreach. As a starting point, we collect data from the WA Environmental Health Disparities Map and the American Community Survey, and we conduct community research to build on this information. We reach out to cultural community organizations (when available) and provide information in other languages as needed and in accordance with [federal guidance](#).¹⁹

Demographic data and community research indicate that Spanish speakers are the largest Limited English Proficient (LEP) population. In addition, the non-English language most widely spoken at home in Census Tract 6 is Spanish.

To request information in another language, call Kristen Forkeutis at 425-240-4353 or email Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov. If calling for interpretation services, please ask for an interpreter and stay on the line while we connect you.

We strive to make our public participation efforts as inclusive as possible and welcome your input about how to best reach the nearby community.

Tribal engagement

The following Tribes could be affected by the contamination, and the cleanup process may also uncover cultural resources.

- Lummi Nation
- Nooksack Indian Tribe
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
- Samish Indian Nation
- Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe
- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

We will reach out to these Tribes to offer opportunities to engage with Ecology in the cleanup process.

Washington's Cleanup Laws

Ecology uses the [Model Toxics Control Act \(MTCA\)](#)²⁰ and accompanying regulations for cleanup activities. Passed in 1989, MTCA provides guidelines for contaminated site cleanup in Washington state. This law sets standards to ensure the cleanup protects human health and the environment. MTCA requires the creation of this plan.

¹⁹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2004/06/25/04-14464/guidance-to-environmental-protection-agency-financial-assistance-recipients-regarding-title-vi>

²⁰ <https://www.ecology.wa.gov/mtca>

Model Toxics Control Act

MTCA began in 1988 as a citizen-led effort to clean up contaminated sites in Washington state. The law holds property owners or operators responsible for cleaning up contamination on, or coming from, their property.

Ecology carries out MTCA, making sure cleanups happen according to state rules and regulations. These rules are found in [Chapter 173-340 Washington Administrative Code \(WAC\)](#).²¹ Ecology investigates reports of contamination, and the property is placed on the [Contaminated Sites List](#).²² If the pollution is determined to pose a serious risk to human health or the environment. This starts the cleanup process at the site.

The cleanup process under MTCA includes several steps (see Appendix). Public involvement is a key part of MTCA's [cleanup process](#).²³ Nearby residents, businesses, community groups, and other interested parties can review and comment on documents related to steps that make crucial decisions or plans regarding the cleanup.

State Environmental Policy Act

MTCA cleanups also require evaluation under the [State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\)](#).²⁴ Under SEPA, the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts from a project or action must be evaluated by state and local agencies when making decisions. This evaluation is subject to public review and comment in parallel with cleanup documents.

Plan Amendments

Ecology developed this plan following MTCA regulations (WAC 173-340-600). We review it as the cleanup progresses and amend it as necessary. You may suggest amendments to Kristen Forkeutis at 425-240-4353 or Kristen.Forkeutis@ecy.wa.gov.

This plan intends to provide the public with information on opportunities for public involvement and comment. The outreach activities discussed reflect Ecology's current plans to keep the public informed. It also provides ways for those interested in the site to communicate their concerns and questions to us.

If you feel the planned outreach activities and mechanisms found in this plan are insufficient or would like to modify them in some way, please contact us. We will work to find solutions. We can implement new activities or outreach tools right away, with or without amending this plan.

²¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/publications/9406.pdf>

²² <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/reports/cleanup/contaminated>

²³ <https://ecology.wa.gov/MTCA-process>

²⁴ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=197-11>

Appendix – Steps in the cleanup process

The cleanup process is defined in the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA), Washington’s cleanup law. See the accessible PDF on the next page for details.

Washington's Cleanup Process



Public participation plans and comment periods are only required for cleanups under a legal agreement with Ecology. Otherwise, all cleanups follow the same steps. The steps are defined by Washington's cleanup law, the Model Toxics Control Act.

