

Focus on: Municipal Stormwater Permits



Stormwater in Washington

Stormwater runoff is a leading pollution threat to water in urban areas of Washington. As rain and snowmelt runs off buildings, paved roads, and parking lots, it can pick up pollution such as oil, fertilizers, pesticides, tire wear, trash, and pet waste. Pollutants and higher flows are carried into local water bodies, where they can harm water quality and habitat.

Municipal Stormwater Permits

To manage stormwater in urban areas, Ecology has municipal stormwater permits. These permits are for the state's most populated cities and counties. We have a separate permit for the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). The permits are aimed at reducing stormwater pollution at its source, treating it, and controlling how much and how fast it is flowing, so cleaner water goes into creeks, rivers, lakes, groundwater, and Puget Sound.

Municipal stormwater permits are divided into categories, based on population and geography:

Phase I permits include the most populated cities and counties.

Western Washington Phase II and **Eastern Washington Phase II** permits are for smaller urban areas.

These permits have a programmatic, holistic regulatory approach to stormwater management, which is different from other Clean Water Act permits. Municipal stormwater permittees are required to develop and implement Stormwater Management programs. These are comprehensive toolboxes of stormwater best management practices (BMPs) known to be effective at preventing, controlling and treating runoff from urbanized landscapes.

Permit Requirements

The permits require local jurisdictions to use a suite of actions and tools to reduce pollution and implement guidance manuals with science-based best management practices.

The permits include everything from outreach and education, to updating local codes, to compliance and enforcement.

Cities and counties under the permits manage:

- Their stormwater systems — maintaining streets, stormwater flow control and treatment facilities, and outfalls to waterways.
- Pollution sources — businesses, construction sites, accidental spills, intentional dumping, and illicit discharges.
- Development practices — ensuring development preserves soil and trees, and manages runoff in a

way that helps to filter stormwater and soak it into the ground.

Permit Highlights

We update the permits every five years, along with Ecology's Stormwater Management Manuals.

The permits and manuals were last reissued on July 1, 2024, with an effective date of Aug. 1, 2024. In addition to updating the permit requirements, we also add new permittees during our reissuances, based on population growth and other criteria.

The permits cover many areas, everything from outreach and education to maintenance and operations to stormwater planning.

A few highlights of the most recent changes include:

- Retrofits for existing development
- Tree canopy as stormwater tool
- Responding to emerging contaminants, including 6PPD-quinone
- Mapping of stormwater infrastructure

Funding to Address Stormwater

Municipal stormwater programs are funded through local stormwater utility fees. Washington is unique in the amount of state funding passed through to local governments in the form of stormwater grants and loans to support permit implementation. Since 2007, Ecology has provided nearly \$500 million to local governments to address the impacts of urban runoff.

[Ecology's grant funds](https://ecology.wa.gov/wqgrants)¹ are used by permittees to help employ stormwater staff, inspect development projects, inform business owners and community members about local stormwater issues, conduct stormwater system maintenance, and provide other enhancements to their stormwater programs.

Cities, counties, and ports also use this funding to build new stormwater facilities, such as bioretention facilities or engineered wetlands, to treat and manage urban runoff across the state.

What are the Stormwater Management Manuals?

Ecology writes two stormwater management manuals: one for Eastern Washington and one for Western Washington. The manuals are used by regulators, designers, and other stormwater professionals looking for guidance to design, implement, and maintain stormwater BMPs.

The manuals also provide further context and guidance for complying with stormwater permits (such as the Municipal Stormwater General Permits) and rules (such as the Underground Injection Control Program). Ecology publishes emerging guidance to provide the best and latest available science in between full manual revisions.

Learn more:

- [Municipal stormwater permits](#)
- [Stormwater manuals](#)
- [Municipal stormwater and 6PPD](#)

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ADA accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-669-1891 or email at jessica.shook@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341

¹ <https://ecology.wa.gov/wqgrants>