

## Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plant Permit Cap Increase

In Washington, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) requires each wastewater treatment plant to have a wastewater discharge permit.

The permit is a regulatory tool that protects downstream waters. It sets limits on how much pollution the plants can discharge.

### Who pays for permits?

Ecology charges a fee to each permit holder to offset its costs to manage the permit program. Permit fees reimburse Ecology for its technical assistance; permit writing; permit maintenance; permit-related data systems; and other costs to operate the program.

Facilities and local governments pay these fees.

Washington has statutory caps, or limits, on these fees. The cap is an upper limit of what Ecology may charge.

The fee is based on the number of households that connected to the treatment plant (a Residential Equivalent).

The current fee rate is capped at 18 cents per month, per connection.

### What wastewater treatment plants get for the investment

Ecology provides guidance and technical assistance to plant operators. These services include:

- Help to improve plant efficiencies and process-control.
- Review of engineering plans.
- Evaluation of effectiveness of pollutant removal.
- Assistance in recordkeeping, laboratory protocols and sampling.
- Training plant personnel to evaluate and modify equipment.
- Inspections and evaluation.
- Developing water quality permits for facilities.
- An online permit database (PARIS) that tracks facility data.

Small facility operators, in particular, greatly benefit from Ecology's on-site technical assistance. Ecology helps plant operators identify and correct issues that can become significant environmental

### What plant operators say about Ecology operator outreach services

*"The support and training the Town's Public Works Department has received from this program is invaluable. The resource the Town receives helps ensure the Town is up to date with the latest techniques and regulations. It has also helped the Town improve sampling techniques, process control strategies, and river and temperature monitoring..."*

**Sanford Foster, Public Works Director, Town of Rosalia (District 9)**

*"...When I first entered the field I sensed an attitude from many operators that dealing with Ecology was something they tried to avoid. Because of Carl (Jones) and the program I have always felt the opposite. I see Carl as a resource and a conduit to getting things done efficiently and effectively..."*

**Kevin Goodrich, Wastewater Supervisor, City of Westport (District 19)**

problems. Many operators of small wastewater treatment plants must manage and maintain aging facilities with limited resources.

As a result, small communities often have difficulty hiring experienced plant operators. Ecology's on-site technical assistance helps these small plants operate successfully.

### **Ecology's bill proposal**

We request authorization to adjust the current limit (cap) on wastewater discharge permit fees from 18 to 25 cents per connection.

The bill would *not increase* the municipal wastewater permit fees, but rather establish the new statutory limit for municipal permit fees based on the number of households hooked up to the treatment plant.

The bill would not adjust fee rates that have already been set for the 2013-15 biennium.

The bill would allow fee increases to be approved by the Legislature in later years. Generally, permit fees are slowly adjusted within the cap by a legislatively approved fiscal growth factor.

This is a cautious approach that, on average, would amount to approximately 4.5 percent per year, or 1 penny per connection per month.

### **Why the change?**

We need this adjustment to help us sustain this permit program.

We provide a lot of services to sewer utilities, especially small facilities – we need this change to help cover our costs to administer facility permits. This also helps us continue to provide personalized technical assistance to small wastewater treatment facilities.

We know the big sewer utilities are paying the lion's share of the costs of this permit fee program.

But all clean water utilities – large and small – will all be helping us with this fix.

### **Contact information**

Don Seeberger, 360-407-6489, [don.seeberger@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:don.seeberger@ecy.wa.gov)

### **Special accommodations**

If you need this document in a format for the visually impaired, call the Water Quality Program at 360-407-6600. Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.