

Waste Reduction, Recycling, and Litter Control Account



The Litter Tax

Washington's litter prevention and collection, waste reduction, and recycling programs are funded by a .015% tax on wrappers, bottles, and other items found in roadside litter. The tax generates about \$13 million per year.

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ADA Accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6900 or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

Three members of an Ecology Youth Corps litter crew remove debris from along a rural Washington highway. In 2020, the Department of Ecology suspended the hiring of high school students due to the pandemic, and focused on the formation of adult litter crews.

Keeping Washington beautiful, preventing waste

In 1971, manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers of frequently littered consumer products supported a "litter tax" and the Washington State Legislature passed the Model Litter Control Act with broad support. This act levied a .015% tax on retail sales of these items. The tax generates about \$13 million a year for the Waste Reduction, Recycling, and Litter Control Account (WRRLCA).

Restored funding

WRRLCA funds were diverted from their intended purpose beginning in 2008, first to the general fund and then to state parks maintenance and operations. The Legislature restored this funding to the Department of Ecology (Ecology) in the 2019-2021 Biennium and the agency immediately began work on a comprehensive litter prevention campaign, a litter reporting hotline, and a litter generation and composition study.

How the money is spent

Ecology's \$26 million WRRLCA budget is split three ways:

- 40% (about \$10.4 million) supports litter pickup and prevention through the Ecology Youth Corps (EYC) and other state agency programs
- 40% (about \$10.4 million) funds Ecology's waste reduction and recycling efforts
- 20% (about \$5.2 million) goes to local governments through the Community Litter Cleanup Program

Ecology's WRRLCA funding:

- Support the Recycling Development Center - including work with manufacturers to increase use of recyclable materials.
- Implement a comprehensive litter prevention campaign.
- Perform a litter study for the first time since 2004 to learn the types, amounts, and sources of litter and effectively measure success.
- Expand efforts to prevent food waste and increase organic waste recycling.
- Expand the Ecology Youth Corps and the Department of Correction's litter pickup programs to increase litter pick up volume and keep roads clean and safe.
- Reinstate a school award program to provide schools the necessary funding for waste reduction and recycling campaigns.
- Expand grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations, focusing on recycling and litter reduction.



Ecology Youth Corps

The most visible use of WRRLCA is the EYC program. This program hires several hundred teenagers and young adults each year to pick up roadside litter across the state. More than 12,000 people have gained valuable job skills, teamwork experience, and knowledge about the environment since EYC's inception. The crews also clean up road medians and illegal dumps.

In 2019, EYC crews removed 1.21 million pounds of litter from 4,853 miles of road. The COVID-19 pandemic limited this work in 2020, but many adult crews were still able to work safely.

Recycling and waste reduction

WRRLCA also funds waste reduction and recycling efforts. The [Recycling Development Center](#) is an example of Ecology's strong working relationship with recyclers and manufacturers to increase and improve markets and processing for recyclable materials in Washington.

Continuing the work to prevent and reduce waste is crucial to the health of Washington's environment. WRRLCA funds provide grants for programs that reduce waste from single use items like plastic bags and prevent more durable items that can be repaired and reused from reaching a landfill prematurely. These grants help address the growing concern about plastics in our waste stream and the environment.

COVID-19 impacts

In 2020, COVID-19 economic impacts resulted in Gov. Inslee's emergency actions that froze all state hiring and contracts. The freeze on contracting caused Ecology to pause some litter prevention work. Ecology also paused the "[Recycle Right](#)" campaign to reduce contamination in the recycling stream. Research contracts planned for the new [Recycling Development Center](#) also remain on hold.



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