

Focus on: Domestic Sewage Exclusion



With this exclusion, some generators may discharge water containing dangerous wastes to publicly owned wastewater treatment works

Contact information

Central Regional Office:
509-575-2490

Eastern Regional Office:
509-329-3400

Northwest Regional Office:
206-594-0000

Southwest Regional Office:
360-407-6300

ADA Accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6700 or email at hwtrpubs@ecy.wa.gov, or visit ecology.wa.gov/accessibility. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

The domestic sewage exclusion is an exemption that allows you to discharge water containing certain dangerous wastes to a publicly owned wastewater treatment works (POTW).

The domestic sewage exclusion:

- Protects human health and the environment by only allowing dangerous wastes that can be adequately treated at a POTW to enter the sewer system.
- Provides dangerous waste generators with a disposal option for wastes that are difficult to manage in any other way.

To meet the exclusion rules,¹ the waste:

- Must not exhibit hazardous or dangerous waste characteristics—such as flammability, reactivity, toxicity, or corrosivity—at the point of discharge if it isn't treatable by the POTW.
- Must not exceed any of the dangerous waste concentration thresholds in [WAC 173-303-090](https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-303-090)² at the point of discharge if it isn't treatable by the POTW.
- Must not be a hazardous or dangerous waste pharmaceutical.

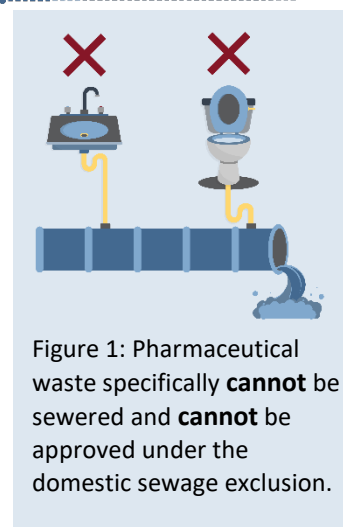


Figure 1: Pharmaceutical waste specifically **cannot** be sewered and **cannot** be approved under the domestic sewage exclusion.

¹ Domestic Sewage Exclusion rules are described in WAC 173-303-071: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-303-071>.

² <https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=173-303-090>



Figure 2: Aerial view of a large POTW.



Figure 3: Sewer pipe taking waste to a POTW. Photo credit: Bidgee.



Figure 4: An industry's pretreatment process prior to discharge to a POTW.

- Must be treatable by the POTW receiving the waste to a significant degree (rather than just passing through to the sludge or effluent of the POTW).

You must disclose the chemical, its maximum discharge concentration, and its loading rate to the sewer in your signed pretreatment permit application.³ The chemical, maximum discharge concentration, and loading rate must also be specifically authorized in the permit you receive.

The domestic sewage exclusion's requirements apply to dangerous waste generators, regardless of their [generator category](#).⁴

This exclusion doesn't apply to dangerous waste generation, treatment, storage, recycling, or other management prior to discharge into the sewer system.

How do I know if my dangerous wastes qualify under the domestic sewage exclusion?

Many wastes designated as dangerous waste may be eligible. Dangerous waste may only be discharged into the POTW if:

- The POTW is able to treat it.⁵
- The Clean Water Act allows the waste in the POTW.⁶

If your dangerous wastes don't qualify for this exclusion, you must either obtain a TSD permit or qualify for a [permit by rule](#).⁷

Dangerous waste pharmaceuticals are never eligible for this exclusion.

Determine eligibility at the point of generation

You must determine if your dangerous waste falls under this exclusion before it is mixed with other waste or diluted.

- The waste discharge must not be prohibited.⁸
- The waste must not be ignitable, corrosive, reactive, or toxic⁹ before entering the sewer system if it isn't treatable by the POTW.
- The waste must not meet the criteria for toxic dangerous waste or persistent dangerous waste under WAC 173-303-100, unless it is treatable in the POTW where it will be received.

Contact your [regional Ecology office](#)¹⁰ for more information.

³ Pretreatment permits must be obtained from Ecology or a delegated pretreatment authority.

⁴ <https://ecology.wa.gov/GeneratorStatus>

⁵ Dangerous waste must be treatable under WAC 173-303-100 to qualify for this exclusion.

⁶ See more details in EPA's pretreatment program fact sheet: <https://bit.ly/EPAPretreatmentProgram>

⁷ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2104014.html>

⁸ See prohibited discharges in 40 CFR Part 403.5: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/40/403.5>.

⁹ Prohibited dangerous waste characteristics are defined in WAC 173-303-090.

¹⁰ <https://ecology.wa.gov/contact>



Figure 5: Aerial view of a POTW.



Figure 6: Street view of a POTW.
 Photo credit: Jenna Valente,
 Chesapeake Bay Program.



Figure 7: A pretreatment process
 prior to discharge to a POTW.

Obtain an authorized permit

You must have a permit from the appropriate authority that authorizes you to discharge specific dangerous waste.

What is the process for getting a permit?

Examine other options

Before issuing a permit, we work with you to promote your waste reduction and recycling, and offer technical assistance to generators.

Prior to seeking a permit, you must:

- Designate each waste stream (before mixing or otherwise diluting the waste) to determine if it is a dangerous waste.
- Identify reduction and recycling options.
- Determine if recycling or other waste management options exist, or if waste reduction is possible through methods like raw material substitution or process changes.

If waste reduction or recycling options are feasible, you may not qualify for a discharge permit.

Determine if dangerous waste is treatable

If your wastewater still designates as dangerous waste after reduction, recycling, and pretreatment, Ecology or a municipality with a delegated pretreatment program¹¹ will determine if it is treatable at the receiving POTW.

Treatability of a wastewater is determined on a case-by-case basis. It depends on both the chemical characteristics of your waste stream and the nature of the receiving POTW.

Your discharge must meet the Clean Water Act pretreatment standards before entering the POTW. The discharge:

- Must comply with pretreatment standards.
- Must not harm the health and safety of POTW personnel.
- Must not cause an upset or interference to the POTW's infrastructure.
- Must not cause pollutants from passing into the receiving waters without treatment.
- Must not negatively impact the quality of the biosolids.

Contact the POTW or your [regional Ecology office](#)¹² to discuss your waste stream and determine next steps.

¹¹ Municipalities with delegated pretreatment programs determine if waste is treatable under RCW 90.48.165.

¹² <https://ecology.wa.gov/contact>

Obtain a pretreatment, discharge, or temporary permit

You must have a permit before you can take advantage of this exclusion. The waste discharge must be specifically authorized in a state waste discharge permit, pretreatment permit (or written discharge authorization), or temporary permit.

Pretreatment permits: POTWs with pretreatment programs and have the authority to write pretreatment permits or letters of authorization for businesses discharging into their system (pursuant to RCW 90.48.165).

State waste discharge permits: Businesses that discharge into POTWs without pretreatment programs need a state waste discharge permit. You can obtain these types of permits from Ecology's Water Quality Program. Contact your regional Ecology office to obtain one.

Temporary permits: These are obtained based on RCW 90.48.200.

How would this exclusion affect my dangerous waste management?

Under this exclusion, you don't need to:

- Manifest your dangerous wastewater to a permitted dangerous waste treatment, storage, or disposal facility.
- Count the amount of waste generated if it is directly discharged to the sewer system at the point of generation.

However, your wastewater must be managed according to the [Dangerous Waste Regulations](#)¹³ before discharging into the sewer system. If your dangerous waste is accumulated, stored, treated, or recycled before entering the sewer system, you must count it and comply with the generator requirements.¹⁴

What are examples of dangerous waste that do and do not qualify for the exclusion?

Dip Tanks: Many auto shops use hot dip tanks to clean paint and grease from metal parts. These tanks generally use sodium hydroxide—a corrosive product—as the primary active ingredient. In this case, the dip tank waste wouldn't be eligible for the exclusion, unless it was treated to make it less corrosive, and to reduce metals and other contaminants. The treated dangerous waste may qualify for a discharge authorization once managed according to the Dangerous Waste Regulations and in compliance with the discharge permit.

Detergent Parts Washers: Some auto shops use aqueous parts washers advertised as using biodegradable detergent. However, the waste generated in these washers may have metals and oil (which can be toxic), so the spent detergent can create problems. In this case, you must designate the wastewater to determine if it is dangerous waste and analyze it to see if it can meet the sewer treatment standards. In some cases you may be allowed to discharge this into the sewer system, but you must first consult the POTW or Ecology.

Pharmaceuticals: Pharmaceutical dangerous waste is banned from the domestic sewage exclusion.

¹³ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-303>

¹⁴ Found in WAC 173-303-170 through WAC 173-303-230.

Where can I learn more about pretreatment permits?

Regulations

- [State Waste Discharge Permit Program](#)¹⁵
- [State Requirements for Submission of Engineering Reports and for Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facilities](#)¹⁶

Guidance

- [Water quality permits webpage](#)¹⁷
- [Permit Writer’s Manual](#)¹⁸
- [Application for a State Waste Discharge Permit to Discharge Industrial Wastewater to a Publicly-Owned Treatment Works \(POTW\)](#)¹⁹
- [State Requirements for Submission of Engineering Reports and Plans for Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facilities](#)²⁰

For More Information

Contact a dangerous waste specialist near you if you have questions about the domestic sewage exclusion, on-site treatment, or any other dangerous waste management practices.



Southwest Region
360-407-6300

Northwest Region
206-594-0000

Central Region
509-575-2490

Eastern Region
509-329-3400

Central Regional Office, Union Gap **509-575-2490**

Counties: Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, Yakima

Eastern Regional Office, Spokane **509-329-3400**

Counties: Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla, Whitman

Northwest Regional Office, Shoreline **206-594-0000**

Counties: Island, King, Kitsap, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom

Southwest Regional Office, Lacey **360-407-6300**

Counties: Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Mason, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skamania, Thurston, Wahkiakum

¹⁵ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-216>

¹⁶ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/0510014.html>

¹⁷ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-quality-permits>

¹⁸ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/92109.html>

¹⁹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/ECY040177.html>

²⁰ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/0510014.html>