

\$4 Million for Homeless Encampments Cleanup



Solid and dangerous waste at an abandoned homeless encampment in Thurston County.

Contact information

Laurie Davies, Ecology
 360-407-6103
laurie.davies@ecy.wa.gov

Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-6381 or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. People with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. People with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.



Abandoned encampments are a human health and environmental threat facing all of Washington.

Gov. Inslee's Homelessness Strategy

Washington State experiences the fifth highest per-capita rate of unsheltered homelessness in the nation. On any given night, approximately 10,000 people are living outside or in places unfit for human habitation.

Taking meaningful steps to bring people inside will require a significant increase in shelter capacity, as well as investments in additional housing supports and improvements to assistance programs. Gov. Inslee's supplemental operating and capital budgets provide funding (\$146 million in the current biennium, and \$300 million over the next three years) to dramatically decrease the rate of unsheltered homelessness in Washington.

Environmental Cleanup of Homeless Encampments

Homelessness is a problem that affects everyone living in Washington. It has become a significant issue for local governments in urban and rural areas on both sides of the Cascades. The rising number of homeless encampments is causing significant impacts to the environment.

Illegal disposal of garbage and human waste at homeless encampments is a major source of contamination to Washington's environment. In addition to impacting open spaces and water quality, releases of untreated sewage and solid waste attract vermin and spread diseases.

As Gov. Inslee takes steps to bring people inside and give them access to shelter and services, efforts to clean up abandoned encampments must be addressed to protect people and the environment from dangerous and infectious waste.

Homelessness a statewide issue



The inevitable result of most homeless encampments is solid waste. Even when campers do their best to bag it up, no garbage removal service exists to take it away.



Solid waste at homeless encampments collects in just about anything that is available.



In Spokane County, homeless encampments dot the I-90 corridor. Campers leave behind solid waste that includes needles and other drug paraphernalia.



The Governor’s budget includes \$4 million a year for encampment cleanup in fiscal years 2021 and 2022. This means that a total of \$8 million will move from the Budget Stabilization Account to the MTCA-Operating Account for the cleanup of solid waste and contaminated materials associated with homeless encampments.

Grants to assist local governments

Cities and counties are primarily responsible for enforcing solid waste handling rules and regulations, and making sure local hazardous and solid waste plans are in place. But local governments don’t have dedicated funding sources to address homelessness encampments.

\$1.5 million of the \$4 million provided in the Governor’s budget for Fiscal Year 2021 is for grants to local governments to remove solid, hazardous, and infectious waste generated by homeless encampments. Funding will be distributed through a competitive grant process.

Ecology is working with local governments that participate in the Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance (LSWFA) Program to develop the guidelines and criteria for this funding. The grants will require a 25% match from local recipients.

Encampments along state highways

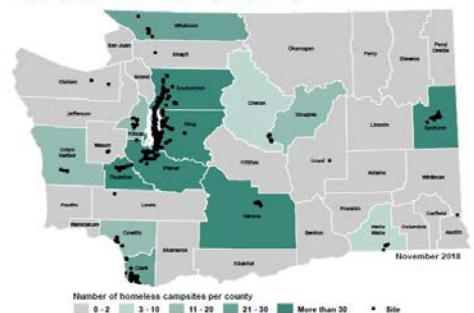
The remaining \$2.5 million is provided in Fiscal Year 2021 to remove surface debris generated by vacated homeless encampments along the I-5 corridor. Ecology plans to partner with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and impacted communities to identify and eliminate contamination hot spots, especially in areas where significant environmental or human health threats exist.

According to WSDOT, there is a steady increase in homeless activity on highway right of ways in recent years. These homeless encampments present a significant safety risk to occupants, neighboring residents and businesses, passing motorists, and WSDOT workers.

Failure to clean up these encampments exposes Washington’s residents and visitors to harmful health and environmental impacts that include contaminated drinking water and diseases.

This pilot project will help reduce those impacts and protect all Washington residents, including those who are affected by homelessness.

Map of Washington state homeless campsites on state property



Top five counties with most homeless sites:

1. King (610 sites)
2. Clark (155 sites)
3. Snohomish (145 sites)
4. Spokane (87 sites)
5. Pierce (76 sites)

Graphic courtesy of WSDOT.