

Focus on: Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance



Waste reduction in schools relies on state funding to support innovative programs like evaluating the contents of a typical bag of garbage.

Contact information

Tami Ramsey
 SWM Grants Coordinator
 360-407-6223
tami.ramsey@ecy.wa.gov

ADA Accessibility

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

Funding challenges limit local government oversight and enforcement of solid waste rules

Waste management in Washington relies on partnerships between state and local governments and private businesses. The majority of these partnerships depend on state funding to support essential local solid waste rule enforcement and waste reduction programs, such as investigating illegal dumps, monitoring the compliance of landfills and transfer stations, promoting recycling and reuse, and safely managing household hazardous waste. Known as Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance (LSWFA), the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) is tasked with providing this funding to counties, cities, and local health departments.

State funding for this program has been reduced by two-thirds since 2015, falling from \$28.2 million in the 2013-15 biennium to \$10 million in 2019-21. These cuts forced many local governments to reduce or stop enforcement work, and eliminate support for waste reduction and recycling programs.

The cuts are being felt especially hard in Washington's rural counties, which are typically unable to rely on other funding mechanisms to support important programs.

The biggest impacts from the cuts are to household hazardous waste collection sites and health departments where local authorities continue to reduce operating hours and eliminate services. This includes cuts to enforcement and investigative work that addresses local solid waste issues and an increasing number of illegal dumps.

Financing Solid Waste Management

Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance passed through Ecology is dedicated to local solid waste planning and implementation projects, including local waste reduction, recycling, and household hazardous waste programs.

County health departments also depend on this funding to investigate and resolve solid waste complaints. Local health departments monitor for compliance almost all of Washington's 800-plus solid waste facilities, including landfills, leachate lagoons, transfer stations, moderate risk waste collection sites, composters, and recycling facilities.

In 2017, 22 local health departments in Washington reported they were reducing or suspending solid waste enforcement work. This means illegal dumps are not investigated and instead are turning into magnets for more dumping. This leads to a greater risk of contaminants leaching into the soil and groundwater.

Some solid waste facilities are also not being monitored for compliance. And a few local governments have limited or altogether ended their solid waste management work as a result of the cuts.

In 2019, reduced staffing continued to limit some counties' ability to respond to rapid changes in the recycling markets. The result was more material was being disposed of and less being recycled. This leads to higher local rates where access to recycling markets is now limited or non-existent.

Today, contaminated recyclables continue to be a problem that is growing more difficult to address due to limited funding.

Ecology continues to request funding be restored to \$28.2 million each biennium. By reinstating appropriate funding to this program, local governments can combat the recycling crisis, ensure the proper disposal of household hazardous waste, continue monitoring solid waste facilities for compliance, and address illegal dumping so human health and the environment are protected.

Local solid waste management and COVID-19

Local health department responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 pulled many health department staff away from implementing their LSWFA grants. It also caused recipients to shift the implementation of those grants from in-person to online events, where possible.

Adjusting to a "new normal," many recycling and moderate risk waste facilities slowed down operations, and many grant recipients initially delayed spending. However, some facilities have recovered and spending is now on track to exhaust the entire \$10 million allocated for the 2019-21 biennium.

In response to a LSWFA process designed to ensure the total \$10 million allocation is spent, 47 recipients tasked with implementing and maintaining their local solid and hazardous waste management plans reported in November 2020 that an additional \$5.4 million would be needed to pay for eligible project costs through the end of the biennium.

Recipients conducting solid waste enforcement work reported needing more than \$360,000 to cover remaining expenses. A portion of this need was covered by 11 local health departments that voluntarily gave back funding for other local health departments to use.