Focus on: Municipal Stormwater Permits

Stormwater in Washington

Stormwater runoff is a leading pollution threat to water in urban areas of Washington. As rain and snowmelt runs off buildings, paved roads, and parking lots, it can pick up pollution such as oil, fertilizers, pesticides, tire wear, trash, and pet waste. Pollutants and higher flows are carried into local water bodies, where they can harm water quality and habitat.

Municipal stormwater permits

To manage stormwater in urban areas, Ecology has municipal stormwater permits. These permits are for the state's most populated cities and counties and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). The permits are aimed at reducing stormwater pollution at its source, treating it, and controlling how much and how fast it is flowing, so cleaner water goes into creeks, rivers, lakes, groundwater, and Puget Sound.

Municipal stormwater permits are divided into categories, based on population and geography:

Phase I permits include the most populated cities and counties.

Western Washington Phase II and **Eastern Washington Phase II** permits are for smaller urban areas.

These permits have a programmatic, holistic regulatory approach to stormwater management, which is different from other Clean Water Act permits. Permittees develop and implement Stormwater Management programs, rather than meet a specific limit for each pollutant at the end of a pipe.

Permit requirements

The permits require local jurisdictions to use a suite of actions and tools to reduce pollution, and implement guidance manuals with science-based best management practices.

The permits include everything from outreach and education, to updating local codes, to compliance and enforcement.

Cities and counties under the permits manage:

- Their stormwater systems — maintaining streets, stormwater flow control and treatment facilities, and outfalls to waterways.
- Pollution sources — businesses, construction sites, accidental spills, intentional dumping, and illicit discharges.
- Development practices —ensuring development preserves soil and trees, and manages runoff in a way that helps to filter stormwater and soak it into the ground.

Funding to address stormwater

Municipal stormwater programs are funded through local stormwater utility fees. Washington is unique in the amount of state funding passed through to local governments in the form of stormwater grants and loans to support permit implementation. Since 2007, Ecology has provided nearly $500 million to local governments to address the impacts of urban runoff.

Ecology's grant funds[1] are used by permittees to help employ stormwater staff, inspect development projects, inform business owners and community members about local stormwater issues, conduct stormwater system maintenance, and provide other enhancements to their stormwater programs.

Cities, counties, and ports also use this funding to build new stormwater facilities, such as bioretention facilities or engineered wetlands, to treat and manage urban runoff across the state.

Permit reissuance

We update the permits every five years, along with Ecology's Stormwater Management Manuals. The current permits expire on July 31, 2024. We began working on the reissuance with listening sessions and sharing preliminary draft permit language in 2022 and early 2023. The reissuance process also includes a formal public review and comment period.

Proposed updates

For this permit cycle, we are proposing a number of important updates to address specific pollutants and ensure that as communities develop, change, and grow, municipalities invest in proper stormwater management to protect and restore water quality.

Updated areas include:

- Requirements for new development and redevelopment statewide
- Stormwater retrofits for existing development
- Street sweeping requirements
- Actions to address PCBs, PFAS, and 6PPD
- Environmental Justice

We are proposing updates to reduce the amount of tire wear and toxic pollutants that enter local waterways. This includes 6PPD and associated compounds that are toxic to several salmon species.

While Ecology is working to find less toxic alternatives to 6PPD in tires, we continue to work with partners on stormwater management practices and treatment systems to reduce 6PPD in waterways now. Research shows many of the same management practices and treatment systems that reduce sediment, copper, zinc, and other common roadway chemicals also remove tire particles and 6PPD.

To learn more about all of Ecology's work to address 6PPD, visit ecology.wa.gov/6PPD.

Provide feedback

The draft permits and stormwater manuals are available for review and public comment from **Aug. 16 through Nov. 10, 2023.**

We are holding a series of six public workshops and hearings, four virtual and two in person.

Visit the permit reissuance webpage[2] to learn more about how to comment, find information about the public meetings, and review the draft documents.

After reviewing all comments received, we will make our permit decision and publish a response to comments document by July 2024.

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ADA accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-669-1891 or email at jessica.shook@ecy.wa.gov, or visit https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

[1] https://ecology.wa.gov/wqgrants
[2] https://ecology.wa.gov/muniswreissue