

Focus on: Improving Air Quality in Overburdened Communities



Figure 1. Kittitas County

Background

A key part of Ecology's charge under the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) is to make sure overburdened communities highly impacted by air pollution are not left behind as we work to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Using multiple sources of air quality data and environmental justice information, we have identified 16 areas of the state containing multiple communities, neighborhoods, and towns that are highly impacted by criteria air pollution. Criteria air pollutants are six common substances known to harm human health and the environment: carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particle pollution, and sulfur dioxide.

This [StoryMap](#)¹ describes each of the 16 communities in detail, including how and why they are included in this work. These descriptions provide key community characteristics and show potentially vulnerable populations and air pollution concerns.

Expanded air monitoring network

"[SensWA](#)"² devices provide real-time air quality information about fine particle pollution, which is the air pollutant of most concern in Washington.

As of November 2024, we have installed 26 SensWA devices across the 16 communities and will continue to install new monitors in the future. These portable devices are adding data to Washington's existing air monitoring network, especially in communities highly impacted by air pollution.

Grants

In Summer 2024, Ecology launched a \$10 million grant program to support this air quality and environmental justice work. Awards will be announced by the end of 2024.

Community-based organizations, local municipalities, and Tribes participating in the initiative to [improve air quality in overburdened communities highly impacted by air pollution](#)³ were eligible to apply.

This new grant program, also funded by the CCA, will support two types of locally-led projects to improve air quality and protect health in the 16 communities:

- **Planning and community engagement** to develop projects that will reduce criteria air pollution.

¹ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c10bdbfc69984a9d85346be1a23f6338>

² <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2302113.html>

³ <https://ecology.wa.gov/air-climate/climate-commitment-act/overburdened-communities>

- **Implementation** of projects that have already completed a community engagement process.

Rulemaking

We have also started [rulemaking](#)⁴ to investigate more protective air quality standards for the 16 communities. Between December 2024 and May 2025, we will hold online public meetings twice a month to get feedback and input from community members, community-based organizations, regulated entities, and all other stakeholders.

Engagement

Ecology has offered many community engagement activities about this work since the CCA was passed. Most recently, we attended multiple community events, including the Duwamish River Festival in South Seattle, Eco-Fair in Yakima, and Valley Fest in Spokane. This allowed us to connect with and hear directly from community members about their air

quality concerns and to provide information about this initiative.

We are now holding high level engagement with local community-based organizations, clean air agencies, and local health jurisdictions to collaborate on the specific air quality concerns of each overburdened community.

Take this short [Air Quality Survey](#).⁵ What we hear through this survey helps to further define our work.



Take our air quality survey!



Contact information

Erin Torrone
erin.torrone@ecy.wa.gov
564-200-4426



ADA accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology at 360-407-6800 or email melanie.forster@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY, call 711 or 877-833-6341.

⁴ <https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/laws-rules-rulemaking/rulemaking/wac-173-448>

⁵ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XS9BFS7>