

# Focus on: Lead in Cookware

## Guidance for Manufacturers and Sellers



To reduce lead exposure to people and the environment, the Washington State Legislature adopted a new law in 2024 addressing cookware that contains lead. Beginning January 1, 2026, it will be illegal to manufacture, distribute, sell, or offer for sale in Washington cookware or a cookware component containing lead or lead compounds at more than five parts per million.

### Why did the legislature adopt this new law?

There is no known safe exposure level to lead, which affects brain and nervous system development. High levels of lead exposure have been discovered in immigrant communities, and subsequent testing revealed high levels of lead in the cookware in these homes. Additional testing found that many items of cookware sold in Washington contained lead. You can find more information about testing at [King County's research into lead-contaminated cookware](#).<sup>1</sup>

Lead can be released from cookware, where it is absorbed into the food being prepared. When lead is present in handles and other accessible components, people can be exposed through touch. They can expose others if they don't wash their hands before touching other people or items.

### Where can I read the law?

You can find the new law at [Chapter 70A.565 RCW](#).<sup>2</sup> Although [RCW 70A.565.030](#)<sup>3</sup> authorizes Ecology to adopt administrative rules to implement the statute, no rules have been adopted. As we work to implement the new statute, we may determine rules are needed. If that happens, there will be a formal rulemaking process with multiple opportunities for public input.

### Who is covered by this new law?

The law applies to manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers.

“Manufacturer” is defined in the statute to mean “any person, firm, association, partnership, corporation, governmental entity, organization, or joint venture that produces a product or is an importer or domestic distributor of a product sold or offered for sale in or into the state.”

“Wholesaler” and “retailer” are not defined in the statute, so Ecology would use the dictionary definition of these terms to decide whether an entity is required to follow the law. “Distributor” is also not defined in the law but is included in the definition of manufacturer.

<sup>1</sup> [kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnpr/about-king-county/about-dnpr/newsroom/news-releases/03-29-lead-contaminated-cookware](https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnpr/about-king-county/about-dnpr/newsroom/news-releases/03-29-lead-contaminated-cookware)

<sup>2</sup> <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=70A.565>

<sup>3</sup> <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=70A.565.030>

Individuals are not covered by the law unless they fall into one of the above categories. That means cookware containing lead might be allowed to be sold at a garage sale or online at sites like craigslist or Facebook Marketplace. Ecology recommends these items not be sold, even if it is legal to do so.

### What is covered by this new law?

Cookware is defined in the statute as any metal pots, pans, bakeware, rice cookers, pressure cookers, and other containers and devices intended for the preparation or storage of food. This includes other vessels and containers in which food or drink is cooked or held. Items such as ranges, cooktops, refrigerators, and freezers are also considered cookware under the law.

“Components” are defined as separate or distinct parts of the cookware. Some examples are lids, knobs, handles and handle assemblies, rivets, fasteners, valves, and vent pipes.

The lead restriction extends to cookware and components composed of any material, not just metal. For example, a metal knife with a silicone hand grip cannot have lead exceeding five parts per million in either the blade or the handle.

### How do businesses prove they are complying with the new law?

Manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers are not required to prove their products are in compliance unless a violation is discovered. You do not need to report to Ecology or provide a certification of compliance about your products or sales.

Businesses that choose to test for lead in their products do not need to use a specific test method. Generally accepted test methods would likely be good choices.

### Ecology’s compliance focus

Our compliance prioritization begins with items with the most direct route for exposure. We will prioritize metal cookware and cookware components that touch, cook, or hold food or are touched by people.

External components of electronic cookware (such as rice cookers, pressure cookers, and ranges) will be prioritized for compliance if they have metal components that touch food or are touched by people during use. Grills, griddles, handles, buttons, and knobs are examples of priority external components.

Internal and inaccessible electronic components are not explicitly excluded from the statutory definitions of cookware and components, they but will not be prioritized for compliance at this time.

### Concerned about compliance?

We understand that some cookware that meets global standards for lead content and some components made of recycled materials will not meet Washington’s new limits. If you are concerned that your products do not meet the new law, we encourage you to reach out to Ecology staff.

### Related information

- Visit Ecology’s webpage about the [lead in cookware law](#).<sup>4</sup>
- If you have questions about the law or its implementation, please email us at [LeadInCookware@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:LeadInCookware@ecy.wa.gov).



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

<sup>4</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/waste-toxics/reducing-toxic-chemicals/washingtons-toxics-in-products-laws/lead-in-cookware-law>