

Securing Environmental Program Funds

SB 6151 - Focus on dedicated accounts

The Issue

Spending fee revenue on the programs they're meant to support ensures that public funds are used effectively and transparently. Under current law, however, fees collected by Ecology's laboratory accreditation and landfill methane programs are deposited into General Fund-State, rather than accounts dedicated to those efforts. This means that fees paid by accredited labs and landfills won't necessarily fund the programs they're intended to support. Not only does this hurt our ability to effectively implement these critical environmental programs, but it's poor customer service to those who pay fees.

The Solution

Dedicated accounts for the laboratory accreditation and landfill methane programs will ensure that fees collected will support program implementation. Lab and landfill operators, rightfully so, expect that the fees they pay to Ecology will fund the services we're supposed to provide. That is precisely how these efforts are intended to work. By using dedicated accounts, Ecology can build transparency and trust with labs and landfill operators who pay fees to fund these programs – and allow Ecology to better serve these groups.

Our Proposal

SB 6151 proposes using dedicated accounts to collect fees generated by both the laboratory accreditation and landfill methane programs. The bill does not impose new fees; it simply establishes accounts for depositing fees. The bill:

- Amends chapter 43.21A RCW to create a dedicated account for laboratory accreditation fees; and
- Specifies that landfill methane fees be deposited into the Air Pollution Control Account (RCW 70A.15.1010).

Why This Matters

Laboratory Accreditation Program

Ecology accredits Washington laboratories that test drinking water, wastewater, soil, sediments, and solid waste for harmful chemicals. Accredited laboratories provide vital data to government agencies that protect public health and the environment. When a laboratory is not accredited, we have no assurance that the laboratory can generate credible data. Under RCW 43.21A.230, Ecology charges labs fees to cover our costs of the program.

Without access to the intended fee-based funding, Ecology would be unable to maintain an accreditation program that effectively serves Washington's laboratories. This would affect essential services that impact state and local decisions, such as restricting toxic chemicals like PFAS or 6PPD, issuing fish consumption advisories, closing swimming beaches due to contamination, and developing water cleanup plans.

Assessments for drinking water laboratories would fall behind the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's required schedule; environmental laboratory audits would return to a sporadic schedule; and technical support that wastewater treatment plants and research laboratories rely on would be insufficient.

Landfill Methane Program

Ecology administers the Landfill Methane Program (chapter 70A.540 RCW) to control emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from municipal solid waste landfills. The program helps ensure that landfills are doing their part to reduce Washington's greenhouse gas emissions 95% below 1990 levels by 2050, as required by state law. The program will also benefit communities living near landfills by reducing their exposure to hazardous air pollutants, precursors to ozone and particulate matter, and odor nuisance compounds.

While Ecology is authorized by law to charge fees, doing so has limited value unless we can ensure the fees are deposited into a dedicated account and used to directly support the program.

Successful implementation of this program, which makes significant progress toward our shared climate goals, relies on stable and predictable funding. Without a dedicated account, Ecology would be unable to coordinate with local authorities to implement the landfill methane program, which would contribute to regulatory uncertainty and potentially higher levels of methane emissions at regulated landfills. If Ecology does not reduce methane emissions from landfills, Washington will risk exceeding greenhouse gas emission limits in state law.

Related Information

- Environmental Laboratory Accreditation[1]
- Landfill Methane Emissions[2]



Carrie Sessions
Carrie.Sessions@ecy.wa.gov
360-480-1991



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[1] https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/Permits-certifications/Laboratory-Accreditation
[2] https://www.ezview.wa.gov/site/alias__1962/41956/landfill_methane_emissions_guidance.aspx