



Focus

I-695 and Air Pollution

Background: The \$2 clean-air tax

Initiative 695 repealed a \$2-per-vehicle annual tax that paid for nearly half of the state's effort to protect the air we breathe. As a result, Washington can do less to control air pollution and can expect more of it. The primary cost of dirty air would be to people's health. Having clean air saves billions of dollars in health costs. Ultimately, our economy would suffer, too, and vehicle and business owners would have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to get the air clean again. Washington invested heavily to get the clean air it has. *Keeping* it clean costs less than *getting* it clean.

How will I-695 affect Washington's air?

Dept. of Ecology's Air Quality Program protects air quality by characterizing air quality, designing solutions, implementing solutions, and measuring success. If none of the funding were restored, these services would be reduced or eliminated.

Characterizing air quality

Dept. of Ecology (Ecology) scientists and technicians gather information on the amount and sources of pollution and how it moves in the air. This information provides a foundation for identifying air quality problems, deciding on solutions, and evaluating those solutions. Activities include:

- Monitoring stations that measure air pollution at more than 100 sites.
- Specialized forecasting to predict and prevent air pollution problems.

Without clean-air funding:

- Nearly 50 percent cut in monitoring stations leaves Ecology "blind" to actual pollution in many areas. Without hard data, EPA must declare violations and set "non-attainment areas" based on worst-case formulas.
- Emergency response (tracking and predicting smoke and fumes from major fires or leaks) eliminated.

Designing solutions


Ecology uses its air pollution knowledge to develop the most cost-effective solutions that meet varying local needs that constantly change. Activities include:

- Developing lowest-cost, most-effective approaches to state and local air-pollution problems.
- Keeping Washington in compliance with federal Clean Air Act and eligible for \$250 million in annual federal transportation grants.

Without clean-air funding:

- Can't affect federal policies that don't fit Washington's needs. Example: Ecology designed and pushed for EPA's natural-events policy; the policy prevents cities from becoming non-attainment areas because of pollution from rural dust or forest fires.
- Can't address air pollution problems ignored by federal Clean Air Act. Examples: Wood stoves and fireplaces, outdoor burning, and toxic emissions.

Implementing solutions

Ecology ensures that clean-air solutions are carried out equitably, fairly, and that people are complying.  Activities include:


- Technical assistance, complaint response, and enforcement in 19 rural counties that receive local service from Ecology on all air-pollution issues.
- Services to small and medium-sized businesses.

Without clean-air funding:

- Public health virtually unprotected from air pollution in counties that receive direct local service from Ecology. Examples: wood smoke, open burning, agricultural burning, dust control.
- Economic development suffers from delays in technical assistance and permit processing.

Measuring effectiveness

Ecology tracks the results of its strategies and updates them as needs and opportunities change. As a result of this process, Ecology:

- Ended the oxygenated gasoline program in Western Washington because the region could meet clean-air goals without it.
- Vigorously opposed a federal vehicle-inspection program that would have doubled motorists' costs and provided no more benefit than Washington's program, one of the least costly in the U.S. 

Without clean-air funding:

- Outdated or ineffective programs go unchanged.
- Washington must accept federally mandated strategies because Ecology can't demonstrate the effectiveness of lower-cost, state-level programs.

How much has Washington's air quality improved?

When the \$2 tax went into effect in 1993, Washington had 13 areas listed by the federal government as having dirty, unhealthy air. Now, after six years of hard work to reduce polluted emissions, 12 of these areas meet federal health-based standards for clean air. In 1999, there have been only seven "bad air" days -- in Vancouver, Colville, Wallula, Kennewick and Spokane -- most due to dust storms.

What's it worth?

A newly released EPA analysis shows that Washington residents are saving hundreds of lives and more than \$2 billion a year in health costs by cleaning up the air. There are other economic benefits of clean air: Real estate with clear views has higher values; maintaining clean air is cheaper than cleaning up dirty air; and areas that violate clean-air standards face federally mandated industrial and motor-vehicle emission-control costs, estimated at more than \$250 million per year. If the state can't meet federal clean-air goals, we can lose all or part of our federal transportation funding. 