Clean Air Washington

The Clean Air Washington Act of 1991 sets a comprehensive new course toward cleaner air throughout the state.

Washington's Air Quality Law

Washington has an air pollution problem

Washington's air may look pristine, but this is an increasingly false perception because much of the pollution cannot be seen. It has been found at unhealthful levels in Washington's agricultural and mountain regions, as well as urban areas.

Washington's population has grown to nearly five million people during the past 100 years. The decisions affecting air quality made by each individual and business become more critical because of our rapid growth.

Air pollution has exceeded federal health standards in all or part of ten counties: Benton, Clark, Franklin, King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, Walla Walla and Yakima. When an area exceeds federal health standards, we call that area a nonattainment area.

How much air pollution? Where does it come from?

Despite 20 years of success in placing limits on air pollution, economic and population growth threaten to overwhelm existing control measures. Each year we inject about 2.5 million tons of harmful gases and particles into the air over our state, enough to fill 8,000 Kingdomes.

The following is a list of Washington's four major sources of air pollution, the share of the total that comes from each source and examples of how much pollution each source generates per year:

- **Motor Vehicles, 57 percent** (1996)
  - 1,000,000 tons carbon monoxide
  - 188,000 tons volatile organic compounds (mainly hydrocarbons)
  - 106,000 tons nitrogen oxides
  - 62,000 tons particulate matter
- **Industrial Emissions, 14 percent** (1996)
  - 274,000 tons carbon monoxide
  - 44,000 tons volatile organic compounds
  - 59,000 tons nitrogen oxides
  - 22,000 tons particulate matter
  - 112,000 tons sulfur dioxide
- **Residential Wood Stoves, 10 percent** (1996)
  - 242,000 tons carbon monoxide
  - 32,000 tons volatile organic compounds
  - 33,000 tons particulate matter

- **Outdoor Burning, 6 percent** (1996)
  - 255,000 tons carbon monoxide
  - 20,000 tons volatile organic compounds
  - 26,000 tons particulate matter
- **Other, 13%** (1996)
  (includes sources such as boats and other recreational vehicles, lawn mowers, etc.)

Air pollution's effects

Air pollution poses a serious health threat to Washington citizens, especially children, the elderly, pregnant women and people with respiratory and heart diseases. Air pollution also makes healthy people more susceptible to health problems.

More than three million Washington residents breath air polluted at levels considered unsafe. Health effects range from headaches and nausea to central nervous system and organ damage, cancer and even death. Small particulate pollution contributes to 100 deaths in Washington each year. Toxic air pollutants cause up to 150 cancer cases annually.

Air pollution takes its toll in other ways as well. It damages property. Its effect on human health causes medical expenses and workplace absenteeism. It obscures scenery vital to tourism. The effects of air pollution on Washington's economy are estimated to approach $1 billion per year.

Clean Air Washington's approach

The 1991 legislation gives Washington a stronger public policy on preventing air pollution based on three concepts:

- **Prevention** - Preventing air pollution is more effective than clean-up.
- **Accountability** - Those who contribute to the problem should help solve it.
- **Public Leadership** - Government should act as innovator and role model.

Clean Air Washington requires new measures to prevent and control emissions from motor vehicles, industry, outdoor burning and wood heating.

What Clean Air Washington does

Stronger Vehicle Emissions Testing. Continues and expands the current program. Requires diesel vehicles to be tested. The Motor Vehicle Emission Check Program has expanded, as required by the 1990 federal Clean Air Act amendments. The Emission Check Program is designed to be self-supporting through test fees.

Fuel Efficiency and Alternative Fuels. This requires that 30 percent of new fleet vehicles purchased by state agencies be powered by alternative fuels. It provides funding for motorist education on motor vehicles and air pollution and matching grants to local governments and school districts for clean fuel programs. A certification program for clean fuel vehicle mechanics is created. The Utilities and Transportation Commission must identify barriers to developing compressed natural gas refueling stations. A $2.25 fee is added to the annual registration of all vehicles to fund a program to reduce motor vehicle pollution.

Conformity. Federal, state and local transportation funds shall be used only on projects that improve, or at least do not worsen, air quality problems. The Departments of Transportation and Ecology have developed rules to meet this goal.

Transportation Demand Management (Commute Trip Reduction). The number of vehicle miles traveled will be reduced through an emphasis on moving people rather than single-occupancy vehicles. Large public and private employers in eight counties, and state government, must adopt plans to reduce the number of trips made by commuters in single-occupancy vehicles 35 percent by the year 1999. The Washington State Energy Office has the lead on this effort.

Operating Permits. Large industries must obtain five-year renewable operating permits. Industries that pollute less, but still cause public health or environmental problems, also must obtain these permits. Awarding and renewing permits will depend on whether an industry has demonstrated its use of the appropriate level of emission control. The permit program and fees are based on requirements of the new amendments to the federal Clean Air Act.

Wood Stoves. Tougher emission standards are required for new wood stoves to be certified and sold at retail. Installation of used, uncertified, and more polluting stoves is banned. A $30 per stove fee is paid at the time of retail sale to support enforcement and public education. The law requires an adequate, non-wood source of heat in all new construction or major remodeling in urban growth areas and nonattainment areas.

Outdoor Burning. As composting and other alternatives become available, outdoor burning will be phased out in high density urban areas by the year 2000. In areas that do not meet federal clean air standards, outdoor burning is banned. The law phases down slash burning by 50 percent over ten years.

Technical Assistance Program. Owners of air pollution sources, especially small businesses, can receive assistance in reducing air emissions through a technical assistance program in the Department of Ecology. Technical assistance program staff are not allowed to have enforcement authority.

Increased Penalties. Civil and criminal penalties were increased from a maximum of $1,000 to a maximum of $10,000 per day per violation of air pollution laws and regulations. Criminal penalties are limited to those who knowingly, or through gross negligence, violate air quality laws.

Chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) Recycling. The law requires the capture and recycling of CFCs from commercial, industrial, automotive and residential refrigeration and air conditioning equipment. A technical assistance program provides assistance to CFC collectors and recyclers. Nonessential products containing CFCs are banned.

For more information

Ecology has prepared fact sheets on each major element of Clean Air Washington. Any or all of these are available from the Washington State Department of Ecology, PO Box 47600, Olympia, WA 98504-7600, or call:

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If you have special accommodation needs or require this document in alternative format, please contact Ecology's Air Quality Program, (360) 407-6830 (voice) or (360) 407-6006 (TDD only).

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