



News Release

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Ecology offers assistance in flood aftermath, cleanup work

OLYMPIA – As residents and business owners return to their property in areas ravaged by this week's storm, the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) is offering information and resources to help answer frequently asked questions.

Handling debris

The flooding was strong enough to pick up and carry any number of items in its path, leaving behind a trail of tanks, containers, household items, vegetation, building debris and vehicles. Some of these may contain chemicals, hazardous substances or polluted water that can pose a threat to human health and the environment.

Ecology recognizes that citizens will be anxious to clean up homes and businesses that suffered damage. Most dwellings and places of business have various kinds of fuel and containers of chemicals like strong acids, bases and solvents. To avoid injury, including chemical burns, citizens are urged to be very cautious.

If containers of fuel or chemicals must be moved, wear heavy gloves, protective eye wear and long-sleeved shirts and pants to minimize skin exposure. Place containers aside from other debris where they will not get knocked over, broken or punctured. Don't place containers of fuel or chemicals in with other cleanup debris.

Ecology and county health and public works departments are working together to identify collection points for fuel and hazardous materials. Ecology's Spills Program conducted a flyover of the Chehalis River Basin today to learn more about the deposition of potentially dangerous containers. To find out how to report potentially harmful garbage and how to dispose of it, contact your local health department.

The flooding may have also caused oil spills or moved containers of hazardous materials. Citizens should report spills or suspicious containers to the Emergency Management Department at 1-800-OILS-911 and the appropriate Ecology regional office (see resources below).

The first step to take in cleaning up flooded garages, shops, or other structures contaminated with oil or chemicals is to contact the insurer and hire a cleanup contractor.

When a state of emergency has been declared, local air authorities can issue permits to authorize the burning of natural vegetation left on a piece of property by a storm. Smoke from outdoor fires harms air quality and contains particulate matters hazardous to human health. If burning is the only option, Ecology offers these tips:

- Only burn vegetation deposited on your own property.
- Wait until vegetation is dry before burning.
- Remove any petroleum-based products, such as plastics or tires.
- Do not burn household items such as furniture or clothes.

Support for businesses

Unfortunately, many farmers lost livestock in the floods. The remaining animal carcasses need to be disposed of safely to prevent the spread of illness and disease. Ecology, the Washington Department of Agriculture and others are collaborating to simplify the transport and safe disposal of dead animals. Farmers can call their local health or solid waste departments for assistance.

Ecology's Toxics Cleanup Program is currently mapping locations of underground storage tanks within the flood impacted areas to see where tanks may be at risk. Staff will be visiting gas station owners to provide information on how to check underground storage tank systems for flood damage prior to restarting the system.

Businesses that generate dangerous wastes may receive extensions from Ecology for waste designation, handling and disposal timelines. Check with the Hazardous Waste and Toxics Reduction Program for more information. Visit <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/index.html> in coming days or call the program at the numbers in the resource section below.

Ecology is also reviewing what kind of repair work can be done without permits during a state of emergency. Staff will work affected government agencies to expedite the process for emergency projects.

Other activities

Ecology's team of Washington Conservation Corps members, part of the Americorps program, have been called into action. At least 50 crew members helped place sandbags in Thurston and Grays Harbor counties during the early part of the storm. Now, nine crews are lending a hand in recovery efforts:

- Helping provide shelter, food, blankets, cots and other necessities to people whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the flood in Lewis and Grays Harbor.
- Delivering ice and water to residents in Westport, Ocean Shores and Oakville.
- Assisting Oakville residents clear mud and debris from their homes and property.

The Water Resources program oversees the safety and repair of more than 900 non-hydroelectric dams. Inspectors have conducted phone and field surveys of the dams located in the storm-impacted area. Although a lot of cleanup is necessary, no dams sustained damage.

Ecology's Water Quality engineers are contacting communities that may have experienced flood-related problems at their sewage treatment plants during the storm. At least 16 communities reported overloads of their systems, which resulted in the release of partially treated or untreated sewage. Engineers are offering technical assistance to help restore regular service to customers.

Additional resources

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- To report an oil spill or release of chemicals or hazardous materials to Emergency Management Department: 1-800-OILS-911
- Ecology's Southwest Region (Pierce County, Olympic Peninsula and Southwest Washington)
 - Spills: 360-407-6300
 - Hazardous Waste Program: 360-407-6300
- Ecology's Northwest Region (King County north)
 - Spills: 425-649-7229
 - Hazardous Waste program: (425) 649-7000
- Washington Emergency Operations Center, www.wadisasternews.com, includes information about:
 - Reporting storm damage to homes and farms
 - Avoiding scams
- Washington Department of Health: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/>
- Washington Department of Agriculture: <http://agr.wa.gov/>
- Environmental Protection Agency floods information: <http://epa.gov/naturalevents/flooding.html>

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