

RCW 90.56.005 Findings—Purpose. (1) The legislature declares that waterborne transportation as a source of supply for oil and hazardous substances poses special concern for the state of Washington. Each year billions of gallons of crude oil and refined petroleum products are transported as cargo and fuel by vessels on the navigable waters of the state. The movement of crude oil through rail corridors and over Washington waters creates safety and environmental risks. The sources and transport of crude oil bring risks to our communities along rail lines and to the Columbia river, Grays Harbor, and Puget Sound waters. These shipments are expected to increase in the coming years. Vessels and trains transporting oil into Washington travel on some of the most unique and special marine environments in the United States. These marine environments are a source of natural beauty, recreation, and economic livelihood for many residents of this state. As a result, the state has an obligation to ensure the citizens of the state that the waters of the state will be protected from oil spills.

(2) The legislature finds that prevention is the best method to protect the unique and special marine environments in this state. The technology for containing and cleaning up a spill of oil or hazardous substances is at best only partially effective. Preventing spills is more protective of the environment and more cost-effective when all the response and damage costs associated with responding to a spill are considered. Therefore, the legislature finds that the primary objective of the state is to achieve a zero spills strategy to prevent any oil or hazardous substances from entering waters of the state.

(3) The legislature also finds that:

(a) Recent accidents in Washington, Alaska, southern California, Texas, Pennsylvania, and other parts of the nation have shown that the transportation, transfer, and storage of oil have caused significant damage to the marine environment;

(b) Even with the best efforts, it is nearly impossible to remove all oil that is spilled into the water, and average removal rates are only fourteen percent;

(c) Washington's navigable waters are treasured environmental and economic resources that the state cannot afford to place at undue risk from an oil spill;

(d) The state has a fundamental responsibility, as the trustee of the state's natural resources and the protector of public health and the environment to prevent the spill of oil; and

(e) In section 5002 of the federal oil pollution act of 1990, the United States congress found that many people believed that complacency on the part of industry and government was one of the contributing factors to the Exxon Valdez spill and, further, that one method to combat this complacency is to involve local citizens in the monitoring and oversight of oil spill plans. Congress also found that a mechanism should be established that fosters the long-term partnership of industry, government, and local communities in overseeing compliance with environmental concerns in the operation of crude oil terminals. Moreover, congress concluded that, in addition to Alaska, a program of citizen monitoring and oversight should be established in other major crude oil terminals in the United States because recent oil spills indicate that the safe transportation of oil is a national problem.

(4) In order to establish a comprehensive prevention and response program to protect Washington's waters and natural resources from spills of oil, it is the purpose of this chapter:

(a) To establish state agency expertise in marine safety and to centralize state activities in spill prevention and response activities;

(b) To prevent spills of oil and to promote programs that reduce the risk of both catastrophic and small chronic spills;

(c) To ensure that responsible parties are liable, and have the resources and ability, to respond to spills and provide compensation for all costs and damages;

(d) To provide for state spill response and wildlife rescue planning and implementation;

(e) To support and complement the federal oil pollution act of 1990 and other federal law, especially those provisions relating to the national contingency plan for cleanup of oil spills and discharges, including provisions relating to the responsibilities of state agencies designated as natural resource trustees. The legislature intends this chapter to be interpreted and implemented in a manner consistent with federal law;

(f) To provide broad powers of regulation to the department of ecology relating to spill prevention and response;

(g) To provide for independent review on an ongoing basis the adequacy of oil spill prevention, preparedness, and response activities in this state;

(h) To provide an adequate funding source for state response and prevention programs; and

(i) To maintain the best achievable protection that can be obtained through the use of the best achievable technology and those staffing levels, training procedures, and operational methods that provide the greatest degree of protection achievable. [2015 c 274 s 1; 2010 1st sp.s. c 7 s 72; 2005 c 304 s 1; 2004 c 226 s 2; 1991 c 200 s 101; 1990 c 116 s 1.]

Effective date—2015 c 274: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect July 1, 2015." [2015 c 274 s 29.]

Effective date—2010 1st sp.s. c 26; 2010 1st sp.s. c 7: See note following RCW 43.03.027.