

RCW 38.52.600 Extreme weather response grant program. (1)

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall develop and implement an extreme weather response grant program for the purpose of assisting political subdivisions and federally recognized tribes, in geographic areas where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts as determined by the department, with the costs of responding to community needs during periods of extremely hot or cold weather or in situations of severe poor air quality from wildfire smoke. The department may adopt rules to administer the extreme weather response grant program.

(2) (a) The department may award grants to political subdivisions and federally recognized tribes, in geographic areas where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts as determined by the department, for reimbursement of costs in accordance with subsection (3) of this section if the costs were incurred by communities that have demonstrated a lack of local resources to address community needs and were incurred for the benefit of vulnerable populations. For the purposes of this section, vulnerability refers to the resilience of communities when confronted by external stresses on human health, such as natural or human-caused disasters. Vulnerable populations include, but are not limited to, individuals with disabilities, individuals without vehicles, older adults, individuals with low incomes or experiencing homelessness, and individuals with limited English proficiency.

(b) The department may utilize grant dollars to purchase temporary, movable shelters, which shall remain in the custody of the department to be loaned out to political subdivisions when requested by the executive head to assist with emergency response to extreme weather events.

(3) The costs associated with the following activities are eligible for reimbursement under the extreme weather response grant program:

(a) Establishing and operating warming and cooling centers, including rental of equipment, purchase of supplies and water, staffing, and other associated costs;

(b) Transporting individuals and their pets to warming and cooling centers;

(c) Purchasing fans or other supplies needed for cooling of congregate living settings;

(d) Providing emergency temporary housing such as rental of a hotel or convention center;

(e) Retrofitting or establishing facilities within warming and cooling centers that are pet friendly in order to permit individuals to evacuate with their pets; and

(f) Other related activities necessary for life safety during a period of extremely hot or cold weather or in situations of severe poor air quality from wildfire smoke as determined by the department.

(4) The department shall, upon request, provide information to political subdivisions and federally recognized tribes regarding the establishment and operation of warming and cooling centers.

(5) Grant funding awarded under this section must be used to supplement, not supplant, other federal, state, and local funding for emergency response.

(6) For purposes of this section, "political subdivision" means any county, city, or town that has established a local organization

for emergency management or any joint local organization for emergency management established pursuant to RCW 38.52.070. [2024 c 172 s 3.]

Short title—2024 c 172: "This act may be known and cited as the extreme weather protection act." [2024 c 172 s 1.]

Findings—2024 c 172: "(1) The legislature finds that cold storm patterns in the winter months, dangerous heat waves in the summer, and other major weather events present severe public health challenges for individuals and families in Washington.

(2) Moreover, the legislature finds that these challenges are not experienced equally across the population. The elderly, people with disabilities, people with low incomes, farmworkers, people experiencing homelessness, and people who historically were zoned to areas that faced increased environmental impacts during weather events are the most at risk for losing their life or being severely impacted by weather-related ailments.

(3) The legislature finds that pets are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions, including increased risk of heatstroke-related illness and death, and the inability for pet owners to find pet friendly accommodations is a major barrier to accessing heating and cooling centers and other resources and prevents individuals from evacuating to safety.

(4) The legislature finds that during the record heatwave of 2021, the deadliest weather-related disaster in Washington on record, over 100 people in Washington and nearly 800 people in the northwest region lost their lives as a result of inability to access cooling centers or resources and hundreds more visited emergency rooms with heat-related illnesses.

(5) The legislature acknowledges that according to scientists at the Pacific Northwest national laboratory, it is predicted that these severe weather events will happen more frequently because of the changing climate.

(6) The legislature finds that the cost to local governments to provide heating and cooling centers are sometimes insurmountable and intends to provide supplemental resources to local jurisdictions and tribal partners where local resources are not available during extreme weather events." [2024 c 172 s 2.]