
Environment & Energy Committee

HB 1670

Brief Description: Increasing transparency regarding sewage-containing spills.

Sponsors: Representatives Hunt, Griffey, Doglio, Bernbaum, Zahn, Salahuddin, Berry, Abbarno, Duerr, Hill, Obras, Lekanoff, Stearns, Parshley, Kloba, Reed, Ramel, Ormsby, Gregerson and Nance.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Ecology to make certain sewage discharge information publicly available via a website featuring a mapping interface, a public notification system, and the publication of annual sewage spill reports.

Hearing Date: 2/4/25

Staff: Jacob Lipson (786-7196).

Background:

The federal Clean Water Act (CWA) sets a national goal to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters and to eliminate pollutant discharges into navigable waters. The CWA sets effluent limitations for discharges of pollutants to navigable waters. The Department of Ecology (Ecology) has received delegated authority from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to carry out the CWA in Washington. As part of this responsibility, Ecology issues required National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) wastewater discharge permits, except for federally owned facilities and for permits on tribal lands, as well as state waster discharge permits under state law. The NPDES permits regulate discharges to surface water from commercial industry or publicly owned treatment works, also referred to as municipal wastewater treatment facilities, and state waste discharge

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permits also regulate discharges to groundwater. Wastewater discharge permits generally place limits on the quantity and concentrations of contaminants that may be discharged, and permits may require wastewater treatment or impose operating or other conditions, including monitoring, reporting, and spill prevention planning. The current Water Treatment Plant General Permit issued by Ecology requires a permit holder to notify Ecology immediately, and not later than 24 hours, upon becoming aware of a spill or discharge that could constitute a threat to human health, welfare, or the environment, and to take appropriate action to correct or minimize health or environmental threats from the spill.

Combined sewer overflow systems discharge untreated or partially treated sewage mixed with stormwater to waterways. They receive overflow from treatment plants or combined sewers when the capacity of those treatment plants or combined sewers is exceeded during heavy rain events.

Summary of Bill:

Ecology must develop certain new tools to publicly communicate intentional or accidental sewage spills, including from combined sewers, that do not meet water discharge permit requirements. These new public communication requirements include:

- By July 1, 2026, Ecology must develop and publish a public-facing website that includes a mapping interface on reported sewage spill locations. Upon receipt of information about a sewage spill, Ecology must post a notice on this website that includes estimated volumes and rates of discharge, the level of treatment of the discharge, the date, time, and location of the incident, geographic areas impacted by the discharge, steps taken to contain the discharge, and recommended safety precautions that should be taken. The website must retain, in perpetuity, information about sewage spills that occur after July 1, 2026.
- By July 1, 2027, Ecology must implement a public notification system that allows members of the public to choose to be notified by Ecology of sewage discharges within four hours of Ecology's receipt of a notice of a discharge.
- By March 15, 2026, Ecology must provide a list of unauthorized sewage spills or discharges that occurred during the preceding calendar year, and beginning March 15, 2027, Ecology must publish and annually make available on its website an annual report of unauthorized sewage spills discharges.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.