

RCW 70A.305.170 Establishment of program to provide informal advice and assistance—Collection of costs—Expedited process—Rules—Voluntary cleanup account. (1) The department may establish a program to provide informal advice and assistance on the administrative and technical requirements of this chapter to persons who are conducting or otherwise interested in conducting independent remedial actions at facilities where there is a suspected or confirmed release of hazardous substances.

(a) Any advice or assistance is advisory only and is not binding on the department.

(b) As part of this advice and assistance, the department may provide written opinions on whether the independent remedial actions or proposals for those actions meet the substantive requirements of this chapter or whether the department believes further remedial action is necessary at the facility.

(c) Nothing in this chapter may be construed to preclude the department from issuing a written opinion on whether further remedial action is necessary at any portion of the real property located within a facility, even if further remedial action is still necessary elsewhere at the same facility. A written opinion on a portion of a facility must also provide an opinion on the status of the facility as a whole.

(2) The department may collect, from persons requesting advice and assistance under the program, all costs incurred by the department in providing advice and assistance.

(a) To collect its costs, the department may use either a cost recovery structure or a fee structure, or both.

(i) A fee structure may include either a single fee or a series of fees for individual services.

(ii) The department may calculate fees based on the complexity of the contaminated site and other site-specific factors determined by the department.

(iii) The department may establish a separate fee and cost recovery structure for providing expedited advice and assistance under subsection (3) of this section.

(b) The department may waive collection of costs if the person requesting technical advice and assistance under the program commits to remediate contaminated real property for development of affordable housing, as determined by the department. Prior to waiving costs, the department must consider the requestor's ability to pay and the potential public benefit of the development. To ensure the real property is used for affordable housing, the department may file a lien against the real property pursuant to RCW 70A.305.060, require the person to record an interest in the real property in accordance with RCW 64.04.130, or use other means deemed by the department to be no less protective of the affordable housing use and the interests of the department.

(c) Except when providing expedited advice and assistance under subsection (3) of this section, the department may also waive collection of costs:

(i) For providing technical assistance in support of public participation;

(ii) For providing written opinions on a cleanup that qualifies for and appropriately uses a model remedy; or

(iii) Based on a person's ability to pay. If costs are waived, the department may file a lien against the real property for which the department has incurred the costs pursuant to RCW 70A.305.060.

(3) The department may offer an expedited process for providing informal advice and assistance under the program. Except as provided under subsection (2)(b) of this section, the department must collect, from persons requesting expedited advice and assistance, all costs incurred by the department in providing the advice and assistance. The department may establish conditions for requesting expedited advice and assistance.

(4) The department may adopt rules to implement the program. To ensure that the adoption of rules will not delay the implementation of independent remedial actions, the department may implement the cost waiver and expedited process specified in subsections (2)(b) and (3) of this section through interpretive guidance pending adoption of rules.

(5) The department must track the number of requests for reviews of planned or completed independent remedial actions under the program and establish performance measures to track how quickly the department is able to respond to those requests. The department's tracking system must include a category for tracking the length of time that elapses between the submission of a request for expedited advice and assistance on an independent remedial action at a facility under subsection (3) of this section and the issuance of a letter on the sufficiency of the cleanup at the facility.

(6) The state, the department, and officers and employees of the state are immune from all liability, and no cause of action of any nature may arise from any act or omission in providing, or failing to provide, informal advice and assistance under the program.

(7) The voluntary cleanup account is created in the state treasury. All receipts from the fees collected and costs recovered under the expedited process in subsection (3) of this section must be deposited into the account. Moneys in the account may be spent only after appropriation. Expenditures from the account may be used only to support the expedited process in subsection (3) of this section. If the department suspends the expedited process, any moneys remaining in the account may be used to carry out the purposes of the program. The account must retain its interest earnings in accordance with RCW 43.84.092. [2020 c 20 § 1318; 2019 c 95 § 2. Formerly RCW 70.105D.180.]

Intent—2019 c 95: "Cleaning up and redeveloping contaminated properties is essential to the health and economic prosperity of our communities. Most cleanups are performed voluntarily by property owners and are driven by the sale or redevelopment of the properties. Many of these property owners request written opinions on the sufficiency of their voluntary cleanups from the department of ecology. Buyers and lenders often require these opinions when property owners sell or redevelop contaminated properties. Providing expedited reviews of voluntary cleanups would encourage and expedite more cleanup and redevelopment projects. It is the intent of the legislature to support the cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated properties in our communities by providing the department of ecology with the additional tools and resources necessary for conducting expedited reviews of voluntary cleanups.

The availability of affordable housing is of vital importance to the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of the state. It is in the public interest to facilitate the cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated and underutilized properties within our communities for affordable housing. It is the intent of the legislature to encourage voluntary cleanups of these properties for affordable housing development by waiving the department of ecology's costs of reviewing voluntary cleanups." [2019 c 95 § 1.]