

# Title 44 WAC

## ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

### Chapters

- 44-06**      **Public records.**  
**44-10**      **Arbitration and the arbitration process.**  
**44-14**      **Public Records Act—Model rules.**

### DISPOSITION OF CHAPTERS FORMERLY CODIFIED IN THIS TITLE

#### Chapter 44-01 REGULATIONS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF CHARITABLE TRUSTS IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

- 44-01-010      Promulgation. [Order 101, Promulgation, § 44-01-010, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-020      General duties of the attorney general and of charitable trustees. [Order 103, § 44-01-020, filed 12/8/71; Order 101, § 44-01-020, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-030      Creation of charitable trust division—Register of trustees. [Order 101, § 44-01-030, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-040      To whom rules apply. [Order 103, § 44-01-040, filed 12/8/71; Order 101, § 44-01-040, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-050      Definitions. [Order 103, § 44-01-050, filed 12/8/71; Order 101, § 44-01-050, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-060      Exemptions and exclusions. [Order 103, § 44-01-060, filed 12/8/71; Order 101, § 44-01-060, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-070      Trustees exempt from RCW 19.10.070—Reports required. [Order 103, § 44-01-070, filed 12/8/71; Order 101, § 44-01-070, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-080      Registration—Time for registration. [Order 103, § 44-01-080, filed 12/8/71; Order 102, § 44-01-080, filed 5/8/69; Order 101, § 44-01-080, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-090      Annual reports. [Order 101, § 44-01-090, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-100      Annual reports—Substance—Form. [Order 103, § 44-01-100, filed 12/8/71; Order 102, § 44-01-100, filed 5/8/69; Order 101, § 44-01-100, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94.

- 44-01-110      Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.  
Annual or periodic reports—Time for filing. [Order 103, § 44-01-110, filed 12/8/71; Order 101, § 44-01-110, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-120      Registration and reports—Executing and filing. [Order 101, § 44-01-120, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-130      Notice of application for tax exemption. [Order 101, § 44-01-130, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-140      Notification of litigation. [Order 101, § 44-01-140, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 98-13-046, filed 6/10/98, effective 7/11/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 34.05.354.
- 44-01-150      Duty to furnish information—In general. [Order 101, § 44-01-150, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-160      Register—Inspection. [Order 101, § 44-01-160, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-170      When trust becomes subject to act—Vested remainders. [Order 103, § 44-01-170, filed 12/8/71; Order 101, § 44-01-170, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.
- 44-01-180      Regulations—Amendments. [Order 101, § 44-01-180, filed 12/8/67, effective 1/8/68.] Repealed by 94-01-004 and 94-02-011, filed 12/1/93 and 12/22/93, effective 1/1/94 and 1/23/94. Statutory Authority: Chapters 34.05, 19.09, 11.110 and 43.07 RCW and 1993 c 471.

### Chapter 44-06 WAC PUBLIC RECORDS

#### WAC

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**WAC 44-06-010 Purpose.** The purpose of this chapter is to provide rules for the Washington state attorney general's office, implementing the provisions of chapter 42.17 RCW relating to public records.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-010, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94; Order 102, § 44-06-010, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-020 Definitions.** (1) The definitions set forth in RCW 42.17.020 shall apply to this chapter.

(2) "Intra-agency memoranda" includes but is not limited to memoranda from one member of the attorney general's staff to another and memoranda by members of the attorney general's staff to the particular state client which they represent.

(3) "Consumer protection division" is the division of the attorney general's office which enforces chapter 19.86 RCW and other trade and business regulation and consumer protection statutes.

(4) "Lemon law administration" means the agency created to administer the New Motor Vehicles Warranty Act, chapter 19.118 RCW within the office of the attorney general.

(5) "Office" is the attorney general's office.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-020, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94. Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250 through 42.17.320. 84-10-031 (Order 103), § 44-06-020, filed 4/30/84; Order 102, § 44-06-020, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-030 Function—Organization—Administrative offices.** The attorney general's office is charged by the constitution and statutes with the general obligation of advising and legally representing the state of Washington, its officials, departments, boards, commissions and agencies but not the local units of government. In response to requests from state officers, legislators and prosecuting attorneys, the attorney general's office issues attorney general opinions. The published opinions of the attorney general's office are numbered as AGO (year of issue and number; i.e., AGO 1974 No. 1). Inquiries and correspondence concerning a matter where a specific assistant attorney general is identified as representing a specific agency should be directed to the specifically named assistant attorney general, if known; or the appropriate section of the office, if known.

Consumer protection complaints should be directed to the Consumer Protection Division, 900 Fourth Avenue, Suite 2000, Seattle, Washington 98164-1012 or to local division offices located in Tacoma, Olympia, or Spokane. Communication concerning the New Motor Vehicles Warranty Act (the lemon law) should be directed to the Lemon Law Administration, 900 Fourth Avenue, Suite 2000, Seattle, Washington 98164-1012. Other inquiries, including requests for attorney general's opinions, should be directed to the Attorney General's Office, P.O. Box 40100, State of Washington, Olympia, Washington 98504-0100.

In addition to the areas mentioned above, the office is divided into several divisions which provide legal advice to state agencies in particular subject matter areas. Because regional office addresses may change from time to time, current division addresses and telephone numbers should be obtained from the local telephone directory or you may

obtain an organizational chart and the addresses and telephone numbers of the regional offices of the attorney general by requesting it from the Attorney General's Office, P.O. Box 40100, State of Washington, Olympia, Washington 98504-0100, phone (206) 753-6200. Attorney general offices are located in other cities in the state and are denominated as regional offices.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-030, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-030, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94. Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250 through 42.17.320. 84-10-031 (Order 103), § 44-06-030, filed 4/30/84; Order 102, § 44-06-030, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-040 Public records available.** Public records are available for public inspection and copying pursuant to these rules except as otherwise provided by chapter 42.17 RCW, any other law and these rules.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-040, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-040, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94; Order 102, § 44-06-040, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-050 Index.** The attorney general's office has indexed by subject matter the published opinions of the attorney general. An index is maintained in the law library, Olympia, Washington, indexing all published attorney general opinions, as described in WAC 44-06-030, by subject matter. Retrieval capability is maintained in the central office, Olympia, Washington, for cases which have been filed involving the state, giving the name, the county and the cause number.

The volume of correspondence received by the attorney general's office is such that it would be unduly burdensome to formulate and maintain an index for all such correspondence. In lieu of an index the following filing system is utilized.

(1) Consumer protection complaints received by the consumer protection division are filed by firm name of the subject of the complaint, or by the subject matter of the complaint if no specific firm is named.

(2) Records of the new motor vehicle arbitration board as well as the lemon law administration are filed in the Seattle office, Lemon Law Administrator, Office of the Attorney General, 900 Fourth Avenue, Suite 2000, Seattle, Washington 98164-1012.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-050, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-050, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94. Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250 through 42.17.320. 84-10-031 (Order 103), § 44-06-050, filed 4/30/84; Order 102, § 44-06-050, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-060 Public records officer.** (1) The public records officer for the attorney general's office shall be responsible for responses to requests for public records. Except as provided in subsections (2) and (3) of this section, all requests for public records shall be directed to Public Records Officer, Office of the Attorney General, P.O. Box 40100, Olympia, Washington 98504-0100.

(2) For those records maintained for lemon law administration for the New Motor Vehicles Warranty Act (chapter 19.118 RCW) the disclosure coordinator shall be located at

the Office of Lemon Law Administration, Office of the Attorney General, 900 Fourth Avenue, Suite 2000, Seattle, Washington 98164-1012.

(3) For those records maintained by the "business and fair practices division" aka consumer protection division (chapter 19.86 RCW), the disclosure coordinator shall be located at the Office of the Attorney General, 900 Fourth Avenue, Suite 2000, Seattle, Washington 98164-1012.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-060, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-060, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94. Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250 through 42.17.320. 84-10-031 (Order 103), § 44-06-060, filed 4/30/84; Order 102, § 44-06-060, filed 2/20/74.]

#### **WAC 44-06-070 Hours for seeking public records.**

Public records shall be available for inspection and copying from 9:00 a.m. to noon and from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-070, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94; Order 102, § 44-06-070, filed 2/20/74.]

#### **WAC 44-06-080 Requests for public records.**

In accordance with requirements of chapter 42.17 RCW that agencies prevent unreasonable invasions of privacy, protect public records from damage or disorganization, and prevent excessive interference with essential functions of the agency, public records may be inspected or copies of such records may be obtained, by members of the public, upon compliance with the following procedures:

(1) A request shall be made in writing (or by fax or electronic mail if desired) upon a form prescribed by the office which shall be available at the offices where records are maintained. A request that is made other than upon the form prescribed by the office is permissible, but must provide the information listed in (a) through (f) of this subsection. The form shall be presented to the public records officer; or to a member of the staff designated by him or her, if the public records officer is not available, at the office during the office hours specified in WAC 44-06-070. The request shall include the following information:

- (a) The name of the person requesting the record;
- (b) The time of day and calendar date on which the request was made;
- (c) The nature of the request;
- (d) If the matter requested is referenced within a current index maintained by the records officer, a reference to the requested record as it is described in such current index;
- (e) If the requested matter is not identifiable by reference to a current index maintained by the office, an appropriate description of the record requested.

(f) If the request is for a list of individuals, the requester shall certify that the request is not for commercial purposes except as provided in RCW 42.17.260(7).

(2) In all cases in which a member of the public is making a request, it shall be the obligation of the public records officer or designated staff member to whom the request is made, to assist the member of the public in appropriately identifying the public record requested.

(2007 Ed.)

(3) The requester may be required to provide additional information necessary to determine the application of an exemption or other law to the record(s) requested.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-080, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-080, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94; Order 102, § 44-06-080, filed 2/20/74.]

#### **WAC 44-06-085 Response to public records requests.**

(1) The office shall respond promptly to requests for disclosure. Within five business days of receiving a public record request, the office will respond by:

- (a) Providing the record;
- (b) Acknowledging that the office has received the request and providing a reasonable estimate of the time the office will require to respond to the request; or
- (c) Denying the public record request. Agency responses refusing in whole or in part the inspection of a public record shall include a statement of the specific exemption authorizing the withholding of the record (or any part) and a brief explanation of how the exemption applies to the record(s) withheld.

(2) Additional time for the office to respond to a request may be based upon the need to:

- (a) Clarify the intent of the request;
- (b) Locate and assemble the information requested;
- (c) Notify third persons or agencies affected by the request; or
- (d) Determine whether any of the information requested is exempt and that a denial should be made as to all or part of the request.

(3) In acknowledging receipt of a public record request that is unclear, the office may ask the requester to clarify what information the requester is seeking. If the requester fails to clarify the request, the office need not respond to it.

(4)(a) If the office does not respond in writing within five working days of receipt of the request for disclosure, the person seeking disclosure shall be entitled to:

- (i) Consider the request denied; and
- (ii) Petition the public records officer under WAC 44-06-120.

(b) If the office responds within five working days acknowledging receipt of the request and providing an estimate of the time required to respond to the request, and the requester feels the amount of time stated is not reasonable, the person seeking disclosure shall be entitled to petition the public records officer for a review of the estimate of time. The procedures set out in WAC 44-06-120 shall apply to this review.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-085, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-085, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94.]

**WAC 44-06-090 Copying fees.** No fee shall be charged for the inspection of a public record. The office, however, will for requests under this chapter, charge ten cents per copy. The public records officer may waive the fee for copies when the expense of processing the payment exceeds the costs of providing the copies. These charges are necessary to reimburse the office for the costs of providing the copies of the

public records and the use of the copying equipment. Payment should be made by check to the attorney general's office. The office may require that all charges be paid in advance of release of the copies of the records.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-090, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-090, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94; Order 102, § 44-06-090, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-100 Protection of public records.** The public records officer shall to the extent practicable insure that records requested are not removed from the premises nor portions thereof removed by members of the public.

[Order 102, § 44-06-100, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-110 Exemptions.** (1) The office reserves the right to determine that a public record requested in accordance with the procedures outlined in WAC 44-06-080 is exempt under the provisions of RCW 42.17.310 or other law.

(2) Many of the records of the office are protected by the attorney-client privilege and/or the attorney work product doctrine. The office, in the course of representing agencies, may at times have materials or copies of materials from such agencies. A request for such records may be referred by the attorney general to the agencies whose records are being requested. The office may assert exemptions applicable to the agency or agencies which transmitted the material to the office.

(3) Pursuant to RCW 42.17.260, the office reserves the right to delete identifying details when it makes available or publishes any public record, in any cases when there is reason to believe that disclosure of such details would be an invasion of personal privacy protected by chapter 42.17 RCW. The public records officer will fully justify such deletion in writing.

(4) All denials of requests for public records must be accompanied by a written statement specifying the reason for the denial, including a statement of the specific exemption authorizing the withholding of the record and a brief explanation of how the exemption applies to the record withheld.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-110, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94; Order 102, § 44-06-110, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-120 Review of denials of public records requests.** (1) Any person who objects to the office's denial of a request for a public record may petition for prompt review of such decision by tendering a written request for review to the public records officer. The written request shall specifically refer to the written statement by the public records officer or other staff member which constituted or accompanied the denial.

(2) Immediately after receiving a written request for review of a decision denying a public record, the public records officer or other staff member denying the request shall refer it to the attorney general or his or her designated deputy attorney general. The attorney general or his or her designee shall immediately consider the matter and either affirm or reverse such denial within two business days fol-

lowing the receipt of the written request for review of the denial of the public record.

(3) Administrative remedies shall not be considered exhausted until the attorney general or the designated deputy attorney general has returned the petition with a decision or until the close of the second business day following receipt of the written request for review of the denial of the public record, whichever occurs first.

(4) For purposes of WAC 44-06-160, the office shall have concluded a public record is exempt from disclosure only after the review conducted under this section has been completed.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-120, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94. Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250 through 42.17.320. 84-10-031 (Order 103), § 44-06-120, filed 4/30/84; Order 102, § 44-06-120, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-130 Consumer protection complaints.** Unless a complainant on a consumer protection matter specifically provides to the contrary, the consumer protection division is authorized when it deems it appropriate to forward a copy of the letter of complaint to the firm which is the subject of the complaint.

[Order 102, § 44-06-130, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-140 Adoption of form.** The attorney general's office hereby adopts use by all persons requesting inspection and/or copies of records of the form set out below, entitled "Request for public records."

Return to:

Public Records Officer  
Office of the Attorney General  
P.O. Box 40100  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0100

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC RECORDS

Date ..... Time .....  
Name .....  
Address .....  
.....  
Phone number where you can  
be reached during day .....  
Description of Records:

.....  
.....  
.....

If my request is for a list of individuals, I certify that the information obtained through this request will not be used for commercial purposes.

.....  
Signature  
Number of copies .....  
Number of pages .....  
Per page charge \$ .....  
Total charge \$ .....

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-140, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority:

RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-140, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94. Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250 through 42.17.320. 84-10-031 (Order 103), § 44-06-140, filed 4/30/84; Order 102, § 44-06-140, filed 2/20/74.]

**WAC 44-06-150 Availability of pamphlet.** The office has available a pamphlet, written in plain language, explaining the provisions of the Public Records Act. Requests for a copy of the pamphlet should be directed to the Public Records Officer, Office of the Attorney General, P.O. Box 40100, Olympia, Washington 98504-0100.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17 and 34.05 RCW. 98-01-013, § 44-06-150, filed 12/5/97, effective 1/5/98. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-150, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94.]

**WAC 44-06-160 Requests for review.** As provided in RCW 42.17.325, "Whenever a state agency concludes that a public record is exempt from disclosure and denies a person opportunity to inspect or copy a public record for that reason, the person may request the attorney general to review the matter." Requests for such review shall be directed to Public Records Review, Office of the Attorney General, P.O. Box 40100, Olympia, Washington 98504-0100. The office will provide the person with a written opinion on whether the record is exempt.

Nothing in this section shall be deemed to establish an attorney-client relationship between the attorney general and a person making a request under this section.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.10.110, chapters 42.17, 19.118 and 34.05 RCW. 94-13-039, § 44-06-160, filed 6/6/94, effective 7/7/94.]

**Chapter 44-10 WAC**

**ARBITRATION AND THE ARBITRATION PROCESS**

**WAC**

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- 44-10-030 Arbitration requests.
- 44-10-031 Effect of request for arbitration filing.
- 44-10-035 Arbitration requests—Forty day written request to replace or repurchase vehicle.
- 44-10-040 Attorney general screening of arbitration requests.
- 44-10-050 Assignment to board.
- 44-10-060 Powers and duties of arbitration special master.
- 44-10-070 Manufacturer's statement.
- 44-10-080 Manufacturer's option to request a viewing of motor vehicle.
- 44-10-090 Arbitration fee.
- 44-10-100 Subpoenas.
- 44-10-110 Scheduling of arbitration hearings.
- 44-10-120 Withdrawal.
- 44-10-130 Defaults.
- 44-10-140 Representation of parties.
- 44-10-150 Settlement of dispute.
- 44-10-160 Use of technical expert.
- 44-10-170 Powers and duties of arbitrators.
- 44-10-180 The arbitration hearing.
- 44-10-200 The arbitration decision.
- 44-10-210 Technical corrections.
- 44-10-221 Resale documents—Attorney general procedures.
- 44-10-222 Manufacturer duties upon receipt of a returned vehicle.
- 44-10-223 Manufacturer, transferor and dealer duties prior to resale of a returned vehicle.
- 44-10-235 Substitute resale disclosure forms.
- 44-10-240 Warranty period for certificate of correction and warranty.
- 44-10-300 Imposition of fine for manufacturer noncompliance with an arbitration decision.
- 44-10-310 Request for review of imposition of fine.

**DISPOSITION OF SECTIONS FORMERLY CODIFIED IN THIS CHAPTER**

- 44-10-055 Composition of arbitration panel. [Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-055, filed 2/3/88.] Repealed by 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090.
- 44-10-165 Technical expert prehearing inspection report. [Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 88-09-063 (Order 88-4), § 44-10-165, filed 4/20/88.] Repealed by 96-03-155, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4.
- 44-10-215 Receipt of resale information. [Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 88-09-064 (Order 88-5), § 44-10-215, filed 4/20/88.] Repealed by 90-19-024, filed 9/11/90, effective 10/12/90. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090.
- 44-10-220 Resale of motor vehicle determined or adjudicated as having a serious safety defect. [Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-220, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 88-13-039 (Order 88-7), § 44-10-220, filed 6/9/88.] Repealed by 96-03-155, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4.
- 44-10-230 Resale of motor vehicle determined or adjudicated as having a nonconformity. [Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-230, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 88-13-039 (Order 88-7), § 44-10-230, filed 6/9/88.] Repealed by 96-03-155, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4.
- 44-10-320 Failure by the manufacturer to pay a fine. [Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 89-06-025 (Order 89-1), § 44-10-320, filed 2/24/89.] Repealed by 96-03-155, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4.

**WAC 44-10-010 Definitions.** Terms, when used in this chapter, shall have the same meaning as terms used in chapter 19.118 RCW. The following definitions shall supplement or aid in the interpretation of the definitions set forth in chapter 19.118 RCW.

"Arbitration special master" means the individual or group of individuals selected by the board to hear and decide special issues timely brought before the board.

"Attorney general" or "attorney general's office" means the person duly elected to serve as attorney general of the state of Washington and delegates authorized to act on his or her behalf.

"Intervening transferor" means any person or entity which receives, buys or otherwise transfers the returned new motor vehicle prior to the first retail transfer, sale or lease subsequent to being repurchased or replaced by the manufacturer.

"Lemon Law administration" means the section within the attorney general's office, consumer protection division, designated by the attorney general to be responsible for the implementation of chapter 19.118 RCW and related rules.

"Lemon Law resale documents" refers to the following:

(1) "Lemon Law resale windshield display" means a document created and provided by the attorney general which identifies that: (a) The vehicle was reacquired by the manufacturer after a determination, settlement or adjudication of a dispute; (b) the vehicle has one or more nonconformities or serious safety defects, or was out-of-service thirty or more

days due to diagnosis or repair of one or more nonconformities; and (c) the defects or conditions causing the vehicle to be reacquired by the manufacturer.

(2) "Lemon Law resale disclosure": Means a document created and provided by the attorney general which identifies that: (a) The vehicle was reacquired by the manufacturer after a settlement, determination or adjudication of a dispute; (b) the vehicle has one or more nonconformities or serious safety defects, or was out-of-service thirty or more days due to diagnosis or repair of one or more nonconformities; and (c) the defects or conditions causing the vehicle to be reacquired by the manufacturer. The document will provide space for the manufacturer to indicate if each nonconformity or serious safety defect has been corrected and is warranted by the manufacturer.

(3) "Notice of out-of-state disposition of a reacquired vehicle" refers to a document created and provided by the Lemon Law administration which requires the manufacturer, agent or dealer to identify the destination state and the dealer, auction, other person or entity to whom the manufacturer sells or otherwise transfers the reacquired vehicle when the vehicle is taken to another state for any disposition, including: resale, transfer or destruction.

"Person" includes every natural person, firm, partnership, corporation, association, or organization.

"Settlement" means the resolution of a dispute, under chapter 19.118 RCW, between the consumer and manufacturer after the new motor vehicle arbitration board has accepted the consumer's request for arbitration and which results in the manufacturer reacquiring the new motor vehicle directly or indirectly through an agent or a motor vehicle dealer. Settlement includes a consumer's acceptance of a decision or award for repurchase or replacement of a vehicle issued by a manufacturer sponsored dispute resolution program where the basis of the program's standards decision making are specifically related to, or identified as, some or all of the provisions of chapter 19.118 RCW and which results in the manufacturer reacquiring the new motor vehicle directly, through an agent or a motor vehicle dealer.

"Similar law of another state" refers to the law of another state which creates remedies for a manufacturer's failure to conform a vehicle to its warranty and under which the vehicle was reacquired by the manufacturer.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061, 02-12-093, § 44-10-010, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.808(2), 19.118.061, and 1998 c 298 § 6. 00-08-068, § 44-10-010, filed 4/3/00, effective 5/4/00. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-010, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 92-11-037, § 44-10-010, filed 5/18/92, effective 6/18/92. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-010, filed 12/22/87.]

**WAC 44-10-020 Designation of manufacturer contract.** (1) A new motor vehicle manufacturer shall submit, in writing, to the Attorney General's Office, Lemon Law Administration the name, address and telephone number of an individual designated by the manufacturer to receive notices related to the arbitration program, service of subpoenas, and other correspondence from the attorney general related to the manufacturer's duties and responsibilities set forth in chapter 19.118 RCW.

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(2) Where a manufacturer's production or distribution system is accomplished through more than one division or region, the manufacturer may designate an individual for a division or region for the purpose of receiving notices related to the arbitration program, service of subpoenas, and other correspondence from the attorney general related to the manufacturer's duties and responsibilities set forth in chapter 19.118 RCW.

(3) The manufacturer is responsible for providing written notice to the attorney general of its replacement of the designated individual or changes to the related address and telephone number.

(4) If no individual is designated or an insufficient address is provided all notices shall be sent to the corporate headquarters of the manufacturer.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-020, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96.]

**WAC 44-10-030 Arbitration requests.** A consumer must submit a request for arbitration form with copies of supporting documentation to the Attorney General's Office, Lemon Law Administration in Seattle or in the Attorney General's Office in Spokane, in order to apply for the new motor vehicle arbitration process. The request for arbitration form will be supplied, upon request, by the attorney general's office.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-030, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-030, filed 12/22/87.]

**WAC 44-10-031 Effect of request for arbitration filing.** (1) A request for arbitration is deemed to have been received within the thirty month limitation identified in RCW 19.118.090(2), if it: (a) Is received by the Office of the Attorney General within thirty months from the date of original delivery of the new motor vehicle to a consumer at retail; and (b) Identifies the consumer and the new motor vehicle which is the subject of the requested arbitration.

(2) If the attorney general finds that a request is not complete, the thirty month limitation will resume running three business days after the date the attorney general mails notice of incompleteness to the consumer.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-031, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96.]

**WAC 44-10-035 Arbitration requests—Forty day written request to replace or repurchase vehicle.** A consumer may file a request for arbitration any time after having sent the manufacturer a written request to replace or repurchase the new motor vehicle pursuant to RCW 19.118.-041(1). However, no arbitration hearing shall be conducted before the manufacturer has had forty calendar days to comply with the consumer's written request.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 88-19-064 (Order 88-8), § 44-10-035, filed 9/16/88.]

**WAC 44-10-040 Attorney general screening of arbitration requests.** (1) After a request for arbitration has been received, the attorney general shall review the form for completeness.

(2) The attorney general will screen the request for arbitration and supporting documentation to determine whether the request appears timely, complete and to comply with the jurisdictional requirements of chapter 19.118 RCW.

(a) If a request appears to be untimely or not in compliance with the jurisdictional requirements of chapter 19.118 RCW the attorney general will reject the request for arbitration and notify the consumer of the reason for the rejection.

(b) A request will be considered complete if the information required by the request form is provided in full or if the consumer provides a reasonable explanation for the absence of any supporting documentation.

(c) If a request is not complete, the attorney general will notify the consumer of any procedures or information required to complete the request.

(3) A consumer request that is based on a problem which does not manifest itself, is intermittent or unconfirmed shall not preclude an attorney general determination of the appearance of jurisdiction for purposes of initial screening. However, this section shall not preclude a party from raising jurisdictional issues at the arbitration hearing or subsequent court proceedings.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-040, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-040, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-040, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-050 Assignment to board.** (1) After initial screening by the attorney general, all requests for arbitration which appear to be timely, complete and to have met the jurisdictional requirements of chapter 19.118 RCW shall be assigned to the board which will record the date it receives the assignment in the request for arbitration file.

(2) The board must determine if it will accept the request for arbitration or reject the request for arbitration, for the reasons set forth in RCW 19.118.090, within three business days after the attorney general has forwarded the request for arbitration to the board.

(3) The board shall record the date of acceptance or rejection of the request for arbitration. The acceptance of the request shall commence the running of the forty-five calendar day period in which a hearing must be conducted.

(4) Upon acceptance of a request, the board shall immediately notify the Lemon Law administration. A notice of acceptance for arbitration will be sent to the consumer and manufacturer by certified mail/return receipt requested and shall inform the parties that a hearing shall be held within forty-five calendar days. The parties shall be sent formal notice of the actual hearing date by certified mail/return receipt requested, at least ten calendar days before the hearing. The designated manufacturer contact shall be sent a copy of the consumer's request and a manufacturer's statement form with the notice of acceptance.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-050, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-050, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-050, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-050, filed 2/3/88; 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-050, filed 12/22/87.]

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**WAC 44-10-060 Powers and duties of arbitration special master.** (1) An arbitration special master may be appointed by the arbitration board to hear and decide preliminary and post-hearing issues which are within the arbitration board's authority. Requests for an arbitration special master may be made in writing by either party to the Lemon Law administration. The request will be reviewed to determine whether issues identified in the special master request will be forwarded to the board or denied. Post-hearing arbitration special masters shall not resolve matters previously presented in the arbitration hearing and addressed in the arbitration decision, or extend the time for compliance beyond the time necessary to hear and notify the parties of a decision about the issues in dispute or requiring clarification.

(2) Issues which may be decided by the arbitration special master include but are not limited to: Motions to quash subpoenas, disputes related to requests to view the vehicle, disputes relating to an arbitration award including specification of the award amounts which could not have been or were not resolved at the arbitration hearing or matters necessary for compliance with the arbitration decision such as: time and place for compliance, condition of the vehicle to be returned, clarification or recalculation of refund amounts or a determination that an offered vehicle is reasonably equivalent to the vehicle being replaced. The arbitration special master may conduct telephonic conferences with a party or parties, as appropriate, and may request additional written information in order to rule on issues.

(3) An arbitration special master shall not extend the forty day period during which the manufacturer must comply with the arbitration decision except where the arbitration special master makes a finding that:

(a) The dispute could not have been brought to the board allowing sufficient time to conclude compliance within the forty day compliance period; and

(b) The manufacturer's position in the dispute is supported by the special master's decision.

(4) Arbitration special masters shall sign a written oath prior to their appointment as arbitration special master attesting to their impartiality. There shall be no ex parte communication initiated by a party with an arbitration special master.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-060, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-060, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 92-11-037, § 44-10-060, filed 5/18/92, effective 6/18/92. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-060, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-060, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-070 Manufacturer's statement.** (1) The manufacturer shall provide information relevant to the resolution of the dispute to the consumer and board on a form created by the Lemon Law administration. The manufacturer's statement form shall be completely answered and shall include, but not be limited to, the following information:

(a) A statement of any affirmative defenses, and any legal or factual issues to be raised at the hearing. Any issues or affirmative defenses not raised in documents filed prior to the hearing may be excluded or limited by the arbitrator at the hearing; except as provided in WAC 44-10-080(6).

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(b) The name, title, and business address of any person(s) the manufacturer plans to call as witnesses or from whom affidavits or written testimony will be presented;

(c) A statement identifying the year, make, model, options, color and any other significant information pertaining to the vehicle or vehicles it intends to offer as a reasonably equivalent replacement vehicle if the consumer prevails and requests replacement. If the manufacturer believes in good faith that replacement is impossible, or unreasonable, or cannot be provided timely pursuant to compliance requirements the manufacturer must raise such issue in its statement.

(2) The manufacturer must exercise its option to request a viewing of the consumer's motor vehicle by including a request to view the vehicle in the manufacturer's statement.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-070, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-070, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-070, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-080 Manufacturer's option to request a viewing of motor vehicle.** (1) A manufacturer may request a viewing of the vehicle to aid in preparation of its defense. The request for a viewing of the vehicle must be indicated in the manufacturer's statement.

(2) The manufacturer and the consumer shall attempt to arrange a mutually agreeable time and location for such viewing. If after reasonable good faith attempts to arrange a viewing, a mutually agreeable time and location is not established, the manufacturer may request the Lemon Law administration program manager to set a time and location for viewing.

(3) Upon receipt of a request to set a viewing, the Lemon Law administration program manager shall establish a time and location for viewing that is reasonably convenient for the parties. The location may be the consumer's residence if other locations are not reasonably convenient for the parties, The consumer must be present during the viewing, unless the consumer expressly waives in writing the right to be present.

(4) The viewing is not meant to be another attempt to repair the vehicle and no repair procedures shall be conducted.

(5) The manufacturer may perform limited nonrepair diagnostic examinations and inspection procedures, such as test driving the vehicle or attaching a testing device to the vehicle. The results of any diagnostic procedures or data gathered as a result of such procedures shall be supplied to the consumer as soon as it is available.

(6) If the viewing of the vehicle reveals any affirmative defenses or legal or factual issues not previously raised in the manufacturer's statement or consumer's request for arbitration, either party may file amendments with the Lemon Law administration within three business days of the viewing, or, no later than three business days prior to the hearing date, whichever is earlier.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-080, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-080, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-080, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-090 Arbitration fee.** (1) A three dollar arbitration fee shall be collected by the new motor vehicle

dealer or lease company from the consumer at completion of the sale or lease of a new motor vehicle. No fee shall be collected where the purchase, lease or transfer is made to a party other than a consumer.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-090, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 90-19-024, § 44-10-090, filed 9/11/90, effective 10/12/90. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(7). 87-23-030 (Order 87-2), § 44-10-090, filed 11/13/87.]

**WAC 44-10-100 Subpoenas.** (1) A party's request for a subpoena to be issued on behalf of the board must be received by the Lemon Law administration with the consumer's request for arbitration or the manufacturer's statement to be considered. A consumer may submit a request for a subpoena within three business days of receipt of a manufacturer's statement. The board shall make a determination of whether the documents and records sought by the party are reasonably related to the dispute and notify the Lemon Law administration of the determination.

(2) A subpoena issued by the attorney general shall identify the party causing the issuance of the subpoena, designate that the subpoena is issued by the attorney general pursuant to RCW 19.118.080, state the purpose of the proceeding, and command the person to whom it is directed to produce at the time and place set in the subpoena the designated documents or records under his or her control.

(3) Service of the subpoena may be made by certified mail, return receipt requested or by overnight express delivery.

(4) A person to whom a subpoena is directed may submit a written request to suspend or limit the terms of the subpoena to the Lemon Law administration within five business days of receipt of the subpoena and shall notify the party who requested the subpoena, of the request to suspend or limit it. The request must be accompanied by a short statement setting forth the basis for the request. The Lemon Law administration program manager may suspend or modify the subpoena or shall assign the request to be heard at the arbitration hearing.

(5) Where the Lemon Law administration program manager upholds or modifies the subpoena, the responding person or party shall comply with the date set in the subpoena or within five business days, whichever is greater.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-100, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-100, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-100, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-100, filed 12/22/87.]

**WAC 44-10-110 Scheduling of arbitration hearings.** The board has the authority to schedule the arbitration hearing at its discretion. The Lemon Law administration shall notify the parties of the date, time and place by certified letter mailed at least ten calendar days prior to the hearing. Hearings may be scheduled during business hours, Monday through Thursday evenings, or Saturdays. If for any reason an arbitration hearing must be rescheduled, the board or the Lemon Law administration shall promptly notify the parties by mail or telephone.



[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-110, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-110, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-110, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-110, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-120 Withdrawal.** A consumer may withdraw a request for arbitration at any time.

A withdrawal shall be granted without prejudice, although upon notice to the Lemon Law administration of withdrawal, the thirty month period in which the consumer must submit a request for arbitration shall resume running. A consumer who has withdrawn may resubmit the claim for arbitration. However, if the consumer withdraws the second request, the withdrawal shall be considered a withdrawal with prejudice and the consumer shall not be allowed to resubmit the claim for arbitration.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-120, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-120, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080. 89-06-026 (Order 89-2), § 44-10-120, filed 2/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-120, filed 12/22/87.]

**WAC 44-10-130 Defaults.** (1) A party who fails to appear at the arbitration hearing will be considered in default.

(2) If a manufacturer defaults the arbitrator shall hold the hearing. The arbitrator shall make a decision based on the evidence presented by the consumer, and any files or documentation contained in the record including the manufacturer's statement and other evidence or documentation submitted by the manufacturer.

(3) If the consumer defaults it shall be considered a withdrawal with prejudice of the request for arbitration. The hearing shall be canceled if the consumer defaults.

(4) The default shall be final unless within twenty-four hours of the hearing time, the manufacturer or consumer contacts the Lemon Law administration to request that the default be set aside. The request shall include evidence of an unforeseeable circumstance that resulted in the failure of the party to appear. Such request shall be considered by the Lemon Law administration program manager who will hear arguments from both parties on the request to set aside the default which may be conducted via telephone conference call. If the default is set aside, a new hearing shall be scheduled within ten calendar days of the original hearing date, and the parties shall be informed of the new date and time at least five business days prior to the hearing date when possible.

(5) If both parties default, the disposition of the case shall be handled as if only the consumer defaulted pursuant to WAC 44-10-130(3).

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-130, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-130, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-130, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-130, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-140 Representation of parties.** (1) Any party to the arbitration hearing may be represented by coun-

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sel. If either party opts to be so represented, said party shall immediately notify the Lemon Law administration and the other party of the name and address of the attorney.

(2) The consumer may be represented by himself or herself or by legal counsel, but may not be represented by a non-attorney. However, a person, acting as an interpreter, may assist a party in the presentation of the case if such assistance is necessary because of a mental or physical handicap or language barrier which would preclude the party from adequately representing himself or herself.

(3) A manufacturer may be represented by legal counsel, authorized employee or agent.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-140, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-140, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-140, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-140, filed 12/22/87.]

**WAC 44-10-150 Settlement of dispute.** (1) Both parties shall notify the Lemon Law administration of a resolution for settlement of the dispute after the request for arbitration has been accepted by the arbitration board. The Lemon Law administration shall verify the terms of the settlement or resolution. The disclosure of terms is for statutorily required record keeping only. The settlement or agreement to otherwise resolve the dispute is not subject to approval by the board or the attorney general.

(2) Notice of settlement or agreement to resolve the dispute shall be treated procedurally as if the consumer had withdrawn from the arbitration process, as set forth in WAC 44-10-120.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-150, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-150, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-150, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-150, filed 12/22/87.]

**WAC 44-10-160 Use of technical expert.** (1) A technical expert is assigned by the board to advise and consult with an arbitrator. Technical experts shall not be directly involved in the manufacture, distribution, sale, or warranty service of any motor vehicle.

(2) Either party may request that a technical expert be assigned to a dispute. Such assignment, however, shall be at the discretion of the board. The board may upon their own volition assign a technical expert to a dispute.

(3) If a technical expert is assigned to a dispute, and is requested by the arbitrator to perform an inspection of the vehicle, other than as part of the arbitration hearing, a notice of the time, date and location of the technical expert's inspection of the vehicle will be provided to both parties. This section does not confer a right, for either party, to be present during the inspection of the vehicle, however, either party may be present. Any written report or results of the expert's inspection shall be supplied to the parties as soon as it is available. The technical expert shall be present at the hearing or shall be available by telephone at the time of hearing, and may be examined by either party or the arbitrator.

(4) The expert shall sign a written oath attesting to his or her impartiality prior to the commencement of each arbitration hearing to which he or she has been assigned.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061, 02-12-093, § 44-10-160, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4, 96-03-155, § 44-10-160, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090, 90-19-024, § 44-10-160, filed 9/11/90, effective 10/12/90. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090, 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-160, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-160, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-170 Powers and duties of arbitrators.** (1)

Arbitrators shall have the duty to conduct fair and impartial hearings, to take all necessary actions to avoid delay in the disposition of proceedings, to maintain order, and to meet the sixty day time frame required by RCW 19.118.090 for the rendering of a decision. They shall have all powers necessary to meet these ends including, but not limited to, the power:

(a) To consider any and all evidence offered by the parties which the arbitrator deems necessary to an understanding and determination of the dispute;

(b) To regulate the course of the hearings and the conduct of the parties, their representatives and witnesses;

(c) To schedule vehicle inspection by the technical experts, if deemed necessary, at such time and place as the arbitrator determines;

(d) To continue the arbitration hearing to a subsequent date if, at the initial hearing, the arbitrator determines that additional information is necessary in order to render a fair and accurate decision. Such continuance shall be held within ten calendar days of the initial hearing;

(e) To impose sanctions for failure of a party to comply with a subpoena pursuant to RCW 19.118.080 (2)(b);

(f) To calculate and order the joint liability for compliance obligations of motor home manufacturers, when applicable, as part of an arbitration decision when ordering repurchase or replacement of a new motor vehicle.

(2) The board is responsible for the assignment of arbitrators to arbitration hearings. The selection and assignment of arbitrators is not subject to the approval of either party.

(3) Arbitrators must not have a personal interest in the outcome of any hearing, nor be acquainted with any of the participants except as such acquaintance may occur in the hearing process, nor hold any prejudice toward any party. Arbitrators shall not be directly involved in the manufacture, distribution, sale, or warranty service of any motor vehicle. Arbitrators shall maintain their impartiality throughout the course of the arbitration proceedings.

(a) An arbitrator shall sign a written oath prior to the commencement of each arbitration hearing to which he or she has been assigned, attesting to his or her impartiality in that case.

(b) There shall be no direct communication between the parties and the arbitrators other than at the arbitration hearing. Any other oral or written communications between the parties and the arbitrators shall be channeled through the board. Any prohibited contact shall be reported by the arbitrators to the board and noted in the case record.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061, 02-12-093, § 44-10-170, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW

19.118.080(2), 19.118.061, and 1998 c 298 § 6, 00-08-068, § 44-10-170, filed 4/3/00, effective 5/4/00. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4, 96-03-155, § 44-10-170, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090, 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-170, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-01-093 (Order 87-4), § 44-10-170, filed 12/22/87.]

**WAC 44-10-180 The arbitration hearing.** (1) The conduct of the hearing shall encourage a full and complete disclosure of the facts.

(2) Arbitrators may admit and give probative effect to evidence which possesses probative value commonly accepted by reasonably prudent people in the conduct of their affairs. They shall give effect to the rules of privilege recognized by law. They may exclude incompetent, irrelevant, immaterial, and unduly repetitious evidence.

(3) The consumer shall present his or her evidence and witnesses, then the manufacturer shall present its evidence and witnesses.

(4) Each party may question the other after each presentation, and may question each witness after testimony. The arbitrator may question any party or witness at any time.

(5) The arbitrator shall ensure that a tape recording record of the hearing is maintained.

(6) The arbitrator shall administer an oath or affirmation to each individual who testifies.

(7) The hearing procedure contemplates that both parties will be present. However, either party may offer written testimony only, as long as the board and the other party are informed of such and are in receipt of that evidence prior to the day of the hearing.

(8) A party may request presentation of its case by telephone.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4, 96-03-155, § 44-10-180, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090, 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-180, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-180, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-200 The arbitration decision.** (1) The arbitration board shall issue the decision in each case within sixty calendar days of acceptance of the request for arbitration:

(a) All decisions shall be written, in a form to be provided by the Lemon Law administration, dated and signed by the arbitrator, and sent by certified mail to the parties;

(b) The date on which the board provides the arbitration decision to the Lemon Law administration shall determine compliance with the sixty day requirement to issue an arbitration decision;

(c) The written decision shall contain findings of fact and conclusions of law as to whether the motor vehicle meets the statutory standards for refund or replacement;

(i) If the consumer prevails and has elected repurchase of the vehicle, the decision shall include the statutory calculations used to determine the monetary award;

(ii) If the consumer prevails and has elected replacement of the vehicle, the decision shall identify or describe a reasonably equivalent replacement vehicle and any refundable incidental costs;

(iii) If the consumer prevails and the manufacturer is represented by counsel, the decision shall include a description of the awarded reasonable costs and attorneys' fees incurred by the consumer in connection with board proceedings.

Reasonable costs and attorneys' fees shall be determined by the arbitrator based on an affidavit of costs and fees prepared by the consumer's attorney and submitted no later than the conclusion of the arbitration hearing. The affidavit may be amended for post-hearing costs and fees. The amended affidavit of costs and fees must be delivered to the manufacturer's designated representative by certified mail or personal service and a copy submitted to the Lemon Law administration by the consumer's attorney within thirty days of the consumer's acceptance of the decision but in no case after a manufacturer's compliance with a decision;

(d) Upon receipt of the board's decision, the Lemon Law administration will distribute it to the parties by certified mail.

(2) Upon request of a party, an arbitrator shall make factual findings and modify the offset total where the wear and tear on those portions of the motor home designated, used, or maintained primarily as a mobile dwelling, office, or commercial space is significantly greater or significantly less than that which could be reasonably expected based on the mileage attributable to the consumer's use of the motor home in an arbitration decision awarding repurchase or replacement of a new motor vehicle originally purchased or leased at retail after June 30, 1998. An arbitrator will consider the actual amount of time that portions of the motor home were in use as dwelling, office or commercial space. The arbitrator shall not consider wear and tear resulting from:

(a) Defects in materials or workmanship in the manufacture of the motor home including the dwelling, office or commercial space;

(b) Damage due to removal of equipment pursuant to RCW 19.118.095 (1)(a); or

(c) Repairs.

The modification to the reasonable offset for use may not result in the addition or reduction of the offset for use calculation by more than one-third. The modification shall be specified as a percentage for reduction or addition to the offset calculation. The modification to the reasonable offset for use shall apply to the offset calculation at the time of repurchase or replacement of the motor home.

(3)(a) If a motor home manufacturer:

(i) Has met or exceeded the reasonable number of attempts to diagnose or repair the vehicle as set forth in RCW 19.118.041 (3)(a) or (b); or

(ii) Is responsible for sixty or more applicable days out of service by reason of diagnosis or repair as set forth in RCW 19.118.041 (3)(c), the motor home manufacturer is independently liable for compliance with a decision awarding repurchase or replacement of the motor home.

(b) If a motor home manufacturer has not met the criteria set forth in (a)(i) and (ii) of this subsection, but has contributed to the combined total of sixty or more days out of service by reason of diagnosis or repair as set forth in RCW 19.118.041 (3)(c), the manufacturer is jointly liable with the other liable motor home manufacturers for compliance with a decision awarding repurchase or replacement of the motor home.

(c) If a motor home manufacturer has met or exceeded the reasonable number of attempts to diagnose or repair the vehicle as set forth in RCW 19.118.041 (3)(a) or (b), and the manufacturer, together with one or more other motor home manufacturers, contributed to a combined total of sixty or more days out of service by reason of diagnosis or repair as set forth in RCW 19.118.041 (3)(c), the motor home manufacturer is jointly and severally liable for compliance with a decision awarding repurchase or replacement of the motor home.

(d) In a decision awarding repurchase or replacement of a motor home, and that allocates compliance liability, an arbitrator will identify the motor home manufacturer's minimum percentage of contribution to compliance with the award. In determining the allocation of liability among jointly liable motor home manufacturers, the arbitrator will consider a motor home manufacturer's contribution to the total number of applicable days out of service as a factor.

(e) When applicable as set forth in RCW 19.118.090(5), the arbitrator must allocate liability for the consumer's costs and attorneys' fees among the liable motor home manufacturers represented by counsel. The arbitrator will specify the liable motor home manufacturer's minimum percentage of contribution to compliance with the award. The motor home manufacturer's minimum percentage of contribution for the consumer's costs and attorneys' fees may be different from the minimum percentage of contribution of the motor home manufacturer's compliance obligation due to other liable motor home manufacturers' lack of representation by counsel.

(f) An arbitrator must specify in the decision that the lack of compliance, late or delayed compliance, or the filing of an appeal by another liable motor home manufacturer will not affect a motor home manufacturer's independent liability for compliance with a decision awarding repurchase or replacement of the motor home.

(g) At the conclusion of the arbitration hearing regarding a motor home purchased or leased after June 30, 1998, a motor home manufacturer may present testimony and other evidence regarding the allocation of liability for compliance with arbitration decisions awarding repurchase or replacement of the motor home. If the motor home manufacturers agree amongst themselves to terms for the allocation of liability for compliance obligations, the arbitrator must include the terms in the arbitration decisions awarding repurchase or replacement of the motor home if the terms are consistent with the arbitration decisions, specific, complete and not otherwise contrary to chapter 19.118 RCW.

(4) Included with the copy of the arbitration decision sent to the consumer shall be a form to be completed by the consumer, indicating acceptance or rejection of the decision and general information to the consumer explaining the consumer's right to appeal the decision to superior court. The consumer must return the form to the Lemon Law administration within sixty calendar days from the date of the consumer's receipt of the decision or the decision will be deemed to have been rejected as of the sixty-first day.

(5) The consumer shall have one hundred twenty calendar days from the date of the rejection of the decision to file a petition of appeal in superior court. At the time of filing an appeal, the consumer shall deliver by certified mail or by per-

sonal service a conformed copy of the petition to the attorney general.

(6) If the consumer accepts a decision which awards repurchase or replacement, the Lemon Law administration shall send a copy of the form completed by the consumer indicating acceptance by certified mail for the board to the manufacturer and shall include a manufacturer's intent form.

A verification of compliance form shall be sent to the consumer by the Lemon Law administration. The verification of compliance form shall be completed and returned to the Lemon Law administration by the consumer upon the manufacturer's compliance with the decision.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-200, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.808(2), 19.118.061, and 1998 c 298 § 6. 00-08-068, § 44-10-200, filed 4/3/00, effective 5/4/00. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-200, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 90-19-024, § 44-10-200, filed 9/11/90, effective 10/12/90. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-200, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-200, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-210 Technical corrections.** (1) The board or the Lemon Law administration program manager may make "technical corrections" to an arbitration decision. "Technical corrections" shall generally be defined as computational corrections, typographical corrections, or other minor corrections.

(2) A party may submit a written request for technical corrections to the Lemon Law administration setting forth the requested correction(s) and reason(s). Such request must be received within ten calendar days of the party's receipt of the decision.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-210, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-210, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7). 88-04-081 (Order 88-2), § 44-10-210, filed 2/3/88.]

**WAC 44-10-221 Resale documents—Attorney general procedures.** (1) When a vehicle has been determined by the new motor vehicle arbitration board, or has been adjudicated in a superior or appellate court of this state, as having one or more nonconformities or serious safety defects that have been subject to a reasonable number of attempts by the manufacturer to conform the vehicle to the warranty:

(a) The Lemon Law administration will provide the manufacturer with the "Lemon Law resale documents" necessary to resell or otherwise transfer the vehicle together with instructions regarding compliance with RCW 19.118.061 and applicable rules;

(b) The Lemon Law administration will provide the manufacturer with the required documents by certified mail at the conclusion of the period pursuant to RCW 19.118.090 (9) for a manufacturer to file an appeal or upon notice from the manufacturer of receipt of the vehicle, whichever occurs first.

(2) When a vehicle is the subject of a "settlement" under chapter 19.118 RCW:

(a) The Lemon Law administration will provide the manufacturer with the "Lemon Law resale documents" necessary to resell or otherwise transfer the vehicle together with

instructions regarding compliance with the RCW 19.118.061 and applicable rules;

(b) The Lemon Law administration will provide the manufacturer with the required documents by certified mail upon notice of the settlement by the parties or upon receipt from a manufacturer sponsored dispute resolution program of a decision or award, and notice of the consumer's acceptance of the award for repurchase or replacement of a vehicle where the basis of the program's decision-making standards are specifically related to or identified as some or all of the provisions of chapter 19.118 RCW and which will result in the manufacturer reacquiring the new motor vehicle directly, through an agent or a motor vehicle dealer.

(3) When a vehicle is the subject of final determination, adjudication or settlement under a "similar law of another state":

(a) The Lemon Law administration will provide the manufacturer, agent, motor vehicle dealer or other transferor with the resale documents necessary to resell or otherwise transfer the vehicle together with instructions regarding compliance with this section;

(b) The Lemon Law administration will provide the manufacturer, agent, motor vehicle dealer or other transferor with the resale documents by certified mail upon receiving a written request for Lemon Law resale documents, which includes a description of the defects or conditions causing the vehicle to be reacquired by the manufacturer.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-221, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-221, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96.]

**WAC 44-10-222 Manufacturer duties upon receipt of a returned vehicle.** The manufacturer must:

(1) Notify the Lemon Law administration and the department of licensing upon receipt of the vehicle from the consumer due to a determination, adjudication or settlement pursuant to chapter 19.118 RCW and chapter 44-10 WAC.

(2) Attach the "Lemon law resale windshield display," as provided by the Lemon Law administration, to the lower center of the front windshield of the vehicle in a manner so as to be readily visible from the exterior of the vehicle.

(3) Correct and warrant a serious safety defect.

(4) Notify the Lemon Law administration and the department of licensing of correction of a nonconformity or serious safety defect and execute the appropriate section of the Lemon Law resale documents.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-222, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-222, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96.]

**WAC 44-10-223 Manufacturer, transferor and dealer duties prior to resale of a returned vehicle.** After the manufacturer's receipt of a vehicle and prior to first subsequent retail transfer, sale or lease of a vehicle subject to the requirements of RCW 19.118.061:

(1) The manufacturer, agent or new motor vehicle dealer with actual knowledge of a determination, adjudication or settlement must deliver the Lemon Law resale documents with the vehicle to a wholesale or retail buyer, or transferor.

(2) The buyer or transferor should sign and date the acknowledgement of receipt of the Lemon Law resale documents on the "Lemon Law resale disclosure" in each wholesale transaction.

(3) An intervening transferor who receives the "Lemon Law resale disclosure" or "notice of correction and warranty" is prohibited from transferring, selling, or leasing the vehicle without delivery of the "Lemon Law resale disclosure" and any "notice of correction and warranty" with the vehicle to the next transferor, purchaser or lessee.

(4) The "Lemon Law resale windshield display" can only be removed by the first subsequent retail purchaser or lessee of the motor vehicle who has signed the Lemon Law resale disclosure form.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-223, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96.]

**WAC 44-10-235 Substitute resale disclosure forms.**

(1) A manufacturer may submit to the attorney general for approval a proposed substitute form(s) for the consumer disclosure notice and certification of repair and warranty as required for resale of a vehicle.

(2) A substitute form must include:

(a) A disclosure that the manufacturer was required to repurchase or replace the vehicle from the previous owner pursuant to the Motor Vehicle Warranties Act, chapter 19.118 RCW, due to specified defects, conditions, or serious safety defects in the vehicle;

(b) A certification of repair and warranty for at least twelve months or twelve thousand miles, whichever occurs first, of any representation of correction or repair for each defect, condition, or serious safety defect;

(c) A disclosure that the title of ownership issued by the department of licensing will have permanent notations that the vehicle was returned pursuant to chapter 19.118 RCW and which will indicate whether or not the defect or condition has been corrected by the manufacturer;

(d) Directions for the distribution of the form copies and that the substitute form must be signed by the subsequent retail purchaser;

(e) A copy of the substitute form which is to be provided to the subsequent retail purchaser;

(f) Two copies of the substitute form which are to be immediately sent to the attorney general and the department of licensing upon retail sale of the vehicle.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 90-19-024, § 44-10-235, filed 9/11/90, effective 10/12/90.]

**WAC 44-10-240 Warranty period for certificate of correction and warranty.** Any warranty of a correction of a defect issued pursuant to the provisions of RCW 19.118.061 shall be for not less than one year from the date of resale or an additional twelve thousand miles from the date of resale, whichever occurs first.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061, 19.118.080 and 19.118.090. 89-16-024 (Order 89-4), § 44-10-240, filed 7/24/89, effective 8/24/89. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 88-09-064 (Order 88-5), § 44-10-240, filed 4/20/88.]

**WAC 44-10-300 Imposition of fine for manufacturer noncompliance with an arbitration decision.** (1) Pursuant

to RCW 19.118.090, the Lemon Law administration program manager may impose a fine against a manufacturer if, after forty calendar days from the manufacturer's receipt of notice of consumer's acceptance of an arbitration decision, the manufacturer has not complied with the decision, notwithstanding any arbitration special master hearing or findings. Notice of the imposition of fine shall be to the manufacturer by certified mail or personal service.

(2) A fine against the manufacturer for noncompliance may be imposed according to the following schedule for each day after the forty day calendar period:

DAYS 1 THROUGH 10 . . . . .	\$ 300.00 PER DAY
DAYS 11 THROUGH 20 . . . . .	\$ 500.00 PER DAY
DAYS 21 THROUGH 30 . . . . .	\$ 700.00 PER DAY
DAYS 31 AND ON . . . . .	\$1000.00 PER DAY

The foregoing fines shall accrue until the manufacturer complies or until one hundred thousand dollars has accrued, whichever occurs first.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061. 02-12-093, § 44-10-300, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 (2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-300, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090(7). 91-02-080, § 44-10-300, filed 12/31/90, effective 1/31/91. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080. 89-06-025 (Order 89-1), § 44-10-300, filed 2/24/89.]

**WAC 44-10-310 Request for review of imposition of fine.**

(1) The manufacturer shall have ten days from the date of receipt of notice of imposition of fine to request a review of imposition of fine. The manufacturer's request for review of imposition of fine shall be sent to the Lemon Law administration in writing and shall state the reasons for the manufacturer's noncompliance with the arbitrator's decision within the forty calendar day period.

(2) Upon receipt of a request for review of imposition of fine, the Lemon Law administration shall have ten days to conduct a review or request additional information from the parties or other persons regarding manufacturer noncompliance.

(3) The review shall be limited to determining whether the manufacturer has shown by clear and convincing evidence that any delay or failure of the manufacturer to comply within forty calendar days following the manufacturer's receipt of notice of consumer's acceptance was beyond the manufacturer's control or was acceptable to the consumer as evidenced by a written statement signed by the consumer. No other issues shall be considered in the review.

(4) The Lemon Law administration shall issue a written review determination which shall be delivered to the manufacturer by certified mail or personal service.

(5) If it is determined that the manufacturer's noncompliance was beyond the manufacturer's control or was acceptable to the consumer as evidenced by a written statement from the consumer, the imposition of fine shall be rescinded. The imposition of fine shall be affirmed where the manufacturer has failed to show clear and convincing evidence as required by WAC 44-10-310(3). If the imposition of fine is affirmed, the manufacturer shall be liable for a fine according to the schedule specified in WAC 44-10-300(2) including all days during the pendency of review under this section and

until compliance with the arbitrator's decision or until one hundred thousand dollars has accrued, whichever comes first.

(6) If a fine is rescinded under WAC 44-10-310(5) the Lemon Law administration program manager may impose a fine against the manufacturer where the manufacturer fails to comply with the agreement between the manufacturer and the consumer, or when the manufacturer fails to comply immediately after the circumstances no longer exist which made compliance beyond the control of the manufacturer. Notice of such fine shall be by certified mail or personnel service to the manufacturer and shall be imposed according to the schedule in WAC 44-10-300(2), and imposition of such fine is subject to review by the Lemon Law administration upon request of the manufacturer under WAC 44-10-310.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2), 19.118.061, 02-12-093, § 44-10-310, filed 6/4/02, effective 7/5/02. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080(2) and (7), 19.118.061 and 1995 c 254 § 4. 96-03-155, § 44-10-310, filed 1/24/96, effective 2/24/96. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.080 and 19.118.090(7), 91-02-080, § 44-10-310, filed 12/31/90, effective 1/31/91. Statutory Authority: RCW 19.118.061 and 19.118.080, 89-06-025 (Order 89-1), § 44-10-310, filed 2/24/89.]

## Chapter 44-14 WAC

### PUBLIC RECORDS ACT—MODEL RULES

#### WAC

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## INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

### WAC 44-14-00001 Statutory authority and purpose.

The legislature directed the attorney general to adopt advisory model rules on public records compliance and to revise them from time to time. RCW 42.17.348 (2) and (3)/42.56.570 (2) and (3). The purpose of the model rules is to provide information to records requestors and state and local agencies about "best practices" for complying with the Public Records Act, RCW 42.17.250/42.56.040 through 42.17.348/42.56.570 ("act"). The overall goal of the model rules is to establish a culture of compliance among agencies and a culture of cooperation among requestors by standardizing best practices throughout the state. The attorney general encourages state and local agencies to adopt the model rules (but not necessarily the comments) by regulation or ordinance.

The act applies to all state agencies and local units of government. The model rules use the term "agency" to refer to either a state or local agency. Upon adoption, each agency would change that term to name itself (such as changing references from "name of agency" to "city"). To assist state and local agencies considering adopting the model rules, an electronic version of the rules is available on the attorney general's web site, [www.atg.wa.gov/records/modelrules](http://www.atg.wa.gov/records/modelrules).

The model rules are the product of an extensive outreach project. The attorney general held thirteen public forums all across the state to obtain the views of requestors and agencies. Many requestors and agencies also provided detailed written comments that are contained in the rule-making file. The model rules reflect many of the points and concerns presented in those forums.

The model rules provide one approach (or, in some cases, alternate approaches) to processing public records requests. Agencies vary enormously in size, resources, and complexity of requests received. Any "one-size-fits-all"

approach in the model rules, therefore, may not be best for requestors and agencies.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-00001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-00002 Format of model rules.** We are publishing the model rules with comments. The comments have five-digit WAC numbers such as WAC 44-14-04001. The model rules themselves have three-digit WAC numbers such as WAC 44-14-040.

The comments are designed to explain the basis and rationale for the rules themselves as well as provide broader context and legal guidance. To do so, the comments contain many citations to statutes, cases, and formal attorney general's opinions.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-00002, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-00003 Model rules and comments are nonbinding.** The model rules, and the comments accompanying them, are advisory only and do not bind any agency. Accordingly, many of the comments to the model rules use the word "should" or "may" to describe what an agency or requestor is encouraged to do. The use of the words "should" or "may" are permissive, not mandatory, and are not intended to create any legal duty.

While the model rules and comments are nonbinding, they should be carefully considered by requestors and agencies. The model rules and comments were adopted after extensive statewide hearings and voluminous comments from a wide variety of interested parties.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-00003, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-00004 Recodification of the act.** On July 1, 2006, the act will be recodified. Chapter 274, Laws of 2005. The act will be known as the "Public Records Act" and will be codified in chapter 42.56 RCW. The exemptions in the act are recodified and grouped together by topic. The recodification does not change substantive law. The model rules provide dual citations to the current act, chapter 42.17 RCW, and the newly codified act, chapter 42.56 RCW (for example, RCW 42.17.340/42.56.550).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-00004, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-00005 Training is critical.** The act is complicated, and compliance requires training. Training can be the difference between a satisfied requestor and expensive litigation. The attorney general's office strongly encourages agencies to provide thorough and ongoing training to agency staff on public records compliance. All agency employees should receive basic training on public records compliance and records retention; public records officers should receive more intensive training.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-00005, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-00006 Additional resources.** Several web sites provide information on the act. The attorney general (2007 Ed.)

office's web site on public records is [www.atg.wa.gov/records/deskbook.shtml](http://www.atg.wa.gov/records/deskbook.shtml). The municipal research service center, an entity serving local governments, provides a public records handbook at [www.mrsc.org/Publications/prdpub04.pdf](http://www.mrsc.org/Publications/prdpub04.pdf). A requestor's organization, the Washington Coalition for Open Government, has materials on its site at [www.washingtoncog.org](http://www.washingtoncog.org).

The Washington State Bar Association is publishing a twenty-two-chapter deskbook on public records in 2006. It will be available for purchase at [www.wsba.org](http://www.wsba.org).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-00006, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE

**WAC 44-14-010 Authority and purpose.** (1) RCW 42.17.260(1)/42.56.070(1) requires each agency to make available for inspection and copying nonexempt "public records" in accordance with published rules. The act defines "public record" to include any "writing containing information relating to the conduct of government or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function prepared, owned, used, or retained" by the agency. RCW 42.17.260(2)/42.56.070(2) requires each agency to set forth "for informational purposes" every law, in addition to the Public Records Act, that exempts or prohibits the disclosure of public records held by that agency.

(2) The purpose of these rules is to establish the procedures (name of agency) will follow in order to provide full access to public records. These rules provide information to persons wishing to request access to public records of the (name of agency) and establish processes for both requestors and (name of agency) staff that are designed to best assist members of the public in obtaining such access.

(3) The purpose of the act is to provide the public full access to information concerning the conduct of government, mindful of individuals' privacy rights and the desirability of the efficient administration of government. The act and these rules will be interpreted in favor of disclosure. In carrying out its responsibilities under the act, the (name of agency) will be guided by the provisions of the act describing its purposes and interpretation.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-010, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## Comments to WAC 44-14-010

**WAC 44-14-01001 Scope of coverage of Public Records Act.** The act applies to an "agency." RCW 42.17-260(1)/2.56.070(1). "'Agency' includes all state agencies and all local agencies. 'State agency' includes every state office, department, division, bureau, board, commission, or other state agency. 'Local agency' includes every county, city, town, municipal corporation, quasi-municipal corporation, or special purpose district, or any office, department, division, bureau, board, commission, or agency thereof, or other local public agency." RCW 42.17.020(2).

Court files and judges' files are not subject to the act.<sup>1</sup> Access to these records is governed by court rules and common law. The model rules, therefore, do not address access to court records.

An entity which is not an "agency" can still be subject to the act when it is the functional equivalent of an agency. Courts have applied a four-factor, case-by-case test. The factors are:

- (1) Whether the entity performs a government function;
  - (2) The level of government funding;
  - (3) The extent of government involvement or regulation;
- and
- (4) Whether the entity was created by the government.

Op. Att'y Gen. 2 (2002).<sup>2</sup>

Some agencies, most notably counties, are a collection of separate quasi-autonomous departments which are governed by different elected officials (such as a county assessor and prosecuting attorney). However, the act defines the county as a whole as an "agency" subject to the act. RCW 42.17.020(2). An agency should coordinate responses to records requests across departmental lines. RCW 42.17.253(1) (agency's public records officer must "oversee the agency's compliance" with act).

Notes: <sup>1</sup>*Nast v. Michels*, 107 Wn.2d 300, 730 P.2d 54 (1986).

<sup>2</sup>*See also Telford v. Thurston County Bd. of Comm'rs*, 95 Wn. App. 149, 162, 974 P.2d 886, *review denied*, 138 Wn.2d 1015, 989 P.2d 1143 (1999); Op. Att'y Gen. 5 (1991).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-01001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-01002 Requirement that agencies adopt reasonable regulations for public records requests.** The act provides: "Agencies shall adopt and enforce reasonable rules and regulations...to provide full public access to public records, to protect public records from damage or disorganization, and to prevent excessive interference with other essential functions of the agency.... Such rules and regulations shall provide for the fullest assistance to inquirers and the most timely possible action on requests for information." RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. Therefore, an agency must adopt "reasonable" regulations providing for the "fullest assistance" to requestors and the "most timely possible action on requests."

At the same time, an agency's regulations must "protect public records from damage or disorganization" and "prevent excessive interference" with other essential agency functions. Another provision of the act states that providing public records should not "unreasonably disrupt the operations of the agency." RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. This provision allows an agency to take reasonable precautions to prevent a requestor from being unreasonably disruptive or disrespectful to agency staff.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-01002, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-01003 Construction and application of act.** The act declares: "The people of this state do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies that serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may maintain control over the instruments that they have created." RCW 42.17.251/42.56.030. The act further provides: "...mindful of the right of individuals to privacy and of the desirability of the efficient admin-

istration of government, full access to information concerning the conduct of government on every level must be assured as a fundamental and necessary precondition to the sound governance of a free society." RCW 42.17.010(11). The act further provides: "Courts shall take into account the policy of (the act) that free and open examination of public records is in the public interest, even though such examination may cause inconvenience or embarrassment to public officials or others." RCW 42.17.340(3)/42.56.550(3).

Because the purpose of the act is to allow people to be informed about governmental decisions (and therefore help keep government accountable) while at the same time being "mindful of the right of individuals to privacy," it should not be used to obtain records containing purely personal information that has absolutely no bearing on the conduct of government.

The act emphasizes three separate times that it must be liberally construed to effect its purpose, which is the disclosure of nonexempt public records. RCW 42.17.010, 42.17.251/42.56.030, 42.17.920.<sup>1</sup> The act places the burden on the agency of proving a record is not subject to disclosure or that its estimate of time to provide a full response is "reasonable." RCW 42.17.340 (1) and (2)/42.56.550 (1) and (2). The act also encourages disclosure by awarding a requestor reasonable attorneys fees, costs, and a daily penalty if the agency fails to meet its burden of proving the record is not subject to disclosure or its estimate is not "reasonable." RCW 42.17.340(4)/42.56.550(4).

An additional incentive for disclosure is RCW 42.17.258, which provides: "No public agency, public official, public employee, or custodian shall be liable, nor shall a cause of action exist, for any loss or damage based upon the release of a public record if the public agency, public official, public employee, or custodian acted in good faith in attempting to comply" with the act.

Note: <sup>1</sup>*See King County v. Sheehan*, 114 Wn. App. 325, 338, 57 P.3d 307 (2002) (referring to the three legislative intent provisions of the act as "the thrice-repeated legislative mandate that exemptions under the Public Records Act are to be narrowly construed.").

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-01003, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## AGENCY DESCRIPTION—CONTACT INFORMATION—PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICER

**WAC 44-14-020 Agency description—Contact information—Public records officer.** (1) The (name of agency) (describe services provided by agency). The (name of agency's) central office is located at (describe). The (name of agency) has field offices at (describe, if applicable).

(2) Any person wishing to request access to public records of (agency), or seeking assistance in making such a request should contact the public records officer of the (name of agency):

Public Records Officer  
(Agency)  
(Address)  
(Telephone number)  
(fax number)  
(e-mail)



Information is also available at the (name of agency's) web site at (web site address).

(3) The public records officer will oversee compliance with the act but another (name of agency) staff member may process the request. Therefore, these rules will refer to the public records officer "or designee." The public records officer or designee and the (name of agency) will provide the "fullest assistance" to requestors; create and maintain for use by the public and (name of agency) officials an index to public records of the (name of agency, if applicable); ensure that public records are protected from damage or disorganization; and prevent fulfilling public records requests from causing excessive interference with essential functions of the (name of agency).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-020, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

### Comments to WAC 44-14-020

**WAC 44-14-02001 Agency must publish its procedures.** An agency must publish its public records policies, organizational information, and methods for requestors to obtain public records. RCW 42.17.250(1)/42.56.040(1).<sup>1</sup> A state agency must publish its procedures in the Washington Administrative Code and a local agency must prominently display and make them available at the central office of such local agency. RCW 42.17.250(1)/42.56.040(1). An agency should post its public records rules on its web site. An agency cannot invoke a procedure if it did not publish or display it as required (unless the party had actual and timely notice of its contents). RCW 42.17.250(2)/42.56.040(2).

Note: <sup>1</sup>See, e.g., WAC 44-06-030 (attorney general office's organizational and public records methods statement).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-02001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-02002 Public records officers.** An agency must appoint a public records officer whose responsibility is to serve as a "point of contact" for members of the public seeking public records. RCW 42.17.253(1). The purpose of this requirement is to provide the public with one point of contact within the agency to make a request. A state agency must provide the public records officer's name and contact information by publishing it in the state register. A state agency is encouraged to provide the public records officer's contact information on its web site. A local agency must publish the public records officer's name and contact information in a way reasonably calculated to provide notice to the public such as posting it on the agency's web site. RCW 42.17.253(3).

The public records officer is not required to personally fulfill requests for public records. A request can be fulfilled by an agency employee other than the public records officer. If the request is made to the public records officer, but should actually be fulfilled by others in the agency, the public records officer should route the request to the appropriate person or persons in the agency for processing. An agency is not required to hire a new staff member to be the public records officer.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-02002, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

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## AVAILABILITY OF PUBLIC RECORDS

**WAC 44-14-030 Availability of public records. (1) Hours for inspection of records.** Public records are available for inspection and copying during normal business hours of the (name of agency), (provide hours, e.g., Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., excluding legal holidays). Records must be inspected at the offices of the (name of agency).

(2) **Records index.** (*If agency keeps an index.*) An index of public records is available for use by members of the public, including (describe contents). The index may be accessed on-line at (web site address). (If there are multiple indices, describe each and its availability.)

(*If agency is local agency opting out of the index requirement.*) The (name of agency) finds that maintaining an index is unduly burdensome and would interfere with agency operations. The requirement would unduly burden or interfere with (name of agency) operations in the following ways (specify reasons).

(3) **Organization of records.** The (name of agency) will maintain its records in a reasonably organized manner. The (name of agency) will take reasonable actions to protect records from damage and disorganization. A requestor shall not take (name of agency) records from (name of agency) offices without the permission of the public records officer or designee. A variety of records is available on the (name of agency) web site at (web site address). Requestors are encouraged to view the documents available on the web site prior to submitting a records request.

### (4) Making a request for public records.

(a) Any person wishing to inspect or copy public records of the (name of agency) should make the request in writing on the (name of agency's) request form, or by letter, fax, or e-mail addressed to the public records officer and including the following information:

- Name of requestor;
- Address of requestor;
- Other contact information, including telephone number and any e-mail address;
- Identification of the public records adequate for the public records officer or designee to locate the records; and
- The date and time of day of the request.

(b) If the requestor wishes to have copies of the records made instead of simply inspecting them, he or she should so indicate and make arrangements to pay for copies of the records or a deposit. Pursuant to section (insert section), standard photocopies will be provided at (amount) cents per page.

(c) A form is available for use by requestors at the office of the public records officer and on-line at (web site address).

(d) The public records officer or designee may accept requests for public records that contain the above information by telephone or in person. If the public records officer or designee accepts such a request, he or she will confirm receipt of the information and the substance of the request in writing.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-030, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## Comments to WAC 44-14-030

**WAC 44-14-03001 "Public record" defined.** Courts use a three-part test to determine if a record is a "public record." The document must be: A "writing," containing information "relating to the conduct of government" or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function, "prepared, owned, used, or retained" by an agency.<sup>1</sup>

(1) **Writing.** A "public record" can be any writing "regardless of physical form or characteristics." RCW 42.17.020(41). "Writing" is defined very broadly as: "... handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostating, photographing, and every other means of recording any form of communication or representation, including, but not limited to, letters, words, pictures, sounds, or symbols, or combination thereof, and all papers, maps, magnetic or paper tapes, photographic films and prints, motion picture, film and video recordings, magnetic or punched cards, discs, drums, diskettes, sound recordings, and other documents including existing data compilations from which information may be obtained or translated." RCW 42.17.020(48). An e-mail is a "writing."

(2) **Relating to the conduct of government.** To be a "public record," a document must relate to the "conduct of government or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function." RCW 42.17.020(41). Almost all records held by an agency relate to the conduct of government; however, some do not. A purely personal record having absolutely no relation to the conduct of government is not a "public record." Even though a purely personal record might not be a "public record," a record of its existence might be. For example, a record showing the existence of a purely personal e-mail sent by an agency employee on an agency computer would probably be a "public record," even if the contents of the e-mail itself were not.<sup>2</sup>

(3) **"Prepared, owned, used, or retained."** A "public record" is a record "prepared, owned, used, or retained" by an agency. RCW 42.17.020(41).

A record can be "used" by an agency even if the agency does not actually possess the record. If an agency uses a record in its decision-making process it is a "public record."<sup>3</sup> For example, if an agency considered technical specifications of a public works project and returned the specifications to the contractor in another state, the specifications would be a "public record" because the agency "used" the document in its decision-making process.<sup>4</sup> The agency could be required to obtain the public record, unless doing so would be impossible. An agency cannot send its only copy of a record to a third party for the sole purpose of avoiding disclosure.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes agency employees work on agency business from home computers. These home computer records (including e-mail) were "used" by the agency and relate to the "conduct of government" so they are "public records." RCW 42.17.020(41). However, the act does not authorize unbridled searches of agency property.<sup>6</sup> If agency property is not subject to unbridled searches, then neither is the home computer of an agency employee. Yet, because the home computer documents relating to agency business are "public records," they are subject to disclosure (unless exempt). Agencies should instruct employees that all public records, regardless of where they were created, should eventually be stored on agency computers. Agencies should ask employees to keep

agency-related documents on home computers in separate folders and to routinely blind carbon copy ("bcc") work e-mails back to the employee's agency e-mail account. If the agency receives a request for records that are solely on employees' home computers, the agency should direct the employee to forward any responsive documents back to the agency, and the agency should process the request as it would if the records were on the agency's computers.

Notes: <sup>1</sup>*Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation v. Johnson*, 135 Wn.2d 734, 748, 958 P.2d 260 (1998). For records held by the secretary of the senate or chief clerk of the house of representatives, a "public record" is a "legislative record" as defined in RCW 40.14.100. RCW 42.17.020(41).

<sup>2</sup>*Tiberino v. Spokane County Prosecutor*, 103 Wn. App. 680, 691, 13 P.3d 1104 (2000).

<sup>3</sup>*Concerned Ratepayers v. Public Utility Dist. No. 1*, 138 Wn.2d 950, 958-61, 983 P.2d 635 (1999).

<sup>4</sup>*Id.*

<sup>5</sup>*See Op. Att'y Gen.* 11 (1989), at 4, n.2 ("We do not wish to encourage agencies to avoid the provisions of the public disclosure act by transferring public records to private parties. If a record otherwise meeting the statutory definition were transferred into private hands solely to prevent its public disclosure, we expect courts would take appropriate steps to require the agency to make disclosure or to sanction the responsible public officers.")

<sup>6</sup>*See Hangartner v. City of Seattle*, 151 Wn.2d 439, 448, 90 P.3d 26 (2004).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-03001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-03002 Times for inspection and copying of records.** An agency must make records available for inspection and copying during the "customary office hours of the agency." RCW 42.17.280/42.56.090. If the agency is very small and does not have customary office hours of at least thirty hours per week, the records must be available from 9:00 a.m. to noon, and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The agency and requestor can make mutually agreeable arrangements for the times of inspection and copying.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-03002, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-03003 Index of records.** State and local agencies are required by RCW 42.17.260/42.56.070 to provide an index for certain categories of records. An agency is not required to index every record it creates. Since agencies maintain records in a wide variety of ways, agency indices will also vary. An agency cannot use, rely on, or cite to as precedent a public record unless it was indexed or made available to the parties affected by it. RCW 42.17.260(6)/42.56.070(6). An agency should post its index on its web site.

The index requirements differ for state and local agencies.

A state agency must index only two categories of records:

(1) All records, if any, issued before July 1, 1990 for which the agency has maintained an index; and

(2) Final orders, declaratory orders, interpretive statements, and statements of policy issued after June 30, 1990. RCW 42.17.260(5)/42.56.070(5).

A state agency must adopt a rule governing its index.

A local agency may opt out of the indexing requirement if it issues a formal order specifying the reasons why doing so

would "unduly burden or interfere with agency operations." RCW 42.17.260 (4)(a)/42.56.070 (4)(a). To lawfully opt out of the index requirement, a local agency must actually issue an order or adopt an ordinance specifying the reasons it cannot maintain an index.

The index requirements of the act were enacted in 1972 when agencies had far fewer records and an index was easier to maintain. However, technology allows agencies to map out, archive, and then electronically search for electronic documents. Agency resources vary greatly so not every agency can afford to utilize this technology. However, agencies should explore the feasibility of electronic indexing and retrieval to assist both the agency and requestor in locating public records.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-03003, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-03004 Organization of records.** An agency must "protect public records from damage or disorganization." RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. An agency owns public records (subject to the public's right, as defined in the act, to inspect or copy nonexempt records) and must maintain custody of them. RCW 40.14.020; chapter 434-615 WAC. Therefore, an agency should not allow a requestor to take original agency records out of the agency's office. An agency may send original records to a reputable commercial copying center to fulfill a records request if the agency takes reasonable precautions to protect the records. See WAC 44-14-07001(5).

The legislature encourages agencies to electronically store and provide public records:

Broad public access to state and local government records and information has potential for expanding citizen access to that information and for providing government services. Electronic methods of locating and transferring information can improve linkages between and among citizens...and governments. ...

It is the intent of the legislature to encourage state and local governments to develop, store, and manage their public records and information in electronic formats to meet their missions and objectives. Further, it is the intent of the legislature for state and local governments to set priorities for making public records widely available electronically to the public.

RCW 43.105.250. An agency could fulfill its obligation to provide "access" to a public record by providing a requestor with a link to an agency web site containing an electronic copy of that record. Agencies are encouraged to do so. For those without access to the internet, an agency could provide a computer terminal at its office.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-03004, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-03005 Retention of records.** An agency is not required to retain every record it ever created or used. The state and local records committees approve a general retention schedule for state and local agency records that applies to records that are common to most agencies.<sup>1</sup> Individual agencies seek approval from the state or local records committee for retention schedules that are specific to their agency, or that, because of particular needs of the agency, must be kept

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longer than provided in the general records retention schedule. The retention schedules for state and local agencies are available at [www.secstate.wa.gov/archives/ga.aspx](http://www.secstate.wa.gov/archives/ga.aspx).

Retention schedules vary based on the content of the record. For example, documents with no value such as internal meeting scheduling e-mails can be destroyed when no longer needed, but documents such as periodic accounting reports must be kept for a period of years. Because different kinds of records must be retained for different periods of time, an agency is prohibited from automatically deleting all e-mails after a short period of time (such as thirty days). While many of the e-mails could be destroyed when no longer needed, many others must be retained for several years. Indiscriminate automatic deletion of all e-mails after a short period may prevent an agency from complying with its retention duties and could complicate performance of its duties under the Public Records Act. An agency should have a retention policy in which employees save retainable documents and delete nonretainable ones. An agency is strongly encouraged to train employees on retention schedules.

The lawful destruction of public records is governed by retention schedules. The unlawful destruction of public records can be a crime. RCW 40.16.010 and 40.16.020.

An agency is prohibited from destroying a public record, even if it is about to be lawfully destroyed under a retention schedule, if a public records request has been made for that record. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. Additional retention requirements might apply if the records may be relevant to actual or anticipated litigation. The agency is required to retain the record until the record request has been resolved. An exception exists for certain portions of a state employee's personnel file. RCW 42.17.295/42.56.110.

Note: <sup>1</sup>An agency can be found to violate the act and be subject to the attorneys' fees and penalty provision if it prematurely destroys a requested record. See *Yacobellis v. City of Bellingham*, 55 Wn. App. 706, 780 P.2d 272 (1989).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-03005, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-03006 Form of requests.** There is no statutorily required format for a valid public records request.<sup>1</sup> A request can be sent in by mail. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. A request can also be made by e-mail, fax, or orally. A request should be made to the agency's public records officer. An agency may prescribe means of requests in its rules. RCW 42.17.250/42.56.040 and 42.17.260(1)/42.56.070(1); RCW 34.05.220 (state agencies). An agency is encouraged to make its public records request form available on its web site.

A number of agencies routinely accept oral public records requests (for example, asking to look at a building permit). Some agencies find oral requests to be the best way to provide certain kinds of records. However, for some requests such as larger ones, oral requests may be allowed but are problematic. An oral request does not memorialize the exact records sought and therefore prevents a requestor or agency from later proving what was included in the request. Furthermore, as described in WAC 44-14-04002(1), a requestor must provide the agency with reasonable notice that the request is for the disclosure of public records; oral requests, especially to agency staff other than the public records officer or designee, may not provide the agency with

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the required reasonable notice. Therefore, requestors are strongly encouraged to make written requests. If an agency receives an oral request, the agency staff person receiving it should immediately reduce it to writing and then verify in writing with the requestor that it correctly memorializes the request.

An agency should have a public records request form. An agency request form should ask the requestor whether he or she seeks to inspect the records, receive a copy of them, or to inspect the records first and then consider selecting records to copy. An agency request form should recite that inspection of records is free and provide the per-page charge for standard photocopies.

An agency request form should require the requestor to provide contact information so the agency can communicate with the requestor to, for example, clarify the request, inform the requestor that the records are available, or provide an explanation of an exemption. Contact information such as a name, phone number, and address or e-mail should be provided. Requestors should provide an e-mail address because it is an efficient means of communication and creates a written record of the communications between them and the agency. An agency should not require a requestor to provide a driver's license number, date of birth, or photo identification. This information is not necessary for the agency to contact the requestor and requiring it might intimidate some requestors.

An agency may ask a requestor to prioritize the records he or she is requesting so that the agency is able to provide the most important records first. An agency is not required to ask for prioritization, and a requestor is not required to provide it.

An agency cannot require the requestor to disclose the purpose of the request with two exceptions. RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. First, if the request is for a list of individuals, an agency may ask the requestor if he or she intends to use the records for a commercial purpose.<sup>2</sup> An agency should specify on its request form that the agency is not authorized to provide public records consisting of a list of individuals for a commercial use. RCW 42.17.260(9)/42.56.070(9).

Second, an agency may seek information sufficient to allow it to determine if another statute prohibits disclosure. For example, some statutes allow an agency to disclose a record only to a claimant for benefits or his or her representative. In such cases, an agency is authorized to ask the requestor if he or she fits this criterion.

An agency is not authorized to require a requestor to indemnify the agency. Op. Att'y Gen. 12 (1988).<sup>3</sup>

Notes: <sup>1</sup>*Hangartner v. City of Seattle*, 151 Wn.2d 439, 447, 90 P.3d 26 (2004) ("there is no official format for a valid PDA request.").

<sup>2</sup>Op. Att'y Gen. 12 (1988), at 11; Op. Att'y Gen. 2 (1998), at 4.

<sup>3</sup>RCW 42.17.258/42.56.060 provides: "No public agency, public official, public employee, or custodian shall be liable, nor shall a cause of action exist, for any loss or damage based upon the release of a public record if the public agency, public official, public employee, or custodian acted in good faith in attempting to comply with the provisions of this chapter." Therefore, an agency has little need for an indemnification clause. Requiring a requestor to indemnify an agency inhibits some requestors from exercising their right to request public records. Op. Att'y Gen. 12 (1988), at 11.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-03006, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## PROCESSING OF PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS— GENERAL

**WAC 44-14-040 Processing of public records requests—General.** (1) **Providing "fullest assistance."** The (name of agency) is charged by statute with adopting rules which provide for how it will "provide full access to public records," "protect records from damage or disorganization," "prevent excessive interference with other essential functions of the agency," provide "fullest assistance" to requestors, and provide the "most timely possible action" on public records requests. The public records officer or designee will process requests in the order allowing the most requests to be processed in the most efficient manner.

(2) **Acknowledging receipt of request.** Within five business days of receipt of the request, the public records officer will do one or more of the following:

(a) Make the records available for inspection or copying;  
(b) If copies are requested and payment of a deposit for the copies, if any, is made or terms of payment are agreed upon, send the copies to the requestor;

(c) Provide a reasonable estimate of when records will be available; or

(d) If the request is unclear or does not sufficiently identify the requested records, request clarification from the requestor. Such clarification may be requested and provided by telephone. The public records officer or designee may revise the estimate of when records will be available; or

(e) Deny the request.

(3) **Consequences of failure to respond.** If the (name of agency) does not respond in writing within five business days of receipt of the request for disclosure, the requestor should consider contacting the public records officer to determine the reason for the failure to respond.

(4) **Protecting rights of others.** In the event that the requested records contain information that may affect rights of others and may be exempt from disclosure, the public records officer may, prior to providing the records, give notice to such others whose rights may be affected by the disclosure. Such notice should be given so as to make it possible for those other persons to contact the requestor and ask him or her to revise the request, or, if necessary, seek an order from a court to prevent or limit the disclosure. The notice to the affected persons will include a copy of the request.

(5) **Records exempt from disclosure.** Some records are exempt from disclosure, in whole or in part. If the (name of agency) believes that a record is exempt from disclosure and should be withheld, the public records officer will state the specific exemption and provide a brief explanation of why the record or a portion of the record is being withheld. If only a portion of a record is exempt from disclosure, but the remainder is not exempt, the public records officer will redact the exempt portions, provide the nonexempt portions, and indicate to the requestor why portions of the record are being redacted.

(6) **Inspection of records.**

(a) Consistent with other demands, the (name of agency) shall promptly provide space to inspect public records. No

member of the public may remove a document from the viewing area or disassemble or alter any document. The requestor shall indicate which documents he or she wishes the agency to copy.

(b) The requestor must claim or review the assembled records within thirty days of the (name of agency's) notification to him or her that the records are available for inspection or copying. The agency will notify the requestor in writing of this requirement and inform the requestor that he or she should contact the agency to make arrangements to claim or review the records. If the requestor or a representative of the requestor fails to claim or review the records within the thirty-day period or make other arrangements, the (name of agency) may close the request and refile the assembled records. Other public records requests can be processed ahead of a subsequent request by the same person for the same or almost identical records, which can be processed as a new request.

(7) **Providing copies of records.** After inspection is complete, the public records officer or designee shall make the requested copies or arrange for copying.

(8) **Providing records in installments.** When the request is for a large number of records, the public records officer or designee will provide access for inspection and copying in installments, if he or she reasonably determines that it would be practical to provide the records in that way. If, within thirty days, the requestor fails to inspect the entire set of records or one or more of the installments, the public records officer or designee may stop searching for the remaining records and close the request.

(9) **Completion of inspection.** When the inspection of the requested records is complete and all requested copies are provided, the public records officer or designee will indicate that the (name of agency) has completed a diligent search for the requested records and made any located nonexempt records available for inspection.

(10) **Closing withdrawn or abandoned request.** When the requestor either withdraws the request or fails to fulfill his or her obligations to inspect the records or pay the deposit or final payment for the requested copies, the public records officer will close the request and indicate to the requestor that the (name of agency) has closed the request.

(11) **Later discovered documents.** If, after the (name of agency) has informed the requestor that it has provided all available records, the (name of agency) becomes aware of additional responsive documents existing at the time of the request, it will promptly inform the requestor of the additional documents and provide them on an expedited basis.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-040, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

### Comments on WAC 44-14-040

**WAC 44-14-04001 Introduction.** Both requestors and agencies have responsibilities under the act. The public records process can function properly only when both parties perform their respective responsibilities. An agency has a duty to promptly provide access to all nonexempt public records.<sup>1</sup> A requestor has a duty to request identifiable records, inspect the assembled records or pay for the copies, and be respectful to agency staff.<sup>2</sup>

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Requestors should keep in mind that all agencies have essential functions in addition to providing public records. Agencies also have greatly differing resources. The act recognizes that agency public records procedures should prevent "excessive interference" with the other "essential functions" of the agency. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. Therefore, while providing public records is an essential function of an agency, it is not required to abandon its other, nonpublic records functions. Agencies without a full-time public records officer may assign staff part-time to fulfill records requests, provided the agency is providing the "fullest assistance" and the "most timely possible" action on the request. The proper level of staffing for public records requests will vary among agencies, considering the complexity and number of requests to that agency, agency resources, and the agency's other functions.

The burden of proof is on an agency to prove its estimate of time to provide a full response is "reasonable." RCW 42.17.340(2)/42.56.550(2). An agency should be prepared to explain how it arrived at its estimate of time and why the estimate is reasonable.

Agencies are encouraged to use technology to provide public records more quickly and, if possible, less expensively. An agency is allowed, of course, to do more for the requestor than is required by the letter of the act. Doing so often saves the agency time and money in the long run, improves relations with the public, and prevents litigation. For example, agencies are encouraged to post many nonexempt records of broad public interest on the internet. This may result in fewer requests for public records. See RCW 43.105.270 (state agencies encouraged to post frequently sought documents on the internet).

Notes: <sup>1</sup>RCW 42.17.260(1)/42.56.070(1) (agency "shall make available for public inspection and copying all public records, unless the record falls within the specific exemptions" listed in the act or other statute).

<sup>2</sup>See RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080 ("identifiable record" requirement); RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120 (claim or review requirement); RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100 (agency may prevent excessive interference with other essential agency functions).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-04001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-04002 Obligations of requestors. (1) Reasonable notice that request is for public records.** A requestor must give an agency reasonable notice that the request is being made pursuant to the act. Requestors are encouraged to cite or name the act but are not required to do so.<sup>1</sup> A request using the terms "public records," "public disclosure," "FOIA," or "Freedom of Information Act" (the terms commonly used for federal records requests) should provide an agency with reasonable notice in most cases. A requestor should not submit a "stealth" request, which is buried in another document in an attempt to trick the agency into not responding.

(2) **Identifiable record.** A requestor must request an "identifiable record" or "class of records" before an agency must respond to it. RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080 and 42.17.340(1)/42.56.550(1). An "identifiable record" is one that agency staff can reasonably locate.<sup>2</sup> The act does not allow a requestor to search through agency files for records which

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cannot be reasonably identified or described to the agency.<sup>3</sup> However, a requestor is not required to identify the exact record he or she seeks. For example, if a requestor requested an agency's "2001 budget," but the agency only had a 2000-2002 budget, the requestor made a request for an identifiable record.<sup>4</sup>

An "identifiable record" is not a request for "information" in general.<sup>5</sup> For example, asking "what policies" an agency has for handling discrimination complaints is merely a request for "information."<sup>6</sup> A request to inspect or copy an agency's policies and procedures for handling discrimination complaints would be a request for an "identifiable record."

Public records requests are not interrogatories. An agency is not required to conduct legal research for a requestor.<sup>7</sup> A request for "any law that allows the county to impose taxes on me" is not a request for an identifiable record. Conversely, a request for "all records discussing the passage of this year's tax increase on real property" is a request for an "identifiable record."

When a request uses an inexact phrase such as all records "relating to" a topic (such as "all records relating to the property tax increase"), the agency may interpret the request to be for records which directly and fairly address the topic. When an agency receives a "relating to" or similar request, it should seek clarification of the request from the requestor.

(3) **"Overbroad" requests.** An agency cannot "deny a request for identifiable public records based solely on the basis that the request is overbroad." RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. However, if such a request is not for identifiable records or otherwise is not proper, the request can still be denied. When confronted with a request that is unclear, an agency should seek clarification.

Notes: <sup>1</sup>*Wood v. Lowe*, 102 Wn. App. 872, 10 P.3d 494 (2000).

<sup>2</sup>*Bonamy v. City of Seattle*, 92 Wn. App. 403, 410, 960 P.2d 447 (1998), *review denied*, 137 Wn.2d 1012, 978 P.2d 1099 (1999) ("identifiable record" requirement is satisfied when there is a "reasonable description" of the record "enabling the government employee to locate the requested records.").

<sup>3</sup>*Limstrom v. Ladenburg*, 136 Wn.2d 595, 604, n.3, 963 P.2d 869 (1998), *appeal after remand*, 110 Wn. App. 133, 39 P.3d 351 (2002).

<sup>4</sup>*Violante v. King County Fire Dist. No. 20*, 114 Wn. App. 565, 571, n.4, 59 P.3d 109 (2002).

<sup>5</sup>*Bonamy*, 92 Wn. App. at 409.

<sup>6</sup>*Id.*

<sup>7</sup>*See Limstrom*, 136 Wn.2d at 604, n.3 (act does not require "an agency to go outside its own records and resources to try to identify or locate the record requested."); *Bonamy*, 92 Wn. App. at 409 (act "does not require agencies to research or explain public records, but only to make those records accessible to the public.").

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348, 06-04-079, § 44-14-04002, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-04003 Responsibilities of agencies in processing requests.** (1) **Similar treatment and purpose of the request.** The act provides: "Agencies shall not distinguish among persons requesting records, and such persons shall not be required to provide information as to the purpose for the request" (except to determine if the request is for a commercial use or would violate another statute prohibiting disclosure). RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080.<sup>1</sup> The act also requires an agency to take the "most timely possible action on

requests" and make records "promptly available." RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100 and 42.17.270/42.56.080. However, treating requestors similarly does not mean that agencies must process requests strictly in the order received because this might not be providing the "most timely possible action" for all requests. A relatively simple request need not wait for a long period of time while a much larger request is being fulfilled. Agencies are encouraged to be flexible and process as many requests as possible even if they are out of order.<sup>3</sup>

An agency cannot require a requestor to state the purpose of the request (with limited exceptions). RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. However, in an effort to better understand the request and provide all responsive records, the agency can inquire about the purpose of the request. The requestor is not required to answer the agency's inquiry (with limited exceptions as previously noted).

(2) **Provide "fullest assistance" and "most timely possible action."** The act requires agencies to adopt and enforce reasonable rules to provide for the "fullest assistance" to a requestor. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. The "fullest assistance" principle should guide agencies when processing requests. In general, an agency should devote sufficient staff time to processing records requests, consistent with the act's requirement that fulfilling requests should not be an "excessive interference" with the agency's "other essential functions." RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. The agency should recognize that fulfilling public records requests is one of the agency's duties, along with its others.

The act also requires agencies to adopt and enforce rules to provide for the "most timely possible action on requests." RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. This principle should guide agencies when processing requests. It should be noted that this provision requires the most timely "possible" action on requests. This recognizes that an agency is not always capable of fulfilling a request as quickly as the requestor would like.

(3) **Communicate with requestor.** Communication is usually the key to a smooth public records process for both requestors and agencies. Clear requests for a small number of records usually do not require predelivery communication with the requestor. However, when an agency receives a large or unclear request, the agency should communicate with the requestor to clarify the request. If the request is modified orally, the public records officer or designee should memorialize the communication in writing.

For large requests, the agency may ask the requestor to prioritize the request so that he or she receives the most important records first. If feasible, the agency should provide periodic updates to the requestor of the progress of the request. Similarly, the requestor should periodically communicate with the agency and promptly answer any clarification questions. Sometimes a requestor finds the records he or she is seeking at the beginning of a request. If so, the requestor should communicate with the agency that the requested records have been provided and that he or she is canceling the remainder of the request. If the requestor's cancellation communication is not in writing, the agency should confirm it in writing.

(4) **Failure to provide initial response within five business days.** Within five business days of receiving a

request, an agency must provide an initial response to requestor. The initial response must do one of four things:

(a) Provide the record;

(b) Acknowledge that the agency has received the request and provide a reasonable estimate of the time it will require to fully respond;

(c) Seek a clarification of the request; or

(d) Deny the request. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520. An agency's failure to provide an initial response is arguably a violation of the act.<sup>2</sup>

(5) **No duty to create records.** An agency is not obligated to create a new record to satisfy a records request.<sup>4</sup> However, sometimes it is easier for an agency to create a record responsive to the request rather than collecting and making available voluminous records that contain small pieces of the information sought by the requestor or find itself in a controversy about whether the request requires the creation of a new record. The decision to create a new record is left to the discretion of the agency. If the agency is considering creating a new record instead of disclosing the underlying records, it should obtain the consent of the requestor to ensure that the requestor is not actually seeking the underlying records.

(6) **Provide a reasonable estimate of the time to fully respond.** Unless it is providing the records or claiming an exemption from disclosure within the five-business day period, an agency must provide a reasonable estimate of the time it will take to fully respond to the request. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520. Fully responding can mean processing the request (assembling records, redacting, preparing a withholding index, or notifying third parties named in the records who might seek an injunction against disclosure) or determining if the records are exempt from disclosure.

An estimate must be "reasonable." The act provides a requestor a quick and simple method of challenging the reasonableness of an agency's estimate. RCW 42.17.340(2)/42.56.550(2). See WAC 44-14-08004 (5)(b). The burden of proof is on the agency to prove its estimate is "reasonable." RCW 42.17.340(2)/42.56.550(2).

To provide a "reasonable" estimate, an agency should not use the same estimate for every request. An agency should roughly calculate the time it will take to respond to the request and send estimates of varying lengths, as appropriate. Some very large requests can legitimately take months or longer to fully provide. There is no standard amount of time for fulfilling a request so reasonable estimates should vary.

Some agencies send form letters with thirty-day estimates to all requestors, no matter the size or complexity of the request. Form letter thirty-day estimates are rarely "reasonable" because an agency, which has the burden of proof, could find it difficult to prove that every single request it receives would take the same thirty-day period.

In order to avoid unnecessary litigation over the reasonableness of an estimate, an agency should briefly explain to the requestor the basis for the estimate in the initial response. The explanation need not be elaborate but should allow the requestor to make a threshold determination of whether he or she should question that estimate further or has a basis to seek judicial review of the reasonableness of the estimate.

An agency should either fulfill the request within the estimated time or, if warranted, communicate with the

requestor about clarifications or the need for a revised estimate. An agency should not ignore a request and then continuously send extended estimates. Routine extensions with little or no action to fulfill the request would show that the previous estimates probably were not "reasonable." Extended estimates are appropriate when the circumstances have changed (such as an increase in other requests or discovering that the request will require extensive redaction). An estimate can be revised when appropriate, but unwarranted serial extensions have the effect of denying a requestor access to public records.

(7) **Seek clarification of a request or additional time.**

An agency may seek a clarification of an "unclear" request. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520. An agency can only seek a clarification when the request is objectively "unclear." Seeking a "clarification" of an objectively clear request delays access to public records.

If the requestor fails to clarify an unclear request, the agency need not respond to it further. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520. If the requestor does not respond to the agency's request for a clarification within thirty days of the agency's request, the agency may consider the request abandoned. If the agency considers the request abandoned, it should send a closing letter to the requestor.

An agency may take additional time to provide the records or deny the request if it is awaiting a clarification. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520. After providing the initial response and perhaps even beginning to assemble the records, an agency might discover it needs to clarify a request and is allowed to do so. A clarification could also affect a reasonable estimate.

(8) **Preserving requested records.** If a requested record is scheduled shortly for destruction, and the agency receives a public records request for it, the record cannot be destroyed until the request is resolved. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100.<sup>5</sup> Once a request has been closed, the agency can destroy the requested records in accordance with its retention schedule.

(9) **Searching for records.** An agency must conduct an objectively reasonable search for responsive records. A requestor is not required to "ferret out" records on his or her own.<sup>6</sup> A reasonable agency search usually begins with the public records officer for the agency or a records coordinator for a department of the agency deciding where the records are likely to be and who is likely to know where they are. One of the most important parts of an adequate search is to decide how wide the search will be. If the agency is small, it might be appropriate to initially ask all agency employees if they have responsive records. If the agency is larger, the agency may choose to initially ask only the staff of the department or departments of an agency most likely to have the records. For example, a request for records showing or discussing payments on a public works project might initially be directed to all staff in the finance and public works departments if those departments are deemed most likely to have the responsive documents, even though other departments may have copies or alternative versions of the same documents. Meanwhile, other departments that may have documents should be instructed to preserve their records in case they are later deemed to be necessary to respond to the request. The agency could notify the requestor which departments are being surveyed for the documents so the requestor

may suggest other departments. It is better to be over inclusive rather than under inclusive when deciding which staff should be contacted, but not everyone in an agency needs to be asked if there is no reason to believe he or she has responsive records. An e-mail to staff selected as most likely to have responsive records is usually sufficient. Such an e-mail also allows an agency to document whom it asked for records.

Agency policies should require staff to promptly respond to inquiries about responsive records from the public records officer.

After records which are deemed responsive are located, an agency should take reasonable steps to narrow down the number of records to those which are responsive. In some cases, an agency might find it helpful to consult with the requestor on the scope of the documents to be assembled. An agency cannot "bury" a requestor with nonresponsive documents. However, an agency is allowed to provide arguably, but not clearly, responsive records to allow the requestor to select the ones he or she wants, particularly if the requestor is unable or unwilling to help narrow the scope of the documents.

(10) **Expiration of reasonable estimate.** An agency should provide a record within the time provided in its reasonable estimate or communicate with the requestor that additional time is required to fulfill the request based on specified criteria. Unjustified failure to provide the record by the expiration of the estimate is a denial of access to the record.

(11) **Notice to affected third parties.** Sometimes an agency decides it must release all or a part of a public record affecting a third party. The third party can file an action to obtain an injunction to prevent an agency from disclosing it, but the third party must prove the record or portion of it is exempt from disclosure.<sup>7</sup> RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540. Before sending a notice, an agency should have a reasonable belief that the record is arguably exempt. Notices to affected third parties when the records could not reasonably be considered exempt might have the effect of unreasonably delaying the requestor's access to a disclosable record.

The act provides that before releasing a record an agency may, at its "option," provide notice to a person named in a public record or to whom the record specifically pertains (unless notice is required by law). RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540. This would include all of those whose identity could reasonably be ascertained in the record and who might have a reason to seek to prevent the release of the record. An agency has wide discretion to decide whom to notify or not notify. First, an agency has the "option" to notify or not (unless notice is required by law). RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540. Second, if it acted in good faith, an agency cannot be held liable for its failure to notify enough people under the act. RCW 42.17.258/42.56.060. However, if an agency had a contractual obligation to provide notice of a request but failed to do so, the agency might lose the immunity provided by RCW 42.17.258/42.56.060 because breaching the agreement probably is not a "good faith" attempt to comply with the act.

The practice of many agencies is to give ten days' notice. Many agencies expressly indicate the deadline date to avoid any confusion. More notice might be appropriate in some cases, such as when numerous notices are required, but every additional day of notice is another day the potentially disclosable record is being withheld. When it provides a notice, the

agency should include the notice period in the "reasonable estimate" it provides to a requestor.

The notice informs the third party that release will occur on the stated date unless he or she obtains an order from a court enjoining release. The requestor has an interest in any legal action to prevent the disclosure of the records he or she requested. Therefore, the agency's notice should inform the third party that he or she should name the requestor as a party to any action to enjoin disclosure. If an injunctive action is filed, the third party or agency should name the requestor as a party or, at a minimum, must inform the requestor of the action to allow the requestor to intervene.

(12) **Later discovered records.** If the agency becomes aware of the existence of records responsive to a request which were not provided, the agency should notify the requestor in writing and provide a brief explanation of the circumstances.

Notes: <sup>1</sup>See also Op. Att'y Gen. 2 (1998).

<sup>2</sup>See *Smith v. Okanogan County*, 100 Wn. App. 7, 13, 994 P.2d 857 (2000) ("When an agency fails to respond as provided in RCW 42.17.320 (42.56.520), it violates the act and the individual requesting the public record is entitled to a statutory penalty.<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>3</sup>While an agency can fulfill requests out of order, an agency is not allowed to ignore a large request while it is exclusively fulfilling smaller requests. The agency should strike a balance between fulfilling small and large requests.

<sup>4</sup>*Smith*, 100 Wn. App. at 14.

<sup>5</sup>An exception is some state-agency employee personnel records. RCW 42.17.295/42.56.110.

<sup>6</sup>*Daines v. Spokane County*, 111 Wn. App. 342, 349, 44 P.3d 909 (2002) ("an applicant need not exhaust his or her own ingenuity to 'ferret out' records through some combination of 'intuition and diligent research'").

<sup>7</sup>The agency holding the record can also file a RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540 injunctive action to establish that it is not required to release the record or portion of it.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-04003, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-04004 Responsibilities of agency in providing records.** (1) **General.** An agency may simply provide the records or make them available within the five-business day period of the initial response. When it does so, an agency should also provide the requestor a written cover letter or e-mail briefly describing the records provided and informing the requestor that the request has been closed. This assists the agency in later proving that it provided the specified records on a certain date and told the requestor that the request had been closed. However, a cover letter or e-mail might not be practical in some circumstances, such as when the agency provides a small number of records or fulfills routine requests.

An agency can, of course, provide the records sooner than five business days. Providing the "fullest assistance" to a requestor would mean providing a readily available record as soon as possible. For example, an agency might routinely prepare a premeeting packet of documents three days in advance of a city council meeting. The packet is readily available so the agency should provide it to a requestor on the same day of the request so he or she can have it for the council meeting.

(2) **Means of providing access.** An agency must make nonexempt public records "available" for inspection or pro-



vide a copy. RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. An agency is only required to make records "available" and has no duty to explain the meaning of public records.<sup>1</sup> Making records available is often called "access."

Access to a public record can be provided by allowing inspection of the record, providing a copy, or posting the record on the agency's web site and assisting the requestor in finding it (if necessary). An agency must mail a copy of records if requested and if the requestor pays the actual cost of postage and the mailing container.<sup>2</sup> The requestor can specify which method of access (or combination, such as inspection and then copying) he or she prefers. Different processes apply to requests for inspection versus copying (such as copy charges) so an agency should clarify with a requestor whether he or she seeks to inspect or copy a public record.

An agency can provide access to a public record by posting it on its web site. If requested, an agency should provide reasonable assistance to a requestor in finding a public record posted on its web site. If the requestor does not have internet access, the agency may provide access to the record by allowing the requestor to view the record on a specific computer terminal at the agency open to the public. An agency is not required to do so. Despite the availability of the record on the agency's web site, a requestor can still make a public records request and inspect the record or obtain a copy of it by paying the appropriate per-page copying charge.

**(3) Providing records in installments.** The act now provides that an agency must provide records "if applicable, on a partial or installment basis as records that are part of a larger set of requested records are assembled or made ready for inspection or disclosure." RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. The purpose of this provision is to allow requestors to obtain records in installments as they are assembled and to allow agencies to provide records in logical batches. The provision is also designed to allow an agency to only assemble the first installment and then see if the requestor claims or reviews it before assembling the next installments.

Not all requests should be provided in installments. For example, a request for a small number of documents which are located at nearly the same time should be provided all at once. Installments are useful for large requests when, for example, an agency can provide the first box of records as an installment. An agency has wide discretion to determine when providing records in installments is "applicable." However, an agency cannot use installments to delay access by, for example, calling a small number of documents an "installment" and sending out separate notifications for each one. The agency must provide the "fullest assistance" and the "most timely possible action on requests" when processing requests. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100.

**(4) Failure to provide records.** A "denial" of a request can occur when an agency:

Does not have the record;

Fails to respond to a request;

Claims an exemption of the entire record or a portion of it; or

Without justification, fails to provide the record after the reasonable estimate expires.

**(a) When the agency does not have the record.** An agency is only required to provide access to public records it

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has or has used.<sup>3</sup> An agency is not required to create a public record in response to a request.

An agency must only provide access to public records in existence at the time of the request. An agency is not obligated to supplement responses. Therefore, if a public record is created or comes into the possession of the agency after the request is received by the agency, it is not responsive to the request and need not be provided. A requestor must make a new request to obtain subsequently created public records.

Sometimes more than one agency holds the same record. When more than one agency holds a record, and a requestor makes a request to the first agency, the first agency cannot respond to the request by telling the requestor to obtain the record from the second agency. Instead, an agency must provide access to a record it holds regardless of its availability from another agency.<sup>4</sup>

An agency is not required to provide access to records that were not requested. An agency does not "deny" a request when it does not provide records that are outside the scope of the request because they were never asked for.

**(b) Claiming exemptions.**

**(i) Redactions.** If a portion of a record is exempt from disclosure, but the remainder is not, an agency generally is required to redact (black out) the exempt portion and then provide the remainder. RCW 42.17.310(2)/42.56.210(2). There are a few exceptions.<sup>5</sup> Withholding an entire record where only a portion of it is exempt violates the act.<sup>6</sup> Some records are almost entirely exempt but small portions remain nonexempt. For example, information revealing the identity of a crime victim is exempt from disclosure. RCW 42.17.310(1)(e)/42.56.210(1)(e). If a requestor requested a police report in a case in which charges have been filed, the agency must redact the victim's identifying information but provide the rest of the report.

Statistical information "not descriptive of any readily identifiable person or persons" is generally not subject to redaction or withholding. RCW 42.17.310(2)/42.56.210(2). For example, if a statute exempted the identity of a person who had been assessed a particular kind of penalty, and an agency record showed the amount of penalties assessed against various persons, the agency must provide the record with the names of the persons redacted but with the penalty amounts remaining.

Originals should not be redacted. For paper records, an agency should redact materials by first copying the record and then either using a black marker on the copy or covering the exempt portions with copying tape, and then making a copy. It is often a good practice to keep the initial copies which were redacted in case there is a need to make additional copies for disclosure or to show what was redacted.

**(ii) Brief explanation of withholding.** When an agency claims an exemption for an entire record or portion of one, it must inform the requestor of the statutory exemption and provide a brief explanation of how the exemption applies to the record or portion withheld. RCW 42.17.310(4)/42.56.210(4). The brief explanation should cite the statute the agency claims grants an exemption from disclosure. The brief explanation should provide enough information for a requestor to make a threshold determination of whether the claimed exemption is proper. Nonspecific claims of exemption such as "proprietary" or "privacy" are insufficient.

One way to properly provide a brief explanation of the withheld record or redaction is for the agency to provide a withholding index. It identifies the type of record, its date and number of pages, and the author or recipient of the record (unless their identity is exempt).<sup>7</sup> The withholding index need not be elaborate but should allow a requestor to make a threshold determination of whether the agency has properly invoked the exemption.

(5) **Notifying requestor that records are available.** If the requestor sought to inspect the records, the agency should notify him or her that the entire request or an installment is available for inspection and ask the requestor to contact the agency to arrange for a mutually agreeable time for inspection.<sup>8</sup> The notification should recite that if the requestor fails to inspect or copy the records or make other arrangements within thirty days of the date of the notification that the agency will close the request and refile the records. An agency might consider on a case-by-case basis sending the notification by certified mail to document that the requestor received it.

If the requestor sought copies, the agency should notify him or her of the projected costs and whether a copying deposit is required before the copies will be made. The notification can be oral to provide the most timely possible response.

(6) **Documenting compliance.** An agency should have a process to identify which records were provided to a requestor and the date of production. In some cases, an agency may wish to number-stamp or number-label paper records provided to a requestor to document which records were provided. The agency could also keep a copy of the numbered records so either the agency or requestor can later determine which records were or were not provided. However, the agency should balance the benefits of stamping or labeling the documents and making extra copies against the costs and burdens of doing so.

If memorializing which specific documents were offered for inspection is impractical, an agency might consider documenting which records were provided for inspection by making an index or list of the files or records made available for inspection.

Notes: <sup>1</sup>*Bonamy v. City of Seattle*, 92 Wn. App. 403, 409, 960 P.2d 447 (1998), *review denied*, 137 Wn.2d 1012, 978 P.2d 1099 (1999).

<sup>2</sup>*Am. Civil Liberties Union v. Blaine Sch. Dist. No. 503*, 86 Wn. App. 688, 695, 937 P.2d 1176 (1997).

<sup>3</sup>*Sperr v. City of Spokane*, 123 Wn. App. 132, 136-37, 96 P.3d 1012 (2004).

<sup>4</sup>*Hearst Corp. v. Hoppe*, 90 Wn.2d 123, 132, 580 P.2d 246 (1978).

<sup>5</sup>The two main exceptions to the redaction requirement are state "tax information" (RCW 82.32.330 (1)(c)) and law enforcement case files in active cases (*Newman v. King County*, 133 Wn.2d 565, 574, 947 P.2d 712 (1997)). Neither of these two kinds of records must be redacted but rather may be withheld in their entirety.

<sup>6</sup>*Seattle Fire Fighters Union Local No. 27 v. Hollister*, 48 Wn. App. 129, 132, 737 P.2d 1302 (1987).

<sup>7</sup>*Progressive Animal Welfare Soc'y. v. Univ. of Wash.*, 125 Wn.2d 243, 271, n.18, 884 P.2d 592 (1994) ("*PAWS II*").

<sup>8</sup>For smaller requests, the agency might simply provide them with the initial response or earlier so no notification is necessary.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-04004, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-04005 Inspection of records. (1) Obligation of requestor to claim or review records.** After the agency notifies the requestor that the records or an installment of them are ready for inspection or copying, the requestor must claim or review the records or the installment. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120. If the requestor cannot claim or review the records him or herself, a representative may do so within the thirty-day period. Other arrangements can be mutually agreed to between the requestor and the agency.

If a requestor fails to claim or review the records or an installment after the expiration of thirty days, an agency is authorized to stop assembling the remainder of the records or making copies. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120. If the request is abandoned, the agency is no longer bound by the records retention requirements of the act prohibiting the scheduled destruction of a requested record. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.-100.

If a requestor fails to claim or review the records or any installment of them within the thirty-day notification period, the agency may close the request and refile the records. If a requestor who has failed to claim or review the records then requests the same or almost identical records again, the agency, which has the flexibility to prioritize its responses to be most efficient to all requestors, can process the repeat request for the now-refiled records as a new request after other pending requests.

(2) **Time, place, and conditions for inspection.** Inspection should occur at a time mutually agreed (within reason) by the agency and requestor. An agency should not limit the time for inspection to times in which the requestor is unavailable. Requestors cannot dictate unusual times for inspection. The agency is only required to allow inspection during the agency's customary office hours. RCW 42.17.280/42.56.090. Often an agency will provide the records in a conference room or other office area.

The inspection of records cannot create "excessive interference" with the other "essential functions" of the agency. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. Similarly, copying records at agency facilities cannot "unreasonably disrupt" the operations of the agency. RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080.

An agency may have an agency employee observe the inspection or copying of records by the requestor to ensure they are not destroyed or disorganized. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100. A requestor cannot alter, mark on, or destroy an original record during inspection. To select a paper record for copying during an inspection, a requestor must use a nonpermanent method such as a removable adhesive note or paper clip.

Inspection times can be broken down into reasonable segments such as half days. However, inspection times cannot be broken down into unreasonable segments to either harass the agency or delay access to the timely inspection of records.

Note: <sup>1</sup>See, e.g., WAC 296-06-120 (department of labor and industries provides thirty days to claim or review records).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-04005, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-04006 Closing request and documenting compliance. (1) Fulfilling request and closing letter.** A records request has been fulfilled and can be closed when a

requestor has inspected all the requested records, all copies have been provided, a web link has been provided (with assistance from the agency in finding it, if necessary), an unclear request has not been clarified, a request or installment has not been claimed or reviewed, or the requestor cancels the request. An agency should provide a closing letter stating the scope of the request and memorializing the outcome of the request. A closing letter may not be necessary for smaller requests. The outcome described in the closing letter might be that the requestor inspected records, copies were provided (with the number range of the stamped or labeled records, if applicable), the agency sent the requestor the web link, the requestor failed to clarify the request, the requestor failed to claim or review the records within thirty days, or the requestor canceled the request. The closing letter should also ask the requestor to promptly contact the agency if he or she believes additional responsive records have not been provided.

(2) **Returning assembled records.** An agency is not required to keep assembled records set aside indefinitely. This would "unreasonably disrupt" the operations of the agency. RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. After a request has been closed, an agency should return the assembled records to their original locations. Once returned, the records are no longer subject to the prohibition on destroying records scheduled for destruction under the agency's retention schedule. RCW 42.17.290/42.56.100.

(3) **Retain copy of records provided.** In some cases, it may be wise for the agency to keep a separate copy of the records it copied and provided in response to a request. This allows the agency to document what was provided. A growing number of requests are for a copy of the records provided to another requestor, which can easily be fulfilled if the agency retains a copy of the records provided to the first requestor. The copy of the records provided should be retained for a period of time consistent with the agency's retention schedules for records related to disclosure of documents.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-04006, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-04007 Later-discovered records.** An agency has no obligation to search for records responsive to a closed request. Sometimes an agency discovers responsive records after a request has been closed. An agency should provide the later-discovered records to the requestor.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-04007, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

#### **WAC 44-14-050 Reserved.**

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-050, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

### **EXEMPTIONS**

**WAC 44-14-060 Exemptions.** (1) The Public Records Act provides that a number of types of documents are exempt from public inspection and copying. In addition, documents are exempt from disclosure if any "other statute" exempts or prohibits disclosure. Requestors should be aware of the following exemptions, outside the Public Records Act, that

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restrict the availability of some documents held by (name of agency) for inspection and copying:

(List other laws)

(2) The (agency) is prohibited by statute from disclosing lists of individuals for commercial purposes.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-060, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

### **Comments to WAC 44-14-060**

**WAC 44-14-06001 Agency must publish list of applicable exemptions.** An agency must publish and maintain a list of the "other statute" exemptions from disclosure (that is, those exemptions found outside the Public Records Act) that it believes potentially exempt records it holds from disclosure. RCW 42.17.260(2)/42.56.070(2). The list is "for informational purposes" only and an agency's failure to list an exemption "shall not affect the efficacy of any exemption." RCW 42.17.260(2)/42.56.070(2). A list of possible "other statute" exemptions is posted on the web site of the Municipal Research Service Center at [www.mrsc.org/Publications/prdpub04.pdf](http://www.mrsc.org/Publications/prdpub04.pdf) (scroll to Appendix C).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-06001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-06002 Summary of exemptions.** (1) **General.** The act and other statutes contain hundreds of exemptions from disclosure and dozens of court cases interpret them. A full treatment of all exemptions is beyond the scope of the model rules. Instead, these comments to the model rules provide general guidance on exemptions and summarize a few of the most frequently invoked exemptions. However, the scope of exemptions is determined exclusively by statute and case law; the comments to the model rules merely provide guidance on a few of the most common issues.

An exemption from disclosure will be narrowly construed in favor of disclosure. RCW 42.17.251/42.56.030. An exemption from disclosure must specifically exempt a record or portion of a record from disclosure. RCW 42.17.260(1)/42.56.070(1). An exemption will not be inferred.<sup>1</sup>

An agency cannot define the scope of a statutory exemption through rule making or policy.<sup>2</sup> An agency agreement or promise not to disclose a record cannot make a disclosable record exempt from disclosure. RCW 42.17.260(1)/42.56.070(1).<sup>3</sup> Any agency contract regarding the disclosure of records should recite that the act controls.

An agency must describe why each withheld record or redacted portion of a record is exempt from disclosure. RCW 42.17.310(4)/42.56.210(4). One way to describe why a record was withheld or redacted is by using a withholding index.

After invoking an exemption in its response, an agency may revise its original claim of exemption in a response to a motion to show cause.<sup>4</sup>

Exemptions are "permissive rather than mandatory." Op. Att'y Gen. 1 (1980), at 5. Therefore, an agency has the discretion to provide an exempt record. However, in contrast to a waivable "exemption," an agency cannot provide a record when a statute makes it "confidential" or otherwise prohibits disclosure. For example, the Health Care Information Act

generally prohibits the disclosure of medical information without the patient's consent. RCW 70.02.020(1). If a statute classifies information as "confidential" or otherwise prohibits disclosure, an agency has no discretion to release a record or the confidential portion of it.<sup>5</sup> Some statutes provide civil and criminal penalties for the release of particular "confidential" records. See RCW 82.32.330(5) (release of certain state tax information a misdemeanor).

(2) **"Privacy" exemption.** There is no general "privacy" exemption. Op. Att'y Gen. 12 (1988).<sup>6</sup> However, a few specific exemptions incorporate privacy as one of the elements of the exemption. For example, personal information in agency employee files is exempt to the extent that disclosure would violate the employee's right to "privacy." RCW 42.17.310 (1)(b)/42.56.210 (1)(b). "Privacy" is then one of the elements, in addition to the others in RCW 42.17.310 (1)(b)/42.56.210 (1)(b), that an agency or a third party resisting disclosure must prove.

"Privacy" is defined in RCW 42.17.255/42.56.050 as the disclosure of information that "(1) Would be highly offensive to a reasonable person, and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public." This is a two-part test requiring the party seeking to prevent disclosure to prove both elements.<sup>7</sup>

Because "privacy" is not a stand-alone exemption, an agency cannot claim RCW 42.17.255/42.56.050 as an exemption.<sup>8</sup>

(3) **Attorney-client privilege.** The attorney-client privilege statute, RCW 5.60.060 (2)(a), is an "other statute" exemption from disclosure.<sup>9</sup> In addition, RCW 42.17.310 (1)(j)/42.56.210 (1)(j) exempts attorney work-product involving a "controversy," which means completed, existing, or reasonably anticipated litigation involving the agency.<sup>10</sup> The exact boundaries of the attorney-client privilege and work-product doctrine is beyond the scope of these comments. However, in general, the attorney-client privilege covers records reflecting communications transmitted in confidence between a public official or employee of a public agency acting in the performance of his or her duties and an attorney serving in the capacity of legal advisor for the purpose of rendering or obtaining legal advice, and records prepared by the attorney in furtherance of the rendition of legal advice. The attorney-client privilege does not exempt records merely because they reflect communications in meetings where legal counsel was present or because a record or copy of a record was provided to legal counsel if the other elements of the privilege are not met.<sup>11</sup> A guidance document prepared by the attorney general's office on the attorney-client privilege and work-product doctrine is available at [www.atg.wa.gov/records/modelrules](http://www.atg.wa.gov/records/modelrules).

(4) **Deliberative process exemption.** RCW 42.17.310 (1)(i)/42.56.210 (1)(i) exempts "Preliminary drafts, notes, recommendations, and intra-agency memorandums in which opinions are expressed or policies formulated or recommended" except if the record is cited by the agency.

In order to rely on this exemption, an agency must show that the records contain predecisional opinions or recommendations of subordinates expressed as part of a deliberative process; that disclosure would be injurious to the deliberative or consultative function of the process; that disclosure would inhibit the flow of recommendations, observations, and opinions; and finally, that the materials covered by the exemption

reflect policy recommendations and opinions and not the raw factual data on which a decision is based.<sup>12</sup> Courts have held that this exemption is "severely limited" by its purpose, which is to protect the free flow of opinions by policy makers.<sup>13</sup> It applies only to those portions of a record containing recommendations, opinions, and proposed policies; it does not apply to factual data contained in the record.<sup>14</sup> The exemption does not apply to records or portions of records concerning the implementation of policy or the factual basis for the policy.<sup>15</sup> The exemption does not apply merely because a record is called a "draft" or stamped "draft." Recommendations that are actually implemented lose their protection from disclosure after they have been adopted by the agency.<sup>16</sup>

(5) **"Overbroad" exemption.** There is no "overbroad" exemption. RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080. See WAC 44-14-04002(3).

(6) **Commercial use exemption.** The act does not allow an agency to provide access to "lists of individuals requested for commercial purposes." RCW 42.17.260(9)/42.56.070(9). An agency may require a requestor to sign a declaration that he or she will not put a list of individuals in the record to use for a commercial purpose.<sup>17</sup> This authority is limited to a list of individuals, not a list of companies.<sup>18</sup> A requestor who signs a declaration promising not to use a list of individuals for a commercial purpose, but who then violates this declaration, could arguably be charged with the crime of false swearing. RCW 9A.72.040.<sup>19</sup>

(7) **Trade secrets.** Many agencies hold sensitive proprietary information of businesses they regulate. For example, an agency might require an applicant for a regulatory approval to submit designs for a product it produces. A record is exempt from disclosure if it constitutes a "trade secret" under the Uniform Trade Secrets Act, chapter 19.108 RCW.<sup>20</sup> However, the definition of a "trade secret" can be very complex and often the facts showing why the record is or is not a trade secret are only known by the potential holder of the trade secret who submitted the record in question.

When an agency receives a request for a record that might be a trade secret, often it does not have enough information to determine whether the record arguably qualifies as a "trade secret." An agency is allowed additional time under the act to determine if an exemption might apply. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520.

When an agency cannot determine whether a requested record contains a "trade secret," usually it should communicate with the requestor that the agency is providing the potential holder of the trade secret an opportunity to object to the disclosure. The agency should then contact the potential holder of the trade secret in question and state that the record will be released in a certain amount of time unless the holder files a court action seeking an injunction prohibiting the agency from disclosing the record under RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540. Alternatively, the agency can ask the potential holder of the trade secret for an explanation of why it contends the record is a trade secret, and state that if the record is not a trade secret or otherwise exempt from disclosure that the agency intends to release it. The agency should inform the potential holder of a trade secret that its explanation will be shared with the requestor. The explanation can assist the agency in determining whether it will claim the trade secret

exemption. If the agency concludes that the record is arguably not exempt, it should provide a notice of intent to disclose unless the potential holder of the trade secret obtains an injunction preventing disclosure under RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540.

As a general matter, many agencies do not assert the trade secret exemption on behalf of the potential holder of the trade secret but rather allow the potential holder to seek an injunction.

Notes: <sup>1</sup>*Progressive Animal Welfare Soc'y. v. Univ. of Wash.*, 125 Wn.2d 243, 262, 884 P.2d 592 (1994) ("PAWS II").

<sup>2</sup>*Servais v. Port of Bellingham*, 127 Wn.2d 820, 834, 904 P.2d 1124 (1995).

<sup>3</sup>*Spokane Police Guild v. Liquor Control Bd.*, 112 Wn.2d 30, 40, 769 P.2d 283 (1989); *Van Buren v. Miller*, 22 Wn. App. 836, 845, 592 P.2d 671, review denied, 92 Wn.2d 1021 (1979).

<sup>4</sup>*PAWS II*, 125 Wn.2d at 253.

<sup>5</sup>Op. Att'y Gen. 7 (1986).

<sup>6</sup>See RCW 42.17.255/42.56.050 ("privacy" linked to rights of privacy "specified in (the act) as express exemptions").

<sup>7</sup>*King County v. Sheehan*, 114 Wn. App. 325, 344, 57 P.3d 307 (2002).

<sup>8</sup>Op. Att'y Gen. 12 (1988), at 3 ("The legislature clearly repudiated the notion that agencies could withhold records based solely on general concerns about privacy.").

<sup>9</sup>*Hangartner v. City of Seattle*, 151 Wn.2d 439, 453, 90 P.3d 26 (2004).

<sup>10</sup>*Dawson v. Daly*, 120 Wn.2d 782, 791, 845 P.2d 995 (1993).

<sup>11</sup>This summary comes from the attorney general's proposed definition of the privilege in the first version of House Bill No. 1758 (2005).

<sup>12</sup>*PAWS II*, 125 Wn.2d at 256.

<sup>13</sup>*Hearst Corp. v. Hoppe*, 90 Wn.2d 123, 133, 580 P.2d 246 (1978); *PAWS II*, 125 Wn.2d at 256.

<sup>14</sup>*PAWS II*, 125 Wn.2d at 256.

<sup>15</sup>*Cowles Pub. Co. v. City of Spokane*, 69 Wn. App. 678, 685, 849 P.2d 1271 (1993).

<sup>16</sup>*Dawson*, 120 Wn.2d at 793.

<sup>17</sup>Op. Att'y Gen. 12 (1988). However, a list of individuals applying for professional licensing or examination may be provided to professional associations recognized by the licensing or examination board. RCW 42.17.260(9)/42.56.070(9).

<sup>18</sup>Op. Att'y Gen. 2 (1998).

<sup>19</sup>RCW 9A.72.040 provides: "(1) A person is guilty of false swearing if he makes a false statement, which he knows to be false, under an oath required or authorized by law. (2) False swearing is a gross misdemeanor." RCW 42.17.270/42.56.080 authorizes an agency to determine if a requestor will use a list of individuals for commercial purpose. See Op. Att'y Gen. 12 (1988), at 10-11 (agency could require requestor to sign affidavit of noncommercial use).

<sup>20</sup>*PAWS II*, 125 Wn.2d at 262.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-06002, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## COSTS OF PROVIDING COPIES OF PUBLIC RECORDS

**WAC 44-14-070 Costs of providing copies of public records.** (1) **Costs for paper copies.** There is no fee for inspecting public records. A requestor may obtain standard black and white photocopies for (amount) cents per page and color copies for (amount) cents per page.

(If agency decides to charge more than fifteen cents per page, use the following language:) The (name of agency) charges (amount) per page for a standard black and white

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photocopy of a record selected by a requestor. A statement of the factors and the manner used to determine this charge is available from the public records officer.

Before beginning to make the copies, the public records officer or designee may require a deposit of up to ten percent of the estimated costs of copying all the records selected by the requestor. The public records officer or designee may also require the payment of the remainder of the copying costs before providing all the records, or the payment of the costs of copying an installment before providing that installment. The (name of agency) will not charge sales tax when it makes copies of public records.

(2) **Costs for electronic records.** The cost of electronic copies of records shall be (amount) for information on a floppy disk and (amount) for information on a CD-ROM.

(3) **Costs of mailing.** The (name of agency) may also charge actual costs of mailing, including the cost of the shipping container.

(4) **Payment.** Payment may be made by cash, check, or money order to the (name of agency).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-070, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## Comments to WAC 44-14-070

**WAC 44-14-07001 General rules for charging for copies.** (1) **No fees for costs of inspection.** An agency cannot charge a fee for locating public records or for preparing the records for inspection or copying. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120.<sup>1</sup> An agency cannot charge a "redaction fee" for the staff time necessary to prepare the records for inspection, for the copying required to redact records before they are inspected, or an archive fee for getting the records from off-site. Op. Att'y Gen. 6 (1991). These are the costs of making the records available for inspection or copying and cannot be charged to the requestor.

(2) **Standard photocopy charges.** Standard photocopies are black and white 8x11 paper copies. An agency can choose to calculate its copying charges for standard photocopies or to opt for a default copying charge of no more than fifteen cents per page.

If it attempts to charge more than the fifteen cents per page maximum for photocopies, an agency must establish a statement of the "actual cost" of the copies it provides, which must include a "statement of the factors and the manner used to determine the actual per page cost." RCW 42.17.260(7)/42.56.070(7). An agency may include the costs "directly incident" to providing the copies such as paper, copying equipment, and staff time to make the copies. RCW 42.17.-260(7)(a)/42.56.070(7)(a).<sup>2</sup> An agency failing to properly establish a copying charge in excess of the default fifteen cents per page maximum is limited to the default amount. RCW 42.17.260(7)(a) and (b)/42.56.070(7)(a) and (b) and 42.17.300/42.56.120.

If it charges more than the default rate of fifteen cents per page, an agency must provide its calculations and the reasoning for its charges. RCW 42.17.260(7)/42.56.070(7) and 42.17.300/42.56.120.<sup>3</sup> A price list with no analysis is insufficient. An agency's calculations and reasoning need not be elaborate but should be detailed enough to allow a requestor or court to determine if the agency has properly calculated its

copying charges. An agency should generally compare its copying charges to those of commercial copying centers.

If an agency opts for the default copying charge of fifteen cents per page, it need not calculate its actual costs. RCW 42.17.260(8)/42.56.070(8).

(3) **Charges for copies other than standard photocopies.** Nonstandard copies include color copies, engineering drawings, and photographs. An agency can charge its actual costs for nonstandard photocopies. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120. For example, when an agency provides records in an electronic format by putting the records on a disk, it may charge its actual costs for the disk. The agency can provide a requestor with documentation for its actual costs by providing a catalog or price list from a vendor.

(4) **Copying charges apply to copies selected by requestor.** Often a requestor will seek to inspect a large number of records but only select a smaller group of them for copying. Copy charges can only be charged for the records selected by the requestor. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120 (charges allowed for "providing" copies to requestor).

The requestor should specify whether he or she seeks inspection or copying. The agency should inform the requestor that inspection is free. This can be noted on the agency's request form. If the requestor seeks copies, then the agency should inform the requestor of the copying charges for the request. An agency should not assemble a large number of records, fail to inform the requestor that inspection is free, and then attempt to charge for copying all the records.

Sometimes a requestor will choose to pay for the copying of a large batch of records without inspecting them. This is allowed, provided that the requestor is informed that inspection is free. Informing the requestor on a request form that inspection is free is sufficient.

(5) **Use of outside vendor.** An agency is not required to copy records at its own facilities. An agency can send the project to a commercial copying center and bill the requestor for the amount charged by the vendor. An agency is encouraged to do so when an outside vendor can make copies more quickly and less expensively than an agency. An agency can arrange with the requestor for him or her to pay the vendor directly. An agency cannot charge the default fifteen cents per page rate when its "actual cost" at a copying vendor is less. The default rate is only for agency-produced copies. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120.

(6) **Sales tax.** An agency cannot charge sales tax on copies it makes at its own facilities. RCW 82.12.02525.

(7) **Costs of mailing.** If a requestor asks an agency to mail copies, the agency may charge for the actual cost of postage and the shipping container (such as an envelope). RCW 42.17.260 (7)(a)/42.56.070 (7)(a).

Notes: <sup>1</sup>See also Op. Att'y Gen. 6 (1991).

<sup>2</sup>The costs of staff time is allowed only for making copies. An agency cannot charge for staff time for locating records or other noncopying functions. See RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120 ("No fee shall be charged for locating public documents and making them available for copying.").

<sup>3</sup>See also Op. Att'y Gen. 6 (1991) (agency must "justify" its copy charges).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-07001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-07003 Charges for electronic records.** Reserved.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-07003, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-07004 Other statutes govern copying of particular records.** The act generally governs copying charges for public records, but several specific statutes govern charges for particular kinds of records. RCW 42.17.305/42.56.130. The following nonexhaustive list provides some examples: RCW 46.52.085 (charges for traffic accident reports), RCW 10.97.100 (copies of criminal histories), RCW 3.62.060 and 3.62.065 (charges for certain records of municipal courts), and RCW 70.58.107 (charges for birth certificates).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-07004, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-07005 Waiver of copying charges.** An agency has the discretion to waive copying charges. For administrative convenience, many agencies waive copying charges for small requests. For example, the attorney general's office does not charge copying fees if the request is for twenty-five or fewer standard photocopies.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-07005, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-07006 Requiring partial payment. (1) Copying deposit.** An agency may charge a deposit of up to ten percent of the estimated copying costs of an entire request before beginning to copy the records. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120.<sup>1</sup> The estimate must be reasonable. An agency can require the payment of the deposit before copying an installment of the records or the entire request. The deposit applies to the records selected for copying by the requestor, not all the records made available for inspection. An agency is not required to charge a deposit. An agency might find a deposit burdensome for small requests where the deposit might be only a few dollars. Any unused deposit must be refunded to the requestor.

When copying is completed, the agency can require the payment of the remainder of the copying charges before providing the records. For example, a requestor makes a request for records that comprise one box of paper documents. The requestor selects the entire box for copying. The agency estimates that the box contains three thousand pages of records. The agency charges ten cents per page so the cost would be three hundred dollars. The agency obtains a ten percent deposit of thirty dollars and then begins to copy the records. The total number of pages turns out to be two thousand nine hundred so the total cost is two hundred ninety dollars. The thirty dollar deposit is credited to the two hundred ninety dollars. The agency requires payment of the remaining two hundred sixty dollars before providing the records to the requestor.

(2) **Copying charges for each installment.** If an agency provides records in installments, the agency may charge and collect all applicable copying fees (not just the ten percent deposit) for each installment. RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120. The agency may agree to provide an installment without first receiving payment for that installment.

Note: <sup>1</sup>See RCW 42.17.300/42.56.120 (ten percent deposit for "a request").

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-07006, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

## REVIEW OF DENIALS OF PUBLIC RECORDS

### WAC 44-14-080 Review of denials of public records.

(1) **Petition for internal administrative review of denial of access.** Any person who objects to the initial denial or partial denial of a records request may petition in writing (including e-mail) to the public records officer for a review of that decision. The petition shall include a copy of or reasonably identify the written statement by the public records officer or designee denying the request.

(2) **Consideration of petition for review.** The public records officer shall promptly provide the petition and any other relevant information to (public records officer's supervisor or other agency official designated by the agency to conduct the review). That person will immediately consider the petition and either affirm or reverse the denial within two business days following the (agency's) receipt of the petition, or within such other time as (name of agency) and the requestor mutually agree to.

(3) **(Applicable to state agencies only.) Review by the attorney general's office.** Pursuant to RCW 42.17.325/42.56.530, if the (name of state agency) denies a requestor access to public records because it claims the record is exempt in whole or in part from disclosure, the requestor may request the attorney general's office to review the matter. The attorney general has adopted rules on such requests in WAC 44-06-160.

(4) **Judicial review.** Any person may obtain court review of denials of public records requests pursuant to RCW 42.17.340/42.56.550 at the conclusion of two business days after the initial denial regardless of any internal administrative appeal.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-080, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

### Comments to WAC 44-14-080

**WAC 44-14-08001 Agency internal procedure for review of denials of requests.** The act requires an agency to "establish mechanisms for the most prompt possible review of decisions denying" records requests. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520. An agency internal review of a denial need not be elaborate. It could be reviewed by the public records officer's supervisor, or other person designated by the agency. The act deems agency review to be complete two business days after the initial denial, after which the requestor may obtain judicial review. Large requests or requests involving many redactions may take longer than two business days for the agency to review. In such a case, the requestor could agree to a longer internal review period.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-08001, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-08002 Attorney general's office review of denials by state agencies.** The attorney general's office is authorized to review a state agency's claim of exemption and

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provide a written opinion. RCW 42.17.325/42.56.530. This only applies to state agencies and a claim of exemption. See WAC 44-06-160. A requestor may initiate such a review by sending a request for review to Public Records Review, Office of the Attorney General, P.O. Box 40100, Olympia, Washington 98504-0100 or publicrecords@atg.wa.gov.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-08002, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

### WAC 44-14-08003 Alternative dispute resolution.

Requestors and agencies are encouraged to resolve public records disputes through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation and arbitration. No mechanisms for formal alternative dispute resolution currently exist in the act but parties are encouraged to resolve their disputes without litigation.

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-08003, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]

**WAC 44-14-08004 Judicial review.** (1) **Seeking judicial review.** The act provides that an agency's decision to deny a request is final for purposes of judicial review two business days after the initial denial of the request. RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the statute allows a requestor to seek judicial review two business days after the initial denial whether or not he or she has exhausted the internal agency review process.<sup>2</sup> An agency should not have an internal review process that implies that a requestor cannot seek judicial review until internal reviews are complete because RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520 allows judicial review two business days after the initial denial.

The act provides a speedy remedy for a requestor to obtain a court hearing on whether the agency has violated the act. RCW 42.17.340 (1) and (2)/42.56.550 (1) and (2). The purpose of the quick judicial procedure is to allow requestors to expeditiously find out if they are entitled to obtain public records.<sup>3</sup> To speed up the court process, a public records case may be decided merely on the "motion" of a requestor and "solely on affidavits." RCW 42.17.340 (1) and (3)/42.56.550 (1) and (3).

(2) **Statute of limitations.** The statute of limitations for an action under the act is one year after the agency's claim of exemption or the last production of a record on a partial or installment basis. RCW 42.17.340(6)/42.56.550(6).

(3) **Procedure.** To initiate court review of a public records case, a requestor can file a "motion to show cause" which directs the agency to appear before the court and show any cause why the agency did not violate the act. RCW 42.17.340 (1) and (2)/42.56.550 (1) and (2).<sup>4</sup> The case must be filed in the superior court in the county in which the record is maintained. RCW 42.17.340 (1) and (2)/42.56.550 (1) and (2). In a case against a county, the case may be filed in the superior court of that county, or in the superior court of either of the two nearest adjoining counties. RCW 42.17.340(5)/42.56.550(5). The show-cause procedure is designed so that a nonattorney requestor can obtain judicial review himself or herself without hiring an attorney. A requestor can file a motion for summary judgment to adjudicate the case.<sup>5</sup> However, most cases are decided on a motion to show cause.<sup>6</sup>

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(4) **Burden of proof.** The burden is on an agency to demonstrate that it complied with the act. RCW 42.17.340 (1) and (2)/42.56.550 (1) and (2).

(5) **Types of cases subject to judicial review.** The act provides three mechanisms for court review of a public records dispute.

(a) **Denial of record.** The first kind of judicial review is when a requestor's request has been denied by an agency. RCW 42.17.340(1)/42.56.550(1). This is the most common kind of case.

(b) **"Reasonable estimate."** The second form of judicial review is when a requestor challenges an agency's "reasonable estimate" of the time to provide a full response. RCW 42.17.340(2)/42.56.550(2).

(c) **Injunctive action to prevent disclosure.** The third mechanism of judicial review is an injunctive action to restrain the disclosure of public records. RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540. An action under this statute can be initiated by the agency, a person named in the disputed record, or a person to whom the record "specifically pertains." The party seeking to prevent disclosure has the burden of proving the record is exempt from disclosure.<sup>7</sup> The party seeking to prevent disclosure must prove both the necessary elements of an injunction and that a specific exemption prevents disclosure.<sup>8</sup>

(6) **"In camera" review by court.** The act authorizes a court to review withheld records or portions of records "in camera." RCW 42.17.340(3)/42.56.550(3). "In camera" means a confidential review by the judge alone in his or her chambers. Courts are encouraged to conduct an in camera review because it is often the only way to determine if an exemption has been properly claimed.<sup>9</sup>

An agency should prepare an in camera index of each withheld record or portion of a record to assist the judge's in camera review. This is a second index, in addition to a withholding index provided to the requestor. The in camera index should number each withheld record or redacted portion of the record, provide the unredacted record or portion to the judge with a reference to the index number, and provide a brief explanation of each claimed exemption corresponding to the numbering system. The agency's brief explanation should not be as detailed as a legal brief because the opposing party will not have an opportunity to review it and respond. The agency's legal briefing should be done in the normal course of pleadings, with the opposing party having an opportunity to respond.

The in camera index and disputed records or unredacted portions of records should be filed under seal. The judge should explain his or her ruling on each withheld record or redacted portion by referring to the numbering system in the in camera index. If the trial court's decision is appealed, the in camera index and its attachments should be made part of the record on appeal and filed under seal in the appellate court.

(7) **Attorneys' fees, costs, and penalties to prevailing requestor.** The act requires an agency to pay a prevailing requestor's reasonable attorneys' fees, costs, and a daily penalty. RCW 42.17.340(4)/42.56.550(4). Only a requestor can be awarded attorneys' fees, costs, or a daily penalty under the act; an agency or a third party resisting disclosure cannot.<sup>10</sup> A requestor is the "prevailing" party when he or she obtains a judgment in his or her favor, the suit was reasonably necessary to obtain the record, or a wrongfully withheld record was

provided for another reason.<sup>11</sup> In an injunctive action under RCW 42.17.330/42.56.540, the prevailing requestor cannot be awarded attorneys' fees, costs, or a daily penalty against an agency if the agency took the position that the record was subject to disclosure.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of the act's attorneys' fees, costs, and daily penalty provisions is to reimburse the requestor for vindicating the public's right to obtain public records, to make it financially feasible for requestors to do so, and to deter agencies from improperly withholding records.<sup>13</sup> However, a court is only authorized to award "reasonable" attorneys' fees. RCW 42.17.340(4)/42.56.550(4). A court has discretion to award attorneys' fees based on an assessment of reasonable hourly rates and which work was necessary to obtain the favorable result.<sup>14</sup>

The award of "costs" under the act is for all of a requestor's nonattorney-fee costs and is broader than the court costs awarded to prevailing parties in other kinds of cases.<sup>15</sup>

A daily penalty of between five dollars to one hundred dollars must be awarded to a prevailing requestor, regardless of an agency's "good faith."<sup>16</sup> An agency's "bad faith" can warrant a penalty on the higher end of this scale.<sup>17</sup> The penalty is per day, not per-record per-day.<sup>18</sup>

Notes: <sup>1</sup>*Progressive Animal Welfare Soc'y v. Univ. of Wash.*, 125 Wn.2d 243, 253, 884 P.2d 592 (1994) ("*PAWS II*") (RCW 42.17.320/42.56.520 "provides that, regardless of internal review, initial decisions become final for purposes of judicial review after two business days.").

<sup>2</sup>*See, e.g.,* WAC 44-06-120 (attorney general's office internal review procedure specifying that review is final when the agency renders a decision on the appeal, or the close of the second business day after it receives the appeal, "whichever occurs first").

<sup>3</sup>*Spokane Research & Def. Fund v. City of Spokane*, 121 Wn. App. 584, 591, 89 P.3d 319 (2004), *reversed on other grounds*, 155 Wn.2d 89, 117 P.3d 1117 (2005) ("The purpose of the PDA is to ensure speedy disclosure of public records. The statute sets forth a simple procedure to achieve this.").

<sup>4</sup>*See generally Spokane Research & Def. Fund v. City of Spokane*, 155 Wn.2d 89, 117 P.3d 1117 (2005).

<sup>5</sup>*Id.* at 106.

<sup>6</sup>*Wood v. Thurston County*, 117 Wn. App. 22, 27, 68 P.3d 1084 (2003).

<sup>7</sup>*Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation v. Johnson*, 135 Wn.2d 735, 744, 958 P.2d 260 (1998).

<sup>8</sup>*PAWS II*, 125 Wn.2d at 257-58.

<sup>9</sup>*Spokane Research & Def. Fund v. City of Spokane*, 96 Wn. App. 568, 577 & 588, 983 P.2d 676 (1999), *review denied*, 140 Wn.2d 1001, 999 P.2d 1259 (2000).

<sup>10</sup>RCW 42.17.340(4)/42.56.550(4) (providing award only for "person" prevailing against "agency"); *Tiberino v. Spokane County Prosecutor*, 103 Wn. App. 680, 691-92, 13 P.3d 1104 (2000) (third party resisting disclosure not entitled to award).

<sup>11</sup>*Violante v. King County Fire Dist. No. 20*, 114 Wn. App. 565, 571, 59 P.3d 109 (2002); *Spokane Research & Def. Fund v. City of Spokane*, 155 Wn.2d 89, 104, 117 P.3d 1117 (2005).

<sup>12</sup>*Confederated Tribes*, 135 Wn.2d at 757.

<sup>13</sup>*Am. Civil Liberties Union v. Blaine Sch. Dist. No. 503*, 95 Wn. App. 106, 115, 975 P.2d 536 (1999) ("*ACLU II*") ("permitting a liberal recovery of costs is consistent with the policy behind the act by making it financially feasible for private citizens to enforce the public's right to access to public records.").

<sup>14</sup>*Id.* at 118.

<sup>15</sup>*Id.* at 115.



<sup>16</sup>*American Civil Liberties Union v. Blaine School Dist. No. 503*, 86 Wn. App. 688, 698-99, 937 P.2d 1176 (1997) ("*ACLU I*").

<sup>17</sup>*Id.*

<sup>18</sup>*Yousoufian v. Office of Ron Sims*, 152 Wn.2d 421, 436, 98 P.3d 463 (2004).

[Statutory Authority: 2005 c 483 § 4, RCW 42.17.348. 06-04-079, § 44-14-08004, filed 1/31/06, effective 3/3/06.]