

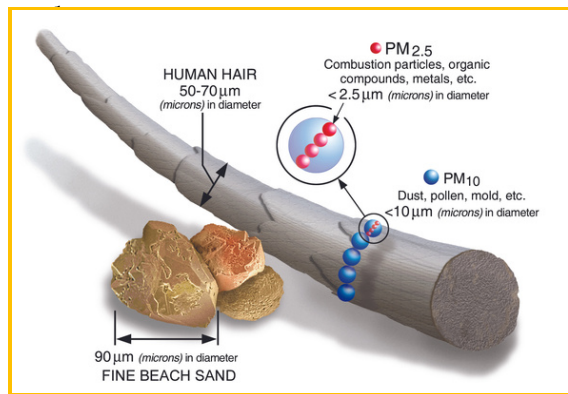
# IMPROVING WASHINGTON'S AIR QUALITY FOR ALL

You can help shape Washington's new Air Quality Program by sharing your thoughts with the Department of Ecology before November 10, 2022.

## UNDERSTANDING AIR QUALITY & ADDRESSING POLLUTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency set national air pollution standards in the Clean Air Act of 1970. The law included limits for six of the most common air pollutants, rules for enforcing these standards, and makes states responsible for meeting them. **But international experts consider current PM2.5 standards inadequate.**

According to law, *criteria pollutants* were not to exceed specified levels that would harm human health, with an *adequate margin of safety* to protect the most vulnerable populations of children and the elderly. When considering particulates, the smaller the particle, the greater the threat. Particles are measured by micrometers (ie, PM2.5 measures 2.5 micrometers in diameter). Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) is of the most concern because they can most easily enter the bloodstream,



and typically results from wildfires, smokestacks, or bacteria.

**This public comment period is our chance to make Washington state's standards stronger and more protective of human health.**

### Criteria Pollutants

The EPA developed national standards for six of the most common air pollutants: carbon monoxide (CO), lead (Pb), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), ozone, particulates, and sulfur dioxide.

### Particle Pollution

As the mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets in the air, this pollution includes a range of materials such as organic chemicals, acids, metals, soil or dust particles, and allergens (like fragments of pollen or mold spores).

## THE HUMAN TOLL OF AIR POLLUTION

Since air pollution is often invisible, it's easy to overlook its impact on our overall health. But it exacerbates or influences many medical conditions, including asthma, lung cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, psychological complications, and autism. When we breathe polluted air, particulates accumulate in the respiratory system. Prolonged exposure only compounds the impacts, making us sicker the longer we are exposed.

### UNEQUAL IMPACTS

Federal + state regulations do not protect us from these negative impacts, and the consequences of polluted air are not faced equally across our communities. People living closest to the sources of pollution face markedly worse health outcomes. For example, our Seattle and Tacoma neighbors living directly next to I-5 see higher rates of asthma and other respiratory conditions, and many have added health burden due to toxic fumes from the nearby industrial plants.

### Overburdened Communities

Evidence backs up what communities of color and low-income people already knew: **Factors like race, income, education level, and ZIP code can increase your risk for harmful environmental exposures like pollution.** In state law, *overburdened communities* are defined as a geographic area where people are exposed to environmental pollutants or contaminants through multiple pathways, which may result in significant adverse health outcomes or effects.



## INADEQUATE STANDARDS AND MONITORING

The federal government requires states to use air monitors to measure pollution in communities, and Washington state further relies on regional clean air agencies to do so. However, recent studies found gaps in Puget Sound's air monitoring system, which follows a broader trend. A 2020 national audit found air monitoring infrastructure across the country to be aging and underfunded. Antiquated air monitors have missed localized pollution disparities and the impacts of industrial explosions nationwide. And the patchy monitoring network has major blind spots: journalists have mapped cancer-causing industrial air pollution 'hot spots' that national monitors failed to reveal.



## REGULATING POLLUTION IN THE CLIMATE COMMITMENT ACT

In 2021, Washington's Legislature passed a landmark climate policy, the Climate Commitment Act. The CCA set standards, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions in Washington by 2050 through a "Cap & Invest" system. The new law includes an expansive air quality monitoring and enforcement program to cover all sources of emissions, not just the larger emitters covered under the Cap & Invest program. *The CCA will:*

- ▶ Identify all Washington's communities overburdened by air pollution and the significant sources this pollution;
- ▶ Set air quality goals for overburdened communities;
- ▶ Expand and improve the air monitoring network statewide;
- ▶ Require the Department of Ecology to conduct analysis to ensure reduction goals are being met;
- ▶ Authorize Ecology and/or local air agencies to issue an enforceable order to the applicable facilities operating in overburdened communities if criteria pollutants are not being reduced.



## WHAT'S NEXT: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH NOV. 10

Washington residents like YOU can help Ecology define how we'll reach our air quality goals. Specifically, Ecology seeks feedback on the indicators they'll use to identify an overburdened community highly impacted by air pollution.

### COMMENTS MAY ALSO COVER:

- The types of air monitors Ecology could deploy,
- How communities would like to see air quality improved,
- Other considerations important to air quality in your community.

Learn more and share your community's concerns at these upcoming virtual events:

Oct 26th at 1 pm  
[Click to register](#)

Nov 1st at 6 pm  
[Click to register](#)

[Learn more](#)

