

Chapter 43.21K RCW
ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE PROGRAM AGREEMENTS

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RCW 43.21K.005 Purpose—1997 c 381. The purpose of chapter 381, Laws of 1997 is to create a voluntary program authorizing environmental excellence program agreements with persons regulated under the environmental laws of the state of Washington, and to direct agencies of the state of Washington to solicit and support the development of agreements that use innovative environmental measures or strategies to achieve environmental results more effectively or efficiently.

Agencies shall encourage environmental excellence program agreements that favor or promote pollution prevention, source reduction, or improvements in practices that are transferable to other interested entities or that can achieve better overall environmental results than required by otherwise applicable rules and requirements.

In enacting chapter 381, Laws of 1997 it is not the intent of the legislature that state environmental standards be applied in a manner that could result in these state standards being waived under section 121 of the federal comprehensive environmental response, compensation, and liability act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 9261 [9621]). [1997 c 381 § 1.]

RCW 43.21K.010 Definitions. The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "State, regional, or local agency" means an agency, board, department, authority, or commission that administers environmental laws.

(2) "Coordinating agency" means the state, regional, or local agency with the primary regulatory responsibility for the proposed environmental excellence program agreement. If multiple agencies have jurisdiction to administer state environmental laws affected by an environmental excellence agreement, the department of ecology shall designate or act as the coordinating agency.

(3) "Director" means the individual or body of individuals in whom the ultimate legal authority of an agency is vested by any provision of law. If the agency head is a body of individuals, a majority of those individuals constitutes the director.

(4) "Environmental laws" means chapters 43.21A, 70A.15, 70A.205, 70A.300, 70A.125, 77.55, 90.48, 90.52, 90.58, 90.64, and 90.71 RCW, and RCW 90.54.020(3)(b) and rules adopted under those chapters and section. The term environmental laws as used in this chapter does not include any provision of the Revised Code of Washington, or of any municipal ordinance or enactment, that regulates the selection of a location for a new facility.

(5) "Facility" means a site or activity that is regulated under any of the provisions of the environmental laws.

(6) "Legal requirement" includes any provision of an environmental law, rule, order, or permit.

(7) "Sponsor" means the owner or operator of a facility, including a municipal corporation, subject to regulation under the environmental laws of the state of Washington, or an authorized representative of the owner or operator, that submits a proposal for an environmental excellence program agreement.

(8) "Stakeholder" means a person who has a direct interest in the proposed environmental excellence program agreement or who represents a public interest in the proposed environmental excellence program agreement. Stakeholders may include communities near the project, local or state governments, permittees, businesses, environmental and other public interest groups, employees or employee representatives, or other persons. [2021 c 65 § 39; 2003 c 39 § 25; 1997 c 381 § 2.]

Explanatory statement—2021 c 65: See note following RCW 53.54.030.

RCW 43.21K.020 Agreements—Environmental results. An environmental excellence program agreement entered into under this chapter must achieve more effective or efficient environmental results than the results that would be otherwise achieved. The basis for comparison shall be a reasonable estimate of the overall impact of the participating facility on the environment in the absence of an environmental excellence program agreement. More effective environmental results are results that are better overall than those that would be achieved under the legal requirements superseded or replaced by the agreement. More efficient environmental results are results that are achieved at reduced cost but do not decrease the overall environmental results achieved by the participating facility. An environmental excellence program agreement may not authorize either (1) the release of water pollutants that will cause to be exceeded, at points of compliance in the ambient environment established pursuant to law, numeric surface water or groundwater quality criteria or numeric sediment quality criteria adopted as rules under chapter 90.48 RCW; or (2) the emission of any air contaminants that will cause to be

exceeded any air quality standard as defined in RCW 70A.15.1030(3); or (3) a decrease in the overall environmental results achieved by the participating facility compared with results achieved over a representative period before the date on which the agreement is proposed by the sponsor. However, an environmental excellence program agreement may authorize reasonable increases in the release of pollutants to permit increases in facility production or facility expansion and modification. [2021 c 65 § 40; 1997 c 381 § 3.]

Explanatory statement—2021 c 65: See note following RCW 53.54.030.

RCW 43.21K.030 Authority for agreements—Restrictions. (1) The director of a state, regional, or local agency may enter into an environmental excellence program agreement with any sponsor, even if one or more of the terms of the environmental excellence program agreement would be inconsistent with an otherwise applicable legal requirement. An environmental excellence program agreement must meet the requirements of RCW 43.21K.020. Otherwise applicable legal requirements identified according to RCW 43.21K.060(1) shall be superseded and replaced in accordance with RCW 43.21K.080.

(2) The director of a state, regional, or local agency may enter into an environmental excellence program agreement only to the extent the state, regional, or local agency has jurisdiction to administer state environmental laws either directly or indirectly through the adoption of rules.

(3) Where a sponsor proposes an environmental excellence program agreement that would affect legal requirements applicable to the covered facility that are administered by more than one state, regional, or local agency, the coordinating agency shall take the lead in developing the environmental excellence program agreement with the sponsor and other agencies administering legal requirements applicable to the covered facility and affected by the agreement. The environmental excellence program agreement does not become effective until the agreement is approved by the director of each agency administering legal requirements identified according to RCW 43.21K.060(1).

(4) No director may enter into an environmental excellence program agreement applicable to a remedial action conducted under the Washington model toxics control act, chapter 70A.305 RCW, or the federal comprehensive environmental response, compensation and liability act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 9601 et seq.). No action taken under this chapter shall be deemed a waiver of any applicable, relevant, or appropriate requirements for any remedial action conducted under the Washington model toxics control act or the federal comprehensive environmental response, compensation and liability act.

(5) The directors of state, regional, or local agencies shall not enter into an environmental excellence program agreement or a modification of an environmental excellence program agreement containing terms affecting legal requirements adopted to comply with provisions of a federal regulatory program and to which the responsible federal agency objects after notice under the terms of RCW 43.21K.070(4).

(6) The directors of regional or local governments may not enter into an environmental excellence program agreement or a modification

of an environmental excellence program agreement containing terms affecting legal requirements that are subject to review or appeal by a state agency, including but not limited to chapters 70A.15, 70A.205, and 90.58 RCW, and to which the responsible state agency objects after notice is given under the terms of RCW 43.21K.070(4). [2021 c 65 § 41; 1997 c 381 § 4.]

Explanatory statement—2021 c 65: See note following RCW 53.54.030.

RCW 43.21K.040 Proposals for agreements. (1) A sponsor may propose an environmental excellence program agreement. A trade association or other authorized representative of a sponsor or sponsors may propose a programmatic environmental excellence program agreement for multiple facilities.

(2) A sponsor must submit, at a minimum, the following information and other information that may be requested by the director or directors required to sign the agreement:

(a) A statement that describes how the proposal is consistent with the purpose of this chapter and the project approval criteria in RCW 43.21K.020;

(b) (i) For a site-specific proposal, a comprehensive description of the proposed environmental excellence project that includes the nature of the facility and the operations that will be affected, how the facility or operations will achieve results more effectively or efficiently, and the nature of the results anticipated; or

(ii) For a programmatic proposal, a comprehensive description of the proposed environmental excellence project that identifies the facilities and the operations that are expected to participate, how participating facilities or operations will achieve environmental results more effectively or efficiently, the nature of the results anticipated, and the method to identify and document the commitments made by individual participants;

(c) An environmental checklist, containing sufficient information to reasonably inform the public of the nature of the proposed environmental excellence program agreement and describing probable significant adverse environmental impacts and environmental benefits expected from implementation of the proposal;

(d) A draft environmental excellence program agreement;

(e) A description of the stakeholder process as provided in RCW 43.21K.050;

(f) A preliminary identification of the permit amendments or modifications that may be necessary to implement the proposed environmental excellence program agreement. [1997 c 381 § 5.]

RCW 43.21K.050 Stakeholder participation. (1) Stakeholder participation in and support for an environmental excellence program agreement is vital to the integrity of the environmental excellence program agreement and helps to inform the decision whether an environmental excellence program agreement can be approved.

(2) A proposal for an environmental excellence program agreement shall include the sponsor's plan to identify and contact stakeholders, to advise stakeholders of the facts and nature of the project, and to request stakeholder participation and review. Stakeholder

participation and review shall occur during the development, consideration, and implementation stages of the proposed environmental excellence program agreement. The plan shall include notice to the employees of the facility to be covered by the proposed environmental excellence program agreement and public notice in the area of the covered facility.

(3) The coordinating agency shall extend an invitation to participate in the development of the proposal to a broad and representative sector of the public likely to be affected by the environmental excellence program agreement, including representatives of local community, labor, environmental, and neighborhood advocacy groups. The coordinating agency shall select participants to be included in the stakeholder process that are representative of the diverse sectors of the public that are interested in the agreement. The stakeholder process shall include the opportunity for discussion and comment at multiple stages of the process and access to the information relied upon by the directors in approving the agreement.

(4) The coordinating agency will identify any additional provisions for the stakeholder process that the director of the coordinating agency, in the director's sole discretion, considers appropriate to the success of the stakeholder process, and provide for notice to the United States environmental protection agency or other responsible federal agency of each proposed environmental excellence program agreement that may affect legal requirements of any program administered by that agency. [1997 c 381 § 6.]

RCW 43.21K.060 Terms and conditions of agreements. An environmental excellence program agreement must contain the following terms and conditions:

(1) An identification of all legal requirements that are superseded or replaced by the environmental excellence program agreement;

(2) A description of all legal requirements that are enforceable as provided in RCW 43.21K.110(1) that are different from those legal requirements applicable in the absence of the environmental excellence program agreement;

(3) A description of the voluntary goals that are or will be pursued by the sponsor;

(4) A statement describing how the environmental excellence program agreement will achieve the purposes of this chapter;

(5) A statement describing how the environmental excellence program agreement will be implemented, including a list of steps and an implementation schedule;

(6) A statement that the proposed environmental excellence program agreement will not increase overall worker safety risks or cause an unjust or disproportionate and inequitable distribution of environmental risks among diverse economic and cultural communities;

(7) A summary of the stakeholder process that was followed in the development of the environmental excellence program agreement;

(8) A statement describing how any participating facility shall measure and demonstrate its compliance with the environmental excellence program agreement including, without limitation, a description of the methods to be used to monitor performance, criteria that represent acceptable performance, and the method of reporting performance to the public and local communities. The facility's compliance with the agreement must be independently verifiable;

(9) A description of and plan for public participation in the implementation of the environmental excellence program agreement and for public access to information needed to assess the benefits of the environmental excellence program agreement and the sponsor's compliance with the environmental excellence program agreement;

(10) A schedule of periodic performance review of the environmental excellence program agreement by the directors that signed the agreement;

(11) Provisions for voluntary and involuntary termination of the agreement;

(12) The duration of the environmental excellence program agreement and provisions for renewal;

(13) Statements approving the environmental excellence program agreement made by the sponsor and by or on behalf of directors of each state, regional, or local agency administering legal requirements that are identified according to subsection (1) of this section;

(14) Additional terms as requested by the directors signing the environmental excellence program agreement and consistent with this chapter;

(15) Draft permits or permit modifications as needed to implement the environmental excellence program agreement;

(16) With respect to a programmatic environmental excellence program agreement, a statement of the method with which to identify and document the specific commitments to be made by individual participants. [1997 c 381 § 7.]

RCW 43.21K.070 Public comment—Notice—Responsiveness summary—

Copy to federal agency. (1) The coordinating agency shall provide at least thirty days after notice has been published in a newspaper under subsection (2) of this section for public comment on a proposal to enter into or modify an environmental excellence program agreement. The coordinating agency may provide for an additional period of public comment if required by the complexity of the proposed environmental excellence program agreement and the degree of public interest. Before the start of the comment period, the coordinating agency shall prepare a proposed agreement, a public notice and a fact sheet. The fact sheet shall: (a) Briefly describe the principal facts and the significant factual, legal, methodological and policy questions considered by the directors signing the agreement, and the directors' proposed decisions; and (b) briefly describe how the proposed action meets the requirements of RCW 43.21K.020.

(2) The coordinating agency shall publish notice of the proposed agreement in the Washington State Register and in a newspaper of general circulation in the vicinity of the facility or facilities covered by the proposed environmental excellence program agreement. The notice shall generally describe the agreement or modification; the facilities to be covered; summarize the changes in legal requirements that will result from the agreement; summarize the reasons for approving the agreement or modifications; identify an agency person to contact for additional information; state that the proposed agreement or modification and fact sheet are available on request; and state that comments may be submitted to the agency during the comment period. The coordinating agency shall order a public informational meeting or a public hearing to receive oral comments if the written

comments during the comment period demonstrate considerable public interest in the proposed agreement.

(3) The coordinating agency shall prepare and make available a responsiveness summary indicating the agencies' actions taken in response to comments and the reasons for those actions.

(4) With respect to an environmental excellence program agreement that affects legal requirements adopted to comply with provisions of a federal regulatory program, the coordinating agency shall provide a copy of the environmental excellence program agreement, and a copy of the notice required by subsection (1) of this section, to the federal agency that is responsible for administering that program at least thirty days before entering into or modifying the environmental excellence program agreement, and shall afford the federal agency the opportunity to object to those terms of the environmental excellence program agreement or modification of an environmental excellence program agreement affecting the legal requirements. The coordinating agency shall provide similar notice to state agencies that have statutory review or appeal responsibilities regarding provisions of the environmental excellence program agreement. [1997 c 381 § 8.]

RCW 43.21K.080 Effect of agreements on legal requirements and permits—Permit revisions—Programmatic agreements. (1)

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any legal requirement identified under RCW 43.21K.060(1) shall be superseded or replaced in accordance with the terms of the environmental excellence program agreement. Legal requirements contained in a permit that are affected by an environmental excellence program agreement will continue to be enforceable until such time as the permit is revised in accordance with subsection (2) of this section. With respect to any other legal requirements, the legal requirements contained in the environmental excellence program agreement are effective as provided by the environmental excellence program agreement, and the facility or facilities covered by an environmental excellence program agreement shall comply with the terms of the environmental excellence program agreement in lieu of the legal requirements that are superseded and replaced by the approved environmental excellence program agreement.

(2) Any permits affected by an environmental excellence program agreement shall be revised to conform to the environmental excellence program agreement by the agency with jurisdiction. The permit revisions will be completed within one hundred twenty days of the effective date of the agreement in accordance with otherwise applicable procedural requirements, including, where applicable, public notice and the opportunity for comment, and the opportunity for review and objection by federal agencies.

(3) Other than as superseded or replaced as provided in an approved environmental excellence program agreement, any existing permit requirements remain in effect and are enforceable.

(4) A programmatic environmental excellence program agreement shall become applicable to an individual facility when all directors entering into the programmatic agreement approve the owner or operator's commitment to comply with the agreement. A programmatic agreement may not take effect, however, until notice and an opportunity to comment for the individual facility has been provided in accordance with the requirements of RCW 43.21K.070 (1) through (3). [1997 c 381 § 9.]

RCW 43.21K.090 Judicial review. (1) A decision by the directors of state, regional, or local agencies to approve a proposed environmental excellence program agreement, or to terminate or modify an approved environmental excellence program agreement, is subject to judicial review in superior court. For purposes of judicial review, the court may grant relief from the decision to approve or modify an environmental excellence program agreement only if it determines that the action: (a) Violates constitutional provisions; (b) exceeds the statutory authority of the agency; (c) was arbitrary and capricious; or (d) was taken without compliance with the procedures provided by this chapter. However, the decision of the director or directors shall be accorded substantial deference by the court. A decision not to enter into or modify an environmental excellence program agreement and a decision not to accept a commitment under RCW 43.21K.080(4) to comply with the terms of a programmatic environmental excellence [program] agreement are within the sole discretion of the directors of the state, regional, or local agencies and are not subject to review.

(2) An appeal from a decision to approve or modify a facility specific or a programmatic environmental excellence program agreement is not timely unless filed with the superior court and served on the parties to the environmental excellence program agreement within thirty days of the date on which the agreement or modification is signed by the director. For an environmental excellence program agreement or modification signed by more than one director, there is only one appeal, and the time for appeal shall run from the last date on which the agreement or modification is signed by a director.

(3) A decision to accept the commitment of a specific facility to comply with the terms of a programmatic environmental excellence program agreement, or to modify the application of an agreement to a specific facility, is subject to judicial review as described in subsection (1) of this section. An appeal is not timely unless filed with the superior court and served on the directors signing the agreement, the sponsor, and the owner or operator of the specific facility within thirty days of the date the director or directors that signed the programmatic agreement approve the owner or operator's commitment to comply with the agreement. For a programmatic environmental excellence program agreement or modification signed by more than one director, there shall be only one appeal and the time for appeal shall run from the last date on which a director approves the commitment.

(4) The issuance of permits and permit modifications is subject to review under otherwise applicable law.

(5) An appeal of a decision by a director under *section 11 of this act to terminate in whole or in part a facility specific or programmatic environmental excellence program agreement is not timely unless filed with the superior court and served on the director within thirty days of the date on which notice of the termination is issued under *section 11(2) of this act. [1997 c 381 § 10.]

***Reviser's note:** Section 11 of this act was vetoed.

**RCW 43.21K.100 Continued effect of agreements and permits—
Modification of affected permit or approval.** After a termination under *section 11 of this act is final and no longer subject to judicial review, the sponsor has sixty days in which to apply for any permit or approval affected by any terminated portion of the

environmental excellence program agreement. An application filed during the sixty-day period shall be deemed a timely application for renewal of a permit under the terms of any applicable law. Except as provided in *section 11(4) of this act, the terms and conditions of the environmental excellence program agreement and of permits issued will continue in effect until a final permit or approval is issued. If the sponsor fails to submit a timely or complete application, any affected permit or approval may be modified at any time that is consistent with applicable law. [1997 c 381 § 12.]

***Reviser's note:** Section 11 of this act was vetoed.

RCW 43.21K.110 Enforceable and voluntary commitments—

Enforcement actions. (1) The legal requirements contained in the environmental excellence program agreement in accordance with RCW 43.21K.060(2) are enforceable commitments of the facility covered by the agreement. Any violation of these legal requirements is subject to penalties and remedies to the same extent as the legal requirements that they superseded or replaced.

(2) The voluntary goals stated in the environmental excellence program agreement in accordance with RCW 43.21K.060(3) are voluntary commitments of the facility covered by the agreement. If the facility fails to meet these goals, it shall not be subject to any form of enforcement action, including penalties, orders, or any form of injunctive relief. The failure to make substantial progress in meeting these goals may be a basis on which to terminate the environmental excellence program agreement under *section 11 of this act.

(3) Nothing in this chapter limits the authority of an agency, the attorney general, or a prosecuting attorney to initiate an enforcement action for violation of any applicable legal requirement. However, no civil, criminal, or administrative action may be brought with respect to any legal requirement that is superseded or replaced under the terms of an environmental excellence program agreement.

(4) This chapter does not create any new authority for citizen suits, and does not alter or amend other statutory provisions authorizing citizen suits. [1997 c 381 § 13.]

***Reviser's note:** Section 11 of this act was vetoed.

RCW 43.21K.120 Reduced fee schedule. An environmental excellence program agreement may contain a reduced fee schedule with respect to a program applicable to the covered facility or facilities. [1997 c 381 § 14.]

RCW 43.21K.130 Rule-making authority. Any state, regional, or local agency administering programs under an environmental law may adopt rules or ordinances to implement this chapter. However, it is not necessary that an agency adopt rules or ordinances in order to consider or enter into environmental excellence program agreements. [1997 c 381 § 16.]

RCW 43.21K.140 Advisory committee. The director of the department of ecology shall appoint an advisory committee to review

the effectiveness of the environmental excellence program agreement program and to make a recommendation to the legislature concerning the continuation, termination, or modification of the program. The committee also may make recommendations it considers appropriate for revision of any regulatory program that is affected by an environmental excellence program agreement. The committee shall be composed of one representative each from two state agencies, two representatives of the regulated community, and two representatives of environmental organizations or other public interest groups. The committee must submit a report and its recommendation to the legislature not later than October 31, 2001. The department of ecology shall provide the advisory committee with such support as they may require. [1997 c 381 § 17.]

RCW 43.21K.150 Costs of processing proposals—Fees—Voluntary contributions. (1) Agencies authorized to enter into environmental excellence program agreements may assess and collect a fee to recover the costs of processing environmental excellence program agreement proposals. The amount of the fee may not exceed the direct and indirect costs of processing the environmental excellence program agreement proposal. Processing includes, but is not limited to: Working with the sponsor to develop the agreement, meeting with stakeholder groups, conducting public meetings and hearings, preparing a record of the decision to enter into or modify an agreement, and defending any appeal from a decision to enter into or modify an agreement. Fees also may include, to the extent specified by the agreement, the agencies' direct costs of monitoring compliance with those specific terms of an agreement not covered by permits issued to the participating facility.

(2) Agencies assessing fees may graduate the initial fees for processing an environmental excellence program agreement proposal to account for the size of the sponsor and to make the environmental excellence program agreement program more available to small businesses. An agency may exercise its discretion to waive all or any part of the fees.

(3) Sponsors may voluntarily contribute funds to the administration of an agency's environmental excellence program agreement program. [1997 c 381 § 18.]

RCW 43.21K.160 Termination of authority to enter into agreements. The authority of a director to enter into a new environmental excellence program agreement program shall be terminated June 30, 2002. Environmental excellence program agreements entered into before June 30, 2002, shall remain in force and effect subject to the provisions of this chapter. [1997 c 381 § 19.]