

RCW 70A.02.060 Environmental justice assessment. (1)(a) When considering a significant agency action initiated after July 1, 2023, a covered agency must conduct an environmental justice assessment in accordance with this section to inform and support the agency's consideration of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations when making decisions and to assist the agency with the equitable distribution of environmental benefits, the reduction of environmental harms, and the identification and reduction of environmental and health disparities.

(b) A covered agency must aspire to complete the environmental justice assessment for a significant agency action without delaying the completion of the underlying agency action.

(2)(a) Consistent with RCW 70A.02.010(12)(e), for the purpose of preparing environmental justice assessments, a covered agency may deem actions significant that are additional to the significant agency actions identified in RCW 70A.02.010(12)(a) through (d), in iterative consultation with the council and interagency work group established under RCW 70A.02.110. By July 1, 2025, each covered agency must consider their agency's activities and identify and begin applying environmental justice assessments to any actions that the agency identifies as significant that are in addition to the significant agency actions identified in RCW 70A.02.010(12)(a) through (d). Significant agency actions designated by a covered agency under this subsection must be actions that may cause environmental harm or may affect the equitable distribution of environmental benefits to an overburdened community or a vulnerable population.

(b) In the identification of significant agency actions, covered agencies shall consider guidance issued by the council established in RCW 70A.02.110. Each covered agency must periodically review and update its identified types of significant agency actions for which an environmental justice assessment is required under this section, and the relevant factors to the agency's environmental justice assessments that result from the unique mission, authorities, and priorities of the agency.

(3) By July 1, 2023, and periodically thereafter, after an opportunity for public comment on its determinations, each covered agency must:

(a) Publish on its website the types of agency actions that the agency has determined are significant agency actions that require an environmental justice assessment under this section, including any significant agency actions identified under subsection (2)(a) of this section;

(b) Provide notification of the determination of the types of significant agency actions in the Washington State Register; and

(c) Prepare an environmental justice assessment when considering a listed action, after publication of the list of any additional significant agency actions identified under (a) of this subsection.

(4) The environmental justice assessment obligation of a covered agency for a significant agency action under this section is satisfied by the completion by the covered agency of a checklist developed by the covered agency that functions akin to the environmental checklist developed by the department of ecology pursuant to chapter 43.21C RCW, and that directs the covered agency to at a minimum:

(a) Consider guidance prepared by the council under RCW 70A.02.110 relating to best practices on environmental justice assessments and when and how to use cumulative environmental health impact analysis;

(b) Where applicable, use cumulative environmental health impact analysis, such as the environmental health disparities map or other data that considers the effects of a proposed action on overburdened communities and vulnerable populations;

(c) Identify overburdened communities and vulnerable populations who are expected to be affected by the proposed action and the potential environmental and health impacts;

(d) Pursuant to the consultation process in RCW 70A.02.100, identify if the proposed action is expected to have any local or regional impacts to federally reserved tribal rights and resources including, but not limited to, those protected by treaty, executive order, or federal law;

(e) Summarize community input and describe how the covered agency can further involve overburdened communities, vulnerable populations, affected tribes, and indigenous populations in development of the proposed action; and

(f) Describe options for the agency to reduce, mitigate, or eliminate identified probable impacts on overburdened communities and vulnerable populations, or provide a justification for not reducing, mitigating, or eliminating identified probable impacts.

(5)(a) To obtain information for the purposes of assessments, a covered agency must solicit feedback from members of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations to assist in the accurate assessment of the potential impact of the action and in developing the means to reduce or eliminate the impact on overburdened communities and vulnerable populations.

(b) A covered agency may include items in the checklist required under subsection (4) of this section that are not specified in subsection (4) of this section.

(c) The completion of an environmental justice checklist under subsection (4) of this section is not required to be a comprehensive or an exhaustive examination of all potential impacts of a significant agency action and does not require a covered agency to conduct novel quantitative or economic analysis of the proposed significant agency action.

(6) Based on the environmental justice assessment, each covered agency must seek, to the extent legal and feasible and consistent with the underlying statute being implemented, to reduce or eliminate the environmental harms and maximize the environmental benefits created by the significant agency action on overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. Consistent with agency authority, mission, and statutory responsibilities, the covered agency must consider each of the following methods for reducing environmental harms or equitably distributing environmental benefits:

(a) Eliminating the disparate impact of environmental harms on overburdened communities and vulnerable populations;

(b) Reducing cumulative environmental health impacts on overburdened communities or vulnerable populations;

(c) Preventing the action from adding to the cumulative environmental health impacts on overburdened communities or vulnerable populations;

(d) Providing equitable participation and meaningful engagement of vulnerable populations and overburdened communities in the development of the significant agency action;

(e) Prioritizing equitable distribution of resources and benefits to overburdened communities;

(f) Promoting positive workforce and job outcomes for overburdened communities;

(g) Meeting community needs identified by the affected overburdened community;

(h) Modifying substantive regulatory or policy requirements; and

(i) Any other mitigation techniques, including those suggested by the council, the office of equity, or representatives of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations.

(7) If the covered agency determines it does not have the ability or authority to avoid or reduce any estimated environmental harm of the significant agency action on overburdened communities and vulnerable populations or address the distribution of environmental and health benefits, the agency must provide a clear explanation of why it has made that determination and provide notice of that explanation to members of the public who participated in the process for the significant agency action or the process for the environmental justice assessment and who provided contact information to the agency.

(8) In developing a process for conducting environmental justice assessments, each covered agency must consider any guidance developed by the council pursuant to RCW 70A.02.110.

(9) The issuance of forest practices permits under chapter 76.09 RCW or sale of timber from state lands and state forestlands as defined in RCW 79.02.010 do not require an environmental justice assessment under this section. [2021 c 314 § 14.]

Conflict with federal requirements—2021 c 314: See note following RCW 70A.02.005.