

WAC 197-11-055 Timing of the SEPA process. (1) **Integrating SEPA and agency activities.** The SEPA process shall be integrated with agency activities at the earliest possible time to ensure that planning and decisions reflect environmental values, to avoid delays later in the process, and to seek to resolve potential problems.

(2) **Timing of review of proposals.** The lead agency shall prepare its threshold determination and environmental impact statement (EIS), if required, at the earliest possible point in the planning and decision-making process, when the principal features of a proposal and its environmental impacts can be reasonably identified.

(a) A proposal exists when an agency is presented with an application or has a goal and is actively preparing to make a decision on one or more alternative means of accomplishing that goal and the environmental effects can be meaningfully evaluated.

(i) The fact that proposals may require future agency approvals or environmental review shall not preclude current consideration, as long as proposed future activities are specific enough to allow some evaluation of their probable environmental impacts.

(ii) Preliminary steps or decisions are sometimes needed before an action is sufficiently definite to allow meaningful environmental analysis.

(b) Agencies shall identify the times at which the environmental review shall be conducted either in their procedures or on a case-by-case basis. Agencies may also organize environmental review in phases, as specified in WAC 197-11-060(5).

(c) Appropriate consideration of environmental information shall be completed before an agency commits to a particular course of action (WAC 197-11-070).

(d) A GMA county/city is subject to additional timing requirements (see WAC 197-11-310).

(3) **Applications and rule making.** The timing of environmental review for applications and for rule making shall be as follows:

(a) At the latest, the lead agency shall begin environmental review, if required, when an application is complete. The lead agency may initiate review earlier and may have informal conferences with applicants. A final threshold determination or FEIS shall normally precede or accompany the final staff recommendation, if any, in a quasi-judicial proceeding on an application. Agency procedures shall specify the type and timing of environmental documents that shall be submitted to planning commissions and similar advisory bodies (WAC 197-11-906).

(b) For rule making, the DNS or DEIS shall normally accompany the proposed rule. An FEIS, if any, shall be issued at least seven days before adoption of a final rule (WAC 197-11-460(4)).

(4) **Applicant review at conceptual stage.** In general, agencies should adopt procedures for environmental review and for preparation of EISs on private proposals at the conceptual stage rather than the final detailed design stage.

(a) If an agency's only action is a decision on a building permit or other license that requires detailed project plans and specifications, agencies shall provide applicants with the opportunity for environmental review under SEPA prior to requiring applicants to submit such detailed project plans and specifications.

(b) Agencies may specify the amount of detail needed from applicants for such early environmental review, consistent with WAC 197-11-100 and 197-11-335, in their SEPA or permit procedures.

(c) This subsection does not preclude agencies or applicants from preliminary discussions or exploration of ideas and options prior to commencing formal environmental review.

(5) An overall decision to proceed with a course of action may involve a series of actions or decisions by one or more agencies. If several agencies have jurisdiction over a proposal, they should coordinate their SEPA processes wherever possible. The agencies shall comply with lead agency determination requirements in WAC 197-11-050 and 197-11-922.

(6) To meet the requirement to insure that environmental values and amenities are given appropriate consideration along with economic and technical considerations, environmental documents and analyses shall be circulated and reviewed with other planning documents to the fullest extent possible.

(7) For their own public proposals, lead agencies may extend the time limits prescribed in these rules.

[Statutory Authority: 1995 c 347 (ESHB 1724) and RCW 43.21C.110. WSR 97-21-030 (Order 95-16), § 197-11-055, filed 10/10/97, effective 11/10/97. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.21C.110. WSR 84-05-020 (Order DE 83-39), § 197-11-055, filed 2/10/84, effective 4/4/84.]