

What does It mean to be on Ecology's List of "Contaminated" Sites?

Ecology maintains two types of lists of contaminated sites:

Confirmed and Suspected Contaminated Sites List

This report shows all sites that have been reported to Ecology and may need further action. The report contains information about sites in all phases of cleanup activity and if contamination is suspected or has been confirmed.

Hazardous Sites List (HSL)

This report is a subset of the Confirmed and Suspected report. This report includes all sites which have been assessed and ranked using the Washington Ranking Method (WARM). Sites are ranked 1 through 5 with a 1 being the more hazardous and 5 being the least hazardous. All ranked sites will need some further action.

How does a site end up on these lists?

Confirmed and Suspected Contaminated Sites List:

When Ecology receives a complaint or report that a property may be contaminated, our staff or local health personnel investigate the situation. We do this by looking at readily available records about the property, interviewing the property owner or operator, the person filing the complaint, and others that may be familiar with the property. We also visit the property and may take samples of readily accessible soil or water where we think contamination may be located. If based on this investigation, it is concluded the property or affected areas are contaminated and pose an actual or potential hazard, we will send the owner and operator a letter informing them of our conclusion. The property is then added as a "site" to our "Confirmed and Suspected Contaminated Sites List".

Hazardous Sites List:

Sites on Ecology's "Confirmed and Suspected Contaminated Sites List" are then scheduled for a more thorough investigation. This will typically involve a more detailed examination of records related to the site, interviews with additional persons, gathering of relevant maps and information on nearby potentially impacted areas, and sometimes additional testing. If the site has not been adequately cleaned up since it was first reported to Ecology, we will use this information to score or "Rank" the site. Ecology provides the owner/operator a chance to review and comment on our work. When this process is completed, ranked sites are added to our "Hazardous Sites List" prioritized by rank.

What does it mean to be on the *Confirmed and Suspected* list?

Sites on the "**Confirmed and Suspected Contaminated Sites List**" are sites where Ecology has confirmed contamination actually exists or are sites where Ecology strongly suspects contamination is present (e.g. buried drums), even though we may not yet have actual test results of contamination. Once on this list, sites are scheduled for a future more detailed evaluation. Owners of sites with serious environmental problems may be issued an order requiring immediate action to keep the contamination from spreading. Otherwise, these site owners may not be contacted by Ecology for months or years due to the tremendous backlog of sites needing further evaluation. A very few sites may require immediate emergency action if an imminent threat exists.

What does it mean to be on the *Hazardous Sites* list?

Sites on the “**Hazardous Sites List**” are sites where Ecology’s further assessment has confirmed contamination is present that poses a threat to human health or the environment. The Hazardous Sites List is updated and published twice a year by Ecology. Each year, Ecology cleanup program administrators select sites on this list that are priority for enforcement action. Sites that pose a lesser hazard may not be subject to enforcement action for several years because of the long list of sites needing action. Many cleanups of lower-priority sites occur voluntarily during property transfers.

Contaminated sites include ones that:

- Threaten drinking water.
- May affect a water body so that it’s unsafe.
- May pollute sediments so that recreating and shellfishing are unsafe.
- May affect people that are living, working, or recreating near the site.

Cleaning up sites minimizes human and environmental health impacts as well as your liability for those impacts.

Between 300 and 400 contaminated sites are reported to Ecology each year. The majority of these sites are reported and cleaned up voluntarily.

There are nearly 2,000 sites waiting to be cleaned up – Ecology focuses its resources on first cleaning up the sites that pose the greatest risk to public health and the environment.

I haven’t heard from Ecology for several years since my property was added to these lists. Does that mean the contamination is no longer of concern?

No. Unless you have cleaned up the contamination, under State law you are still responsible for cleaning up the contamination. The reason why you haven’t heard from Ecology is because of the large number of contaminated sites in Washington State. As Ecology works down these lists, we will eventually come to your site and issue an order requiring further testing and cleanup. In the mean time, if you do nothing to clean up the contamination, it can spread and make the ultimate cost of cleanup more expensive. You can work with Ecology voluntarily to get your site cleaned up at any time through the Voluntary Cleanup Program or through negotiating an agreed order or decree.

Furthermore, if you have contamination on your property and it is not on Ecology’s list, this does not release you from cleanup responsibility, and the site should be reported.

What List is the Basis for the Sites Ecology provides OFM Under GASB 49?

Ecology provides all contaminated site names affiliated with state agencies on both of our lists to OFM including leaking underground storage tank sites. We include the name of the site, address, rank, how long it’s been waiting for cleanup, and status.

Under state cleanup law, a “site” is the area of contamination. A site may include multiple property owners. For the GASB 49 report, Ecology attempted to find those sites that include a state agency as a property owner as well as those state agencies that caused contamination. Ecology will be updating this information for OFM each year.