



*Thea Foss Waterway in Tacoma (left: 1970s, right: 2010s)*

## 2017 ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY

# Protecting All Communities From Toxic Pollution

SB 5501 | Sen. Carlyle, Sen. Rolfes, Sen. Frockt

HB 1663 | Rep. Peterson, Rep. Fitzgibbon

### Overview

The voter-approved Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA) has proven to be an effective means to clean up toxic waste sites, prevent toxic chemical pollution, and support communities to address toxics pollution threats. Over 5,600 toxic sites await cleanup in Washington.

A modest surcharge to the current hazardous substance tax will provide more reliable and timely funds for critical toxics pollution prevention, cleanup, and public participation projects.

### Challenge

Currently, over 12,450 hazardous sites have been documented throughout the state, and new sites are added each year. These range from a neighborhood gas station to complex sites like the Spokane River or Duwamish Waterway. Through June 2016, approximately 6,600 have been cleaned up completely; another 200 await final monitoring.

MTCA funds are critical for local governments, including cities, counties, and ports, as well as state programs that implement laws and clean up contamination on state and private lands. Pollution prevention programs, which are the cheapest and most effective way to protect the public and the environment from pollution, receive an estimated 4% of MTCA funds. A portion of these funds also goes to local communities to help local residents have a voice in clean up decisions, conduct education, and manage waste safely. These grants are crucial to ensure that communities of color and low-income communities are equitably supported to have a voice in addressing toxic pollution problems impacting their health and their local economy.

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One of the 2017 Environmental Priorities presented by a coalition of over twenty organizations in Washington committed to advancing strong environmental policy.

### Projects funded by this program

- Grants to communities and ports for cleaning up toxic sites
- Hazardous materials emergency response training
- Funding to local health departments to conduct site inspections for facilities handling hazardous substances
- Prevention grants for waste management and recycling
- State hazardous and solid waste planning, management, regulation, enforcement, technical assistance, and public education
- Grants to citizen groups to support public participation in prevention and cleanup programs

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### Challenge cont'd

Every component of the MTCA program is critical for the well-being of communities most impacted by toxics. Just over half of toxic sites in Washington are in areas that are disproportionately low-income and disproportionately people of color. The residents of 46% of neighborhoods in Washington have incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty line, but those neighborhoods contain 56% of toxic sites.

MTCA relies on a modest "Polluter Pays" tax of 0.7% of the value of a particular hazardous substance, like petroleum products or pesticides. Hazardous substance tax revenue from year to year is more variable and difficult to anticipate and predict to ensure all of the various needs under the law are met. One key factor is the price of oil, with lower oil prices meaning a decline in revenue.

Over the last few years, budget leaders have continuously decreased funding for toxics pollution reduction projects. For example, in 2016 revenues from the tax dropped by roughly \$75 million, creating a shortfall that delayed many stormwater and state cleanup projects. Community support grants for the biennium were cut entirely.



*Auto scrap yard fire in Yakima county.*

### Solution

This biennium, the legislature is facing another large MTCA shortfall, estimated at around \$70 million. One easy solution is to alter the hazardous substance tax to provide more stable revenue over time through a temporary surcharge that only applies when tax revenues drop below \$160 million. This will allow more predictability in the state budget process and provide reliability for local communities that depend on these dollars to improve public health and the environment.

## CONTACT

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*Removing PCB-contaminated sediments at the Spokane River.*

photos: Department of Ecology, Curtis Cron