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PORT OF QUINCY (Grant County Port District No. 1)

Comments on Preliminary Draft Rule Language – Chapter 173 448 WAC

Air Quality in Overburdened Communities Highly Impacted by Air Pollution

Submitted to the Washington State Department of Ecology

The Port of Quincy appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Preliminary Draft Rule Language for Chapter 173 448 WAC, Air Quality in Overburdened Communities Highly Impacted by Air Pollution. While we support the goal of improving air quality and public health outcomes, we have significant concerns about how the draft rule would apply to the George/West Grant County area within the Port of Quincy district.

Our comments focus on ensuring that the rule is applied fairly, accurately, and in a manner consistent with the actual emissions profile and economic realities of the region.

1. George/West Grant County is not an industrial emissions area

The George community does not contain industrial facilities that emit criteria pollutants at levels contemplated in the draft rule. The local economy is primarily agricultural, food processing, and service oriented, and there are no large-scale refineries, manufacturing plants, or industrial complexes that would qualify as "high priority emitters" under WAC 173 448 070.

Applying a regulatory framework designed for industrial corridors to a rural agricultural community risks mischaracterizing local conditions and imposing obligations where no qualifying stationary sources exist.

2. Air quality impacts in George are driven by external, non-local sources

The primary contributors to air quality challenges in the George/West Grant County area are not local stationary sources. Instead, the dominant factors include:

- Wildfire smoke transported from regional and statewide fires
- Dust and particulate matter from surrounding arid lands
- Seasonal inversions that trap transported pollutants in the Columbia Basin
- Vehicle emissions from Interstate 90, a major east west freight and passenger corridor

These sources are not under the control of George residents, businesses, or the Port of Quincy.

Imposing regulatory obligations on the community for pollution it does not generate creates an inequitable burden and misdirects resources away from the true sources of emissions.

3. The draft rule overemphasizes permitted stationary sources

The draft rule places significant emphasis on "high priority emitters" based solely on permitting status, rather than on the actual contributors to impaired air quality in each community. This approach does not reflect the emissions reality in George, where:

- There are no qualifying stationary sources
- The largest contributors are mobile, regional, or natural sources
- Wildfire smoke and dust events dominate PM2.5 levels

Applying stationary source focused requirements in a community without such sources would be ineffective and inconsistent with the rule's stated purpose.

4. Need for community specific emissions inventories and source analysis

Before assigning obligations or identifying "high priority emitters," Ecology should complete a community specific emissions inventory for each overburdened community. For George/West Grant County, such an inventory would clearly show:

- No significant stationary industrial emissions
- Dominance of wildfire smoke, dust, and mobile sources
- Meteorological and regional transport factors driving PM2.5 concentrations

Without this foundational analysis, the rule risks misidentifying contributors and imposing obligations unrelated to actual emissions patterns.

5. The rule would impair economic opportunity and business development in a disadvantaged rural area

George and West Grant County are rural, economically disadvantaged areas that rely heavily on attracting new employers, expanding agricultural processing, and supporting small businesses. The draft rule, as written, would unintentionally make this more difficult in several ways:

A. Regulatory uncertainty discourages investment

Businesses evaluating rural communities look for predictable permitting pathways and regulatory clarity. If George is labeled an "overburdened community" subject to additional requirements—despite lacking local industrial emissions—prospective employers may perceive the area as higher risk or more costly to operate in.

B. Burdens could fall on small, non-industrial businesses

In the absence of large stationary sources, compliance obligations may fall—directly or indirectly—on small agricultural, logistics, or service sector businesses that lack the resources to absorb new regulatory costs.

C. Rural communities cannot afford misdirected regulatory burdens

George/West Grant County has fewer economic development tools, fewer large employers, and fewer sources of tax revenue than urban areas. Any rule that increases costs or administrative complexity—without producing measurable air quality benefits—risks slowing job creation and limiting the community's ability to attract new opportunities.

D. Penalizing a community for pollution it does not generate is inequitable

The rule's current structure could effectively punish George for wildfire smoke, dust, and regional transport—factors entirely outside local control. This would place a disadvantaged rural community at a competitive disadvantage compared to areas with similar or worse emissions profiles but different regulatory classifications.

6. If Ecology is concerned about external pollution sources, the solution should be mitigation funding—not punitive regulation

If Ecology believes that external pollution sources are significantly affecting air quality in George/West Grant County, then the appropriate response is state-supported mitigation, not punitive regulatory burdens on a community that does not generate the pollution.

A. Rural communities need support, not penalties, for problems they cannot control

George cannot regulate wildfire smoke, regional dust transport, or emissions from Interstate 90. Penalizing the community for these external factors would be both ineffective and inequitable.

B. Mitigation funding would produce real, measurable benefits

If Ecology is concerned about external impacts, the state should provide funding for:

- Wildfire smoke resilience programs
- Dust suppression and land stabilization projects
- Air filtration systems for schools, senior centers, and public facilities
- Community monitoring networks using validated equipment

- Vegetative buffers and windbreaks to reduce particulate transport

These investments would directly improve public health and air quality—unlike imposing regulatory obligations on nonexistent stationary sources.

- C. Punitive rules would divert scarce local resources away from meaningful solutions

Rural communities have limited staff capacity and limited tax bases. Imposing new compliance obligations would force them to spend scarce resources on administrative tasks rather than on practical mitigation measures that actually improve air quality.

- D. State funding aligns with environmental justice principles

Environmental justice requires that disadvantaged communities receive support, not additional burdens. If external pollution sources are the problem, then state funded mitigation is the only equitable and effective approach.

7. Requests for clarification and rule adjustments

To ensure fairness, accuracy, and effective implementation, the Port of Quincy respectfully requests that Ecology:

- Clarify that communities without qualifying stationary sources will not be subject to emission reduction obligations
- Base "high priority emitter" designations on actual emissions data
- Focus regulatory strategies on the true contributors to impaired air quality
- Complete community specific emissions inventories and source apportionment before assigning obligations
- Recognize the distinction between locally generated emissions and external regional pollution sources
- Ensure that disadvantaged rural communities are not placed at a competitive disadvantage for economic development
- Provide mitigation funding—not punitive regulation—when external pollution sources drive local air quality conditions

Conclusion

The Port of Quincy supports reasonable and effective measures to improve air quality across Washington State. However, the preliminary draft of Chapter 173-448 WAC does not reflect the emissions realities of the George/West Grant County area and risks imposing obligations on communities that are receivers of pollution but not contributors.

We urge Ecology to revise the draft rule to ensure that:

- Regulatory actions are grounded in actual emissions data
- Requirements are proportional to source contributions
- Rural communities without industrial emitters are not burdened with ineffective or inequitable obligations
- Economic development in disadvantaged areas is not hindered
- State resources are directed toward mitigation strategies that will produce measurable improvements in air quality

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. The Port of Quincy looks forward to continued collaboration with Ecology as this rulemaking progresses.