



June 13, 2023

Kimberly Grieves
Phthalates Action Plan Project Manager
Washington State Department of Ecology
ChemActionPlans@ecy.wa.gov

RE: Phthalates Action Plan Comments

Dear Ms. Grieves:

The Discovery Clean Water Alliance (Alliance) thanks the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Phthalates Action Plan. The Alliance appreciates Ecology's efforts to address these ubiquitous and persistent chemicals to protect human health and the environment.

The Alliance is a partnership managed by the Clark Regional Wastewater District (District), along with Clark County, Washington, and the cities of Battle Ground and Ridgefield, Washington. The Alliance provides wastewater services to more than 125,000 people in Clark County (about 25% of the County's population). The Salmon Creek Treatment Plant (SCTP) is the primary wastewater treatment facility for the Alliance: SCTP produces approximately 10,000 tons of biosolids each year that is land applied as a beneficial soil amendment to agricultural sites within Washington's Cowlitz and Klickitat counties.

The Alliance wishes to make the following comments related to the Draft Phthalates Action Plan:

1. We support the plan's recommendations to identify and reduce upstream sources and uses of phthalates and believe that action will have the most meaningful impact on human health and the environment.

Wastewater facilities like those managed by the Alliance do not actively use or generate phthalates, they receive them in the waste streams from the homes and businesses that they serve. Thus, the Alliance strongly supports source control measures, like the Safer Products for Washington program, that aim to reduce the use of these chemicals in consumer products and will result in fewer phthalates in wastewater and biosolids. Wastewater treatment plants are not designed to treat or remove chemicals like phthalates and eliminating them at the source will be the most effective way to reduce their impacts on human health and prevalence in the environment without unfairly burdening ratepayers of public clean water agencies.

2. We suggest removing biosolids from the solid waste section of the plan, and more broadly addressing all agriculture-related exposure pathways for phthalates.



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The plan makes several recommendations related to biosolids under the “Solid Waste Media Recommendations” section. We think it is important to note that biosolids in Washington are not considered solid waste but rather required to be beneficially reused to the maximum extent possible under state regulations (Chapter 70A.226 RCW; Chapter 173-308 WAC). As noted in the plan, 85 percent of biosolids are beneficially used as soil amendments in Washington state. The beneficial reuse of biosolids replenishes nutrients in the soil, contributes to carbon sequestration, and provides a cost-effective fertilizer source for local farmers.

While the vast majority of biosolids are recycled, biosolids are only applied to a very small amount of Washington land – less than a quarter of one percent of agricultural acreage receives biosolids. Therefore, focusing on biosolids alone will not completely address phthalates contamination and exposure pathways in Washington’s agricultural lands. Potential sources of phthalates in commercial fertilizers, pesticides, and other products will need to also be investigated to fully understand the extent of phthalates contamination in agricultural soil.

Addressing agriculture-related phthalates exposure in a broader context will keep in perspective the relatively small role that biosolids plays in statewide agricultural practices, while also acknowledging the importance of beneficial reuse as an environmentally sustainable, cost-effective means of managing this valuable resource.

3. We support further research and investigation as needed to develop science-based policies and regulations regarding phthalates.

We agree that more information is needed regarding phthalates in wastewater and biosolids, including the fate and transport of these chemicals through the treatment process, and the potential for crop uptake from contaminated soil. We support Ecology’s efforts to investigate these topics and encourage the use of existing data and studies to inform future research, as well as partnering with academic institutions and other organizations who are also working to advance understanding of these issues. The Alliance is also willing to participate in Ecology studies to provide samples or data as needed to further these investigative efforts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and for Ecology’s leadership to address this important issue. As a public clean water utility, our goals are aligned with Ecology’s to protect human and environmental health, and we support efforts aimed at reducing and restricting phthalate uses and sources in our state. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact me at jpeterson@crwwd.com or 360-993-8819.

Sincerely,



John Peterson, P.E.

Executive Director

Discovery Clean Water Alliance