WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

Success Stories

January - March 1999

Brief Descriptions; Full Stories Follow Descriptions

1. **Criteria for Sewage Works Design**
   Updating a manual using a diverse group of interested parties avoiding $500,000 in costs.
2. Alternative to Large Print Jobs
   Pilot project with State Printer to print documents on demand.
3. Grants to Small Local Government Projects
   Increasing the amount and number of grants going toward small toxic cleanup projects.
4. Testing Wastewater Discharge for Toxic Chemicals
   Improving permit decisions involving toxic pollutants.
5. Environmental Information Management System
   Making environmental monitoring information available to all staff.

1. CRITERIA FOR SEWAGE WORKS DESIGN

Problem

Ecology publishes a manual for use by local government and consulting firms for the planning and design of wastewater treatment facilities. The manual had not been updated since 1985. An estimate of $250,000 was given to Ecology by a consulting firm to update the manual.

Solution

Because of limited funding, staff initiated an innovative pilot approach using a diverse group of public and private organizations who volunteered to update the manual with Ecology leading the effort.

Effect

Without the addition of FTE's, the manual was successfully updated in December 1998. The single biggest indirect benefit was the collaboration and partnering of state and local agencies and the private consulting engineering community.

Results

- Cost avoidance to Ecology: The original estimate of $250,000 was closer to $500,000 over a 3-year period when the manual was completed.

2. ALTERNATIVE TO LARGE PRINT JOBS

Problem

Limited operating funds are expended to print large quantities (bulk savings) of print jobs. The documents sit on shelves until ordered for purchase by the public. The money from the sale cannot be used because it is considered a receivable and is subject to future appropriation by the legislature.

Solution

Ecology staff worked with the State Printer to implement a pilot approach for the printing of a large print job. The State Printer maintains a camera-ready copy of the document and prints it upon demand. The State Printer directly recovers its printing and shipping costs.

Effect

Ecology avoids the upfront (and unrecoverable) costs of printing and shipping the document.

Results

- Annual cost avoidance: $15,000
- Annual FTE hours saved: 53 in taking orders, shipping and billing.

3. GRANTS TO SMALL LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROJECTS

Problem

Ecology awards grants to local government for the clean up of toxic sites. In the past, many of these grants went to large, complex projects. Obstacles to obtaining grants for smaller projects, such as those needed by school, fire and road districts, were the paperwork and process involved.

Solution

Staff worked to streamline the paperwork and formal agreements needed to receive the grants and allow local government to apply for a grant after conducting the smaller clean ups.

Effect

The percent of remedial action grants going to small local government projects increased from a ten year average of 34% to an actual rate of 80% for fiscal year 1999.

Results

- The amount of grant dollars going toward small projects increased from a ten year average of $257,852 to an actual amount of $1,176,744 for fiscal year 1999.
- Small clean ups are getting done faster, thereby protecting the air, land and water of the state.

4. TESTING WASTEWATER DISCHARGE FOR TOXIC CHEMICALS

Problem

Several thousand facilities receive a permit from Ecology to discharge wastewater into the surface waters of the state. Toxic pollutants discharged by 135 of these facilities are not easily detected in the required monitoring of wastewater. These facilities are required to monitor the accumulative effect of their wastewater on aquatic organisms. After the tests were completed, many of these facilities were unable to accurately interpret the results of the samples.

Solution
Staff developed a data system to enter and analyze all of the lab results for the facilities. One person analyzes the data and maintains the system.

Effect
This type of testing is fairly new and controversial. By entering all the facility data into one system, Ecology has developed a credible system to analyze results and make better permit decisions.

Results
- The results of each test are consistently analyzed for permit decision making.
- The data base allows for consistent reports to be printed rather than individual permit writers having to do their own reports – resulting in an annual savings of 422 FTE hours.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Problem
Ecology collects enormous amounts of monitoring data on the environmental quality of Washington's air, land and water. Historically, this information was used by staff who manage projects such as toxic site cleanups, contamination investigations and monitoring general environmental conditions. The data collected was generally not accessible to anyone else.

Solution
As the second module of our Information Integration Project, all data that Ecology collects or requires to be reported to us in now entered into the agency's Environmental Information Management System.

Effect
Monitoring information is accessible to all staff. This allows staff working on similar projects, or the same project, to have a more environmental information available to them for decision-making.

Results
- Environmental data is documented and consistent giving it greater credibility/quality assurance for current and future use.
- Environmental data will not be "lost in file drawers" to other potential users. It is estimated that "lost" data was costing the agency approximately $1.5 million per year.
- The need for many smaller data systems is being eliminated.