



# Summer Report

## Taking on the Sound's biggest threat

### Keeping untreated sewage out of the Sound

How can Washington reduce Puget Sound beach closings, help the Sound's wildlife survive, and reduce the size and number of biological dead zones in the Sound?

One big step would be to stop sewage overflows from adding to the Sound's pollution with each heavy rain.

#### An outdated system

From the late 1800s through the 1940s, engineers designed combined sewers to carry sewage and stormwater runoff in a single pipe to the nearest body of water. Today, more than 230 overflows a year in King County alone feed directly into Puget Sound and other local waterways.

During heavy rains, stormwater and sewage overwhelm the system, forcing operators to decide between letting waste come back up people's toilets and sinks, or dumping it into the Sound untreated. That's why, in 2009, 690 million gallons of untreated wastewater were discharged into waterways in King County.

The easiest and most cost-effective way to reduce sewage and stormwater pollution in our waterways is to stop the water from ever entering the pipes. We can reduce the amount of stormwater that our cities produce by strengthening standards and promoting green infrastructure development. Reducing the amount of stormwater our cities create will in turn prevent sewage overflows and allow sewage to be treated rather than dumped in our waters. Right now, the Environmental Protection Agen-



Stuart Maxwell

▲ Untreated sewage and wastewater were discharged more than 230 times in King County in 2009.

cy is considering standards to achieve these goals. Yet powerful developers and builders are fighting hard to block EPA action.

That's why we're working to show the EPA that Washingtonians want a thriving, safe Puget Sound for our children and our wildlife. In February, we collected valentines for Puget Sound, and delivered them to

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson to show overwhelming support for strong stormwater rules. And in the coming months, we'll be working to build a broad base of support, mobilizing Washingtonians to submit public comments, building a diverse coalition of public health professionals and supportive city leaders, and meeting with regional EPA officials.



Joshua Putnam

### what's inside

◀ Turn to page 3 for an interview with one of the city councilmembers working to clean up King County's waters.

More online: Find out more about our efforts to protect the Sound at [www.EnvironmentWashington.org](http://www.EnvironmentWashington.org).



## To our members

In each state legislative session, we win some and we lose some. But despite the ups and downs, there's one annual event that never ceases to encourage me: Environmental Lobby Day in Olympia.

This year, more than 500 people from across the state converged on Olympia to raise a common voice in support of Washington's environment. Attendees filled the halls of the capitol, meeting with decision-makers, attending key hearings, and participating in classes to sharpen their advocacy skills.

Environmental action comes in many forms, so whether you were able to attend this year or not, your support—from talking to a canvasser on your doorstep to taking action online—helps remind our lawmakers that a green, healthy future should be one of their top priorities.

Sincerely,

Heather Shute  
Advocate

## Recent action

### Mercury: Another reason to go coal-free

Work has continued transitioning Washington toward a coal-free future by phasing out TransAlta, the state's only coal-fired power plant. To demonstrate just how important this transition is, Environment Washington released a new report in January, entitled "Dirty Energy's Assault on our Health: Mercury."

This report found that the 361 pounds of mercury that TransAlta emits every year is not only harmful to our environment but is also a widespread health risk. One in six women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her bloodstream to put her unborn child at risk should she become pregnant. This report was the first in a series of Environment Washington reports that will address the public health and environmental impacts of pollutants from coal-fired power plants.

### Solar-powered hot water: Smart, clean, ready to go

Those who always think "rain" when they think "Washington" might want to think again. According to an Environment Washington report released this spring, "Smart, Clean and Ready to Go," solar hot water heating could cut the state's global warming pollution by as the same amount as taking 170,000 cars off the road.

For the release of the report, Environment Washington was joined by Howard Lamb of Sunergy Systems, a Seattle-based solar design and installation firm, and Deb Schaack, a business manager in Seattle, who installed a solar hot water heater for her business. "Environmental concerns were a primary driver for us during the design and construction of our office addition, and solar hot water was at the top of our list as a feasible, cost-effective option," said Schaack.

Environment Washington will continue to call on decision-makers to take aggressive steps to encourage and promote the installation of solar water heaters on homes and businesses.



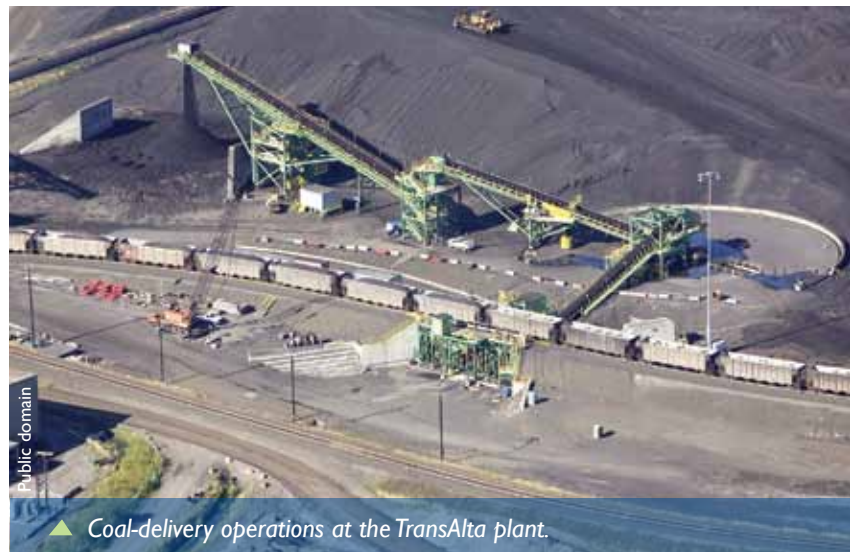
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Public domain

▲ Coal-delivery operations at the TransAlta plant.

# For a healthy future, update the Clean Air Act

There's no doubt that the Clean Air Act, which turned 40 in 2010, has improved the health and well-being of millions of Americans. Its protections are credited with saving the lives of 160,000 Americans in 2010 alone.

Of course, air pollution remains a pressing health threat in this country, a stark reminder of the work still left to do. An estimated 13,200 Americans lost their lives as a result of heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks and other fatal conditions brought on or exacerbated by air pollution from power plants.

Thankfully, the Obama administration has announced it will seek to strengthen and update portions of the Clean Air Act in the coming months.

## An assault on our health

With some vocal opponents of the Clean Air Act throwing their weight around in Congress, Environment Washington, the American Lung Association and other public health organizations are building support to make sure the administration's proposals go through.

In January, Shelley Vinyard, the top clean air advocate in our Washington, D.C., office, released a hard-hitting examination of one of the most dangerous air pollutants: mercury. That report, "Dirty Energy's Assault on our Health," documented waterways across the country that carry advisories warning against fish consumption due to mercury pollution. According to the report, power plants released 134,000 pounds of mercury into our environment in 2009 alone. (See Page 2 for Washington-specific numbers.)

The findings were covered by some 100 news outlets nationwide, including the Olympian and the Tacoma News Tribune. This is the first in a series of reports Vinyard plans to publish in her examination of the health threats posed by the burning of coal.

## A taste of things to come?

The Obama administration's updates to the Clean Air Act face great uncertainty, with polluting industries and their allies in Congress having launched an all-out assault on the landmark law.

In February, the House of Representatives attached a provision to a federal funding bill that would have blocked the Environmental Protection Agency from cutting mercury pollution from cement plants, cleaning up soot pollution, and reducing carbon dioxide from coal-fired plants.

After this setback, Vinyard and others worked to convince dozens of newspapers across the country to editorialize in support of the Clean Air Act. Environment America, our national federation, held rallies outside of the offices of those representatives who voted for the bill.

Less than a month later, the Senate rejected the funding bill, with many senators citing the environmental and public health attacks within the bill as one of the reasons for their opposition.



Photo courtesy Sen. Murray's office

## staff in action

*Environment Washington Field Associate Kristina Dumas (left) meets with U.S. Sen. Patty Murray in Washington, D.C.*



Photo courtesy Councilmember Phillip's office

## Keeping King County waters clean

As we work to protect Puget Sound from toxic runoff, Environment Washington has partnered with King County Councilmember Larry Phillips, chair of the Council's Transportation, Economy and Environment Committee. We had a chance to ask him about his work.

**Q:** Why has clean water been one of your top priorities throughout your career?

**A:** For a region surrounded by Puget Sound, lakes and rivers, clean water is essential to our environmental and economic sustainability. Millions of gallons of toxic runoff wash into Puget Sound, Lake Washington and thousands of other lakes and streams, threatening our health, environment and economy every day. Toxic stormwater runoff is the worst water pollution problem we face in our state and one that has been challenging for local governments like King County to address.

Holding polluters accountable for their fair share of the cleanup is a responsible approach to reclaiming Puget Sound and our waterways. If we allow pollution to continue degrading these ecosystems, we negatively affect our economy and our way of life. That is why I sponsored King County Council legislation supporting the state Legislature's proposed Clean Water Jobs Act in 2010 and 2011.

▲ Read the full interview online:  
[www.EnvironmentWashington.org/clean-water/phillips](http://www.EnvironmentWashington.org/clean-water/phillips)

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### Environment Washington

#### Our mission

We all want clean air, clean water and open space. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Washington. We focus exclusively on protecting Washington's air, water and open space. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

## Another step toward Rainier protection

Environment Washington applauded President Barack Obama for his long-anticipated report, released in February, which highlighted findings from the administration's nationwide listening sessions on how to protect our most treasured places.

Since last April, the administration held more than 50 sessions, including stops in Seattle and Spokane. Environment Washington talked to more than 127,000 people over the course of the summer, collected more than 3,000 public comments, and turned out more than 100 people to the session in Seattle, urging Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and President Obama to protect Mt. Rainier National Park and the Carbon River Valley rainforest. We're thrilled to see the administration taking an interest in protecting one of Washington's and America's most special places.

This summer, we'll talk to tens of thousands more Washingtonians, keep the issue talked about in the media, and continue pushing until we win the protections that the Carbon River Valley rainforest deserves.



#### ◀ *The Carbon River Valley.*

We're making the case for expanding Mt. Rainier National Park to encompass the endangered Carbon River Valley rainforest. To help the campaign, go to our website and click on "Take Action."