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Department of Ecology News Release - September 1, 2017

West Point treatment plant fined and required to make significant investments

SEATTLE – The Washington Department of Ecology has fined King County \$361,000 and ordered them to make significant investments into the West Point wastewater treatment plant in Seattle after the [plant failed](#) Feb. 9 and sent untreated wastewater into Puget Sound.

Ecology's investigation concluded that a lack of appropriate equipment redundancy and reliability, poor operation, and inadequate maintenance practices led to the treatment plant's failure. The damage was exacerbated by insufficient operator training and a lack of systematically prioritized alarms.

As a result, Ecology is requiring King County to make significant financial investments to improve operating and maintenance conditions – changes that could cost over a million dollars. Under administrative order, King County must:

- Improve redundancy and reliability of key equipment.
- Improve how the plant's control system communicates critical alarms to operators.
- Develop and implement better emergency training for operators.
- Improve the ability to monitor emergency bypasses should they occur.

In addition to the improvements, King County is levied a fine of \$361,000 – the largest penalty Ecology has ever issued to a publically-owned wastewater treatment plant.

"A treatment plant failure of this magnitude is completely unacceptable. They violated their permit and our state's water quality laws. As a consequence, we are taking a million-dollar enforcement action against King County," said Ecology Director Maia Bellon.

The county has until Aug. 1, 2018, to implement all the improvements or it could face additional penalties.

"King County has already carried out a number of critical improvements at West Point that include electrical system redundancy, replacing outmoded equipment and strengthening emergency training programs," said King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks Director Christie True. "We're now focused on long-term planning to address West Point's biggest operational challenges, which include greater demand on the plant driven by population growth, urban development, and stronger storms resulting from climate change. We look forward to working with Ecology and other partners, and are thankful that stepped up water quality monitoring showed little to no substantial water quality impairments as a result of the plant damage."

On Feb. 9, 2017, King County's West Point Wastewater Treatment Plant suffered catastrophic damage when the plant's pump station failed, which began a chain of events causing internal flooding that severely damaged the facility's sewage treatment infrastructure. The failure sent stormwater and untreated sewage into Puget Sound. King County restored flows back through the treatment plant later that day, but at a significantly diminished quality of treatment, which lasted for 77 days. On Feb. 15 and 16, the plant received high influent flows that could not be treated at the already damaged plant. This resulted in additional untreated discharges of sewage and stormwater to Puget Sound.

"Our objective is to prevent incidents like this from happening in the future and to protect water quality," said Heather Bartlett, Ecology's water quality program manager, "We recognize that King County has already taken some steps to make corrections and improvements to the plant. We are eager to see King County fully implement these changes."

Ecology penalties and orders may be appealed to the Washington State Pollution Control Hearings Board within 30 days. Water pollution fines are placed in the state's [Coastal Protection Fund](#) that provides grants to

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local and tribal governments for water quality improvement projects.

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