



# Local Leaders

## Issue Spotlight

Local Leaders,

*This is our seventh in a series of emails to elevate core issues we've been working on. Let us know what you think or if there are any other issue spotlights you'd be interested to learn more about.*

**Let's talk about the nexus between toxic clean-ups and affordable housing.** There are over 13,000 sites contaminated by toxic waste in Washington. These contaminated sites are not only a threat to public health but lost opportunities for land use. Many local leaders are looking to clean up these sites and create new, much needed resources and services for their communities, including affordable housing. Our state has a tool called the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA) to clean up these sites and ensure people and the environment are protected against hazardous waste.

AND! There is a *new* state grant program in development to clean up these sites and use them for affordable housing – the Healthy Housing Grant Program at the Department of Ecology. Cheers to Ecology for recognizing and prioritizing the intersectional nature of a healthy environment and affordable housing!

### **What is the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA)?**

The Model Toxics Control Act, our state's cleanup law, was created to protect people and the environment from hazardous toxic pollution. In its 30+ year history, MTCA has successfully cleaned up over 7,000 sites throughout the state, and even prevented pollution from harming our communities. MTCA's broad success demonstrates how this law serves as one of the most important tools for environmental protection here in Washington.

Now, the Department of Ecology is working to address racial and economic disparities in MTCA. In 2017, Front and Centered, a statewide coalition of organizations and groups rooted in communities of color and people with lower incomes, conducted an equity analysis identifying that 56% of MTCA sites are located in low-income communities and 46% are located in communities of color.

These findings highlight the need to rewrite MTCA processes and policies contributing to the disparity [[Learn more about the MTCA Rulemaking process](#)] and the importance of identifying new opportunities to better support impacted communities.

### **What is the Healthy Housing Grant Program?**

The Healthy Housing Grant Program started in 2018 as a tool to clean up contaminated properties and reclaim the land for affordable, community-driven housing projects. It is Ecology's newest resource for local governments and communities to clean up MTCA sites. The Healthy Housing Grant Program has supported over

10 cleanup projects for affordable housing development in communities including Wenatchee, Kennewick, Seattle, and Bellingham.

Initially the program functioned as a case-by-case review process that addressed the needs of a specific project. Ecology is now working to develop a competitive grant program to ensure equitable access to this funding resource across the state and prioritize funding for the most critical projects.

The Healthy Housing Grant Program will support communities by:

- Cleaning up contaminated sites for residential use
- Providing meaningful community engagement that informs and shapes decisions throughout the cleanup process
- Integrating long-term goals of shared economic and community asset building across a diverse population

### **Why does this matter for *your* community?**

The Healthy Housing Grant Program is a new tool that can help communities like yours address local toxic contamination sites by providing \$\$\$ and resources to support affordable housing development and protecting people and the environment from hazardous exposures.

The grant opportunity includes support for planning, investigation, and cleanup. Projects will be considered based upon readiness, equity, community support, improvement to the environment and public health, and a range of other indicators to ensure that the projects that most closely meet a community's need are ranked highest and funded first.

### **What are local leadership opportunities for the Healthy Housing Program?**

- Let your community know that Ecology is accepting applications for this new Healthy Housing Grant Program starting in February 2022! Share this resource with your local housing advocates, affordable housing developers, community land trusts, environmental advocates, and anyone who makes sense!
- Ways to learn more:
  - THIS WEDNESDAY! Ecology will be presenting at the Affordable Housing Conference by Housing Washington on October 6<sup>th</sup> at 8am on this new grant program. Register for FREE at this [link](#).
  - Ecology will also be presenting on the new grant program at the [Northwest Remediation Conference](#) on October 14<sup>th</sup> (Registration \$95 for government employees)
  - Watch the recording from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA Conference) - [on demand starting October 2nd](#)
  - Read more about the [intersection of environmental justice and MTCA in CONVENE by the Washington Environmental Council](#)



### **Staff Spotlight: Michelle Chow**

Michelle Chow is the Stormwater & Toxics Policy Manager for both Washington Conservation Voters and Washington Environmental Council.

Michelle is passionate about working with local and state governments to integrate equity and justice in decision-making processes. Her work focuses on equitably reducing the impacts of toxic pollution to people and the environment. She currently serves on the Stakeholder and Tribal Advisory Group (STAG) for the MTCA Rulemaking.

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Thanks for reading! We'll continue to share information and resources on critical issues. Let us know what else we can do to be a resource for environmental progress in your community.

Best,  
Danielle & Emily

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