



State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)

Essential Handout

17

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SKAGITCOUNTYWA.GOV

Skagit County

Planning and
Development Services



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This information only applies to property within unincorporated Skagit County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

Enacted by the Legislature in 1971, the State Environmental Policy Act- commonly called SEPA-helps state and local agencies in Washington state identify environmental impacts that could result from governmental decisions such as:

- Issuing permits for private projects such as an office building, grocery store, or apartment complex.
- Constructing public facilities like a new school, highway, or utility pipelines.
- Adopting regulations, policies, or plans such as a county or city comprehensive plan, critical area ordinance, or state water quality regulation.

What is required to submit for SEPA?

Skagit County uses the SEPA checklist that is provided by the Department of Ecology. The checklist asks questions about the proposal and its potential impact on the built and natural environment which includes:

- Air, Animals, Earth, Energy, Environmental Health, Land Use, Plants, Public Services, Transportation, Utilities and Water.

Information learned from the SEPA Checklist may be used to:

- Modify a proposal to reduce potential impacts.
- Apply conditions to a proposal to mitigate adverse environmental impacts that are identified; or
- Deny a proposal when significant adverse environmental impacts are present and cannot be reduced to an acceptable level.

Are there exceptions to the SEPA requirement?

Yes, below are examples of projects that do not require SEPA submittal.

- Construction or location of up to 20 detached single family residential units.
- Construction of an office, school, commercial, recreational, service or storage building with 12,000 sq. ft. of gross floor area with parking lots up to 40 spaces
- Construction of certain agricultural structures up to 30,000 sq. ft.
- Installation or removal of underground or above-ground tanks with a

capacity of 10,000 gallons or less.

- Installation or removal of underground or above-ground tanks with a capacity of 60,000 gallons or less on agricultural and industrial lands.
- Grading (fill and excavation) 500 cubic yards or less throughout the total lifetime of the fill or excavation.
- Installation of accessory solar energy generation equipment on or attached to existing structures and facilities where the existing footprint and size of the building is not increased.
- Land divisions of four or fewer lots.
- Repair, remodeling, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing structures or facilities involving no expansions or changes in use beyond that previously existing; except that, where undertaken wholly or in part on lands covered by water, only minor repair or replacement of structures is exempt.
- Variances.

When the project is an addition, modification, or replacement of a SEPA-exempt building or facility that would cause the building or facility to exceed the exemption, the project is no longer SEPA-exempt. For example, where a facility has an existing commercial structure of 10,000 sq. ft. (which is exempt from SEPA review), and the proposal is to add another 5,000 sq. ft., the proposed addition will exceed the 12,000 sq. ft. exemption and therefore will require SEPA review.

Are there instances when SEPA is always required?

Yes, below are cases when SEPA is always required:

- Any work on lands wholly or partly covered by water
- Construction of more than 20 dwelling units
- Grading of more than 500 cubic yards
- Land divisions of more than four lots
- Shoreline substantial development and conditional use permits

A SEPA application may be required for:

- Comprehensive Plan map amendments/rezones
- Special-Use Permits

What happens after SEPA has been submitted?

Skagit County will review the SEPA Checklist along with other documentation regarding the proposal. If more information is needed, Skagit County will request that the applicant conduct further studies such as:

- Traffic study.
- Site study to evaluate potential air quality, water quality, or other impacts.

When a proponent has submitted enough information regarding the proposal, Skagit County will do one of the following:

- Issue a Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) if it finds the proposal is unlikely to have a significant adverse environmental impact; or

- Issue a Determination of Significance (DS) and prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) if the information indicates the proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact.
 - An EIS includes:
 - An evaluation of alternatives to the proposal; and
 - Measures that would reduce or eliminate likely environmental impacts.

For more information regarding SEPA

Visit the Department of Ecology's SEPA webpage at
www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/sepa/overview.html

Who should I contact if I have questions?

You may contact us if you have any questions via:

Online: [Ask a Permit Technician](#)

Phone: 360-416-1320

Visit us at: 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon

Remember, asking questions first can save lots of headaches, heartaches, and money!