

Environment & Energy

Washington State Will Regulate Methane Emitted from Landfills

By Zach Bright

March 25, 2022, 5:56 PM

- Governor signs bill to limit potent greenhouse gas
 - Large sites now responsible for catching methane
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Certain Washington state landfill owners and operators will have to measure and capture methane gas produced on their facilities, after Gov. Jay Inslee (D) signed a bill Friday to limit their emission.

The new law instructs certain sites to establish systems that redirect methane, an organic waste byproduct, for storage. It follows similar legislation from Oregon and California that hold landfills responsible for reducing their emissions.

“Landfills are one of the largest sources of methane in the state of Washington, other than dairy farms,” bill sponsor Rep. Davina Duerr (D) said at the bill’s signing ceremony. “This legislation, H.B. 1663, requires landfills that meet size and emission thresholds to capture and collect methane.”

Also signed was H.B. 1799, a bill calling for a 75% reduction of organic materials such as food waste sent to landfills by 2030.

Landfill Responsibilities

Almost 2.4% of Washington state’s total greenhouse gas emissions come from waste management, according to 2018 numbers published by the state ecology department last year. Methane, the principal emission, has a global warming potential 28 to 36 times higher than carbon dioxide and makes up about 20% of global emissions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Washington measure means active covered landfills with 450,000 or more tons of waste and closed landfills with 750,000 or more tons of waste must annually calculate the amount of emissions created. That would apply to two dozen landfills that store more than 450,000 tons, according to the state ecology department.

For those facilities, operators must install and implement methane collection systems if their emissions surpass an hourly rate of 3 million British thermal units, or face possible closure. That gas can be harnessed as an energy source if properly processed.

Of the country's more than 2,600 municipal solid waste landfills, 541 are collecting methane and 474 have potential to set up systems of their own, according to the EPA.

"There is still much to do, but the passage of this bill moves us in the right direction," Duerr said, "and it gives me hope that we can still provide a habitable environment for our kids and for their kids."

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