

Your Local Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC)



The role of the SWAC is to provide informed advice to the legislative and administrative body of the county or city regarding waste management issues.

The local solid waste advisory committee, mandated by Chapter [70A.205.110](#) RCW, is an on-going committee. Initially established to help prepare a solid waste management plan, the law defines duties that are much broader, “to assist in the development of programs and policies

concerning solid waste handling and disposal and to review and comment upon proposed rules, policies, or ordinances prior to their adoption.” The committee is an advisory body only. It makes recommendations to the local governing body, which will then make final decisions after considering those recommendations and other available information.

Requirements of a SWAC (Chapter [70A.205.110](#) (3) RCW)

The Washington State Department of Ecology requires that a SWAC:

- Is an on-going committee of at least nine appointed members who represent a balance of interests
- Assists in the development of programs and policies involving solid waste reduction, handling, and disposition
- As advisory body, reviews proposed solid waste related rules, policies, or ordinances and develops recommendations prior to their adoption
- Actively assists and participates in the review, revision or amendment of both a comprehensive solid waste (CSWMP) and hazardous waste management plan (HWMP)
- Also follows RCW [70A.205.115](#) to conduct specific stakeholder and review meetings during the development of the waste reduction and recycling element of the CSWMP.

RCW [70A.205.110](#) (3)

Each county shall establish a local solid waste advisory committee to assist in the development of programs and policies concerning solid waste handling and disposal and to review and comment upon proposed rules, policies, or ordinances prior to their adoption. Such committees shall consist of a minimum of nine members and shall represent a balance of interests including, but not limited to, citizens, public interest groups, business, the waste management industry, agriculture, and local elected public officials. The members shall be appointed by the county legislative authority. A county or city shall not apply for funds from the state and local improvements revolving account, Waste Disposal Facilities, 1980, under chapter [43.83.350](#) RCW, for the preparation, update, or major amendment of a comprehensive solid waste management plan unless the plan or revision has been prepared with the active assistance and participation of a local solid waste advisory committee.

The Benefits of a Strong SWAC

A strong SWAC is a partner of its local government, representing local stakeholder interests, community interests, and providing review and insight. This public participation is vital for the following reasons:

- Allows informed decision-making by policy makers.
- Empowers local citizenry and allows for creative synergies and greater cooperation
- Supports accountability that the Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan is kept current.
- Helps ensure compliance with Chapters [70A.205 RCW](#) and [173-312 WAC](#).
- Helps to avoid litigation and Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance funding ineligibility.

A strong SWAC is at minimum “active” and “balanced.”

FAQs

Q: What is an “active” SWAC?

A: “Active” means members keep abreast of current issues and are actively researching and giving input to current topics. An “active” SWAC meets as often as is necessary “to assist in the development of programs and policies concerning solid waste handling and disposal and to review and comment upon proposed rules, policies, or ordinances prior to their adoption.” This includes work on the Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan.

Q: What is a “balanced” SWAC?

A: “Balanced” SWACs have at least nine members, representing a wide range of interests including, but not limited to citizens, public interest groups, business, the waste management industry, agriculture, and local elected public officials. When a person could potentially represent more than one interest, the appointing county must consider all potential interests. For example, a member of the waste management industry who is also a member of a local environmental group could potentially speak for either group during a meeting. As such, the county legislative and appointing authority must consider SWAC representation as a whole, and appoint as necessary to ensure as equal representation as possible.

For example, “Acme” County has a well-balanced SWAC consisting of 9 members. Membership includes a citizen representative from each of three Board of Commissioner jurisdictions, one from the solid waste industry, one from Navy Region Northwest, one representative of the Sierra Club, one businessperson, one farmer, and one City Commissioner.

Q: Will Ecology accept a CSWMP without SWAC review?

A: No, with one exception. Per RCW [70A.205.110 \(3\)](#), SWAC is “to assist in the development of programs and policies concerning solid waste handling and disposal and to review and comment upon proposed rules, policies, or ordinances prior to their adoption.” The exception pertains to municipalities, because the RCW is for SWACs established by a county. While Ecology highly encourages cities with their own CSWMPs to also have active SWACs, the RCW only mentions cities and SWACs in the context of eligibility for grant funds. Ecology clarified this in WACs such as 173-312-040. So, while it is possible for Ecology to accept a CSWMP from a municipality without review by a municipal SWAC as defined in the WAC, that entity would be ineligible to receive certain grant funds.

Q: What authority does SWAC have?

A: A Solid Waste Advisory Committee has the authority to offer advice or input on solid waste issues to local staff and elected officials. The SWAC may also reasonably seek information related to solid waste from local staff. In the end, all policy decisions are made by either the elected officials or at the administrative level of the local government. Additional SWAC authorities or duties may be outlined in the individual SWAC's bylaws.

Q: What should local government provide for SWAC?

A: The suggested responsibilities of the local solid waste staff are to:

1. **Provide technical assistance, reports, data, maps, local ordinances, and other documents to SWAC members as requested or required within budgetary and time constraints.** Solid Waste staff should provide your SWAC with adequate information upon which to make informed and reliable recommendations to the local legislative authority.
2. **Provide administrative support for the SWAC.** Facilitate review and revision or amendment of the CSWMP or HWMP, coordinate facilities for meetings, prepare and distribute agendas and minutes, and comply with the Open Public Meetings Act.
3. **Attend SWAC meetings and present data as requested.**

Q: Are all SWACs the same statewide?

A: No. Each local legislative authority has the power to organize a SWAC within the instruction of the law to meet local needs. For example, several county commissioners have elected to include equal division of commissioner districts as one of the representation criteria. A few counties include tribal seats to address the balanced representation requirement.

Further Information:

SWAC information is found in the "Guidelines for the Development of Local Solid Waste Management Plans and Plan Revisions," Ecology publication No. 10-07-005. You may also contact your regional Ecology solid waste planner for technical assistance and examples of bylaws, work plans, agendas, memorandums of understanding and more.

Suggestions for a Strong, Functioning SWAC

The relationship of each SWAC to its local government and solid waste staff will vary. There are several tasks, however, the committee can implement to make itself more efficient and effective.

1. Hold regular meetings (at least quarterly) to help keep attendance up. Develop and adopt bylaws and procedures. Abide by them. Such rules facilitate effective, fair, and productive meetings. A friendly, partnering atmosphere is also helpful. Listen to the members.
2. Assign the chair or other admin positions to members (from outside of county government).
3. Refer to the local comprehensive solid waste (CSWMP) and hazardous waste management plans (HWMP), and assist in their implementation by making recommendations that are consistent with each plan. Use them as your guiding documents. Participate in the maintenance of the plans and the development of updated plans as needed.
4. SWACs are intended to represent community interests. Actively seek public input to find out how things are going and what people want done (if anything). Put topics on the agenda that are relevant to your members and important guests to encourage attendance and productivity.
5. Develop a constructive working relationship with the local legislative authority, assess your mutual objectives and exchange ideas. Provide them with regular updates on the committee's work.
6. Work closely with elected officials. Meet periodically with the city council or county board or invite them to meetings to share information and promote communication and support. Appoint a committee representative to appear before the governing body when it is necessary to explain or promote a recommendation. This is especially important when the committee's advice differs from local solid waste staff. After conferring with staff, make your recommendations directly to the local legislative authority.
7. Develop and maintain relationships with other SWACs. Share ideas and experiences. On occasion attend another SWAC's meeting, tour other county facilities, and talk with other SWAC members.
8. Become as knowledgeable as possible on waste management issues. Attend conferences and other training opportunities. Ask questions.
9. Educate the public on the committee's work and the purpose for planning. Let the people you represent know what you are doing. Make information, data, and maps available to them when requested. If possible, include a link from the county's website to a SWAC webpage to facilitate public accessibility and information exchange.
10. Take time to orient new committee members to the job. Introduce new members to critical players, planning documents, county facilities, terminology, policies, etc. Develop an orientation packet that includes enabling ordinance, SWAC charter, SWAC operating norms, CSWMP, HWMP, SWAC roles and responsibilities, etc. Provide each member with a reference notebook they may update at each meeting. This includes meeting schedules, minutes, contact information, etc.
11. Annually re-examine committee work, evaluate whether tasks are being accomplished, progress, and how the process can be improved. Devote one meeting each year to evaluate the previous year and plan for the next. The chairperson might work with local solid waste staff to develop an annual work plan.

References: "The Job of the Solid Waste Advisory Committee, Fourteen Ways to Build a Better SWAC" (adapted from "The Job of the Planning Commissioner" by Albert Solnit), "The Role, Responsibilities, and Relationships of the Local Solid Waste Advisory Committee," by WA State Dept. of Ecology, March 23, 1994, "Pierce County Solid Waste Advisory Committee Reinvigoration," Prepared for Pierce County Department of Public Works and Utilities by EnviroIssues, October 2005.