

PRESS RELEASE FROM WASHINGTON STATE HYDROGEOLOGICAL SOCIETY:

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From: Washington State Hydrogeological Society
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Date: Mon, Jul 20, 2026 at 5:52 PM
Subject: Washington State Hydrogeological Society Accuses Ecology of
“Unlawful Overreach” in Restricting Engineers’ Hydrogeologic Work
To:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington State Hydrogeological Society Accuses Ecology of “Unlawful Overreach” in Restricting Engineers’ Hydrogeologic Work

Tacoma, WA (July 20, 2026) - The Washington State Hydrogeological Society (WSHS) is publicly condemning the Washington State Department of Ecology for issuing a new directive that bars licensed Professional Engineers (PE’s) from performing or stamping hydrogeologic analyses submitted to Water Conservancy Boards. WSHS asserts that Ecology’s reinterpretation is legally unsupported, procedurally improper, and disruptive to critical infrastructure work across Washington.

Earlier this month, Ecology informed Water Conservancy Boards that hydrogeologic analyses must now be stamped exclusively by licensed hydrogeologists. The agency warned that change applications may be reversed or denied if stamped by PE’s, despite decades of precedent allowing engineers to perform this work.

WSHS says the directive represents a significant and unauthorized narrowing of engineering practice.

WSHS: Ecology Is Attempting to Redefine Engineering Practice Without Authority
WSHS states that Washington’s engineering licensing statute, in place since 1935, has always encompassed hydrogeologic work. When the geology and hydrogeology

licensing program was created in 2000, the Legislature explicitly preserved the scope of engineering practice. Ecology's new interpretation, WSHS argues, contradicts that statutory framework and attempts to impose new licensing restrictions without legislative or regulatory authority.

According to WSHS, the agency's reinterpretation was issued without rulemaking, without public process, and without coordination with the Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, the only body empowered to interpret engineering licensure in Washington.

WSHS characterizes Ecology's approach as "regulatory overreach that bypasses established legal channels."

WSHS Raises Concerns About Lack of Transparency and Documentation

WSHS notes that Ecology's position appears to rely on informal verbal discussions rather than written legal opinions or published guidance. Communications referenced by Ecology were described as privileged, unavailable, or undocumented. WSHS argues that statewide licensing policy cannot be based on private conversations or internal interpretations.

WSHS states that "the absence of formal documentation or transparent process undermines the legitimacy of Ecology's directive and creates confusion for engineers, hydrogeologists, and Water Conservancy Boards."

WSHS Warns of Immediate Impacts on Public Infrastructure

WSHS says Ecology's reinterpretation threatens to disrupt or delay a wide range of projects across Washington, including:

- groundwater supply and well development
- dam, levee, and floodway engineering
- tunnel and roadway construction
- wastewater and stormwater systems
- irrigation and agricultural infrastructure
- port, river, and coastal engineering
- public water system planning

WSHS warns that Water Conservancy Boards may face procedural gridlock, applicants may encounter new delays and costs, and engineers may be forced to halt or reassign ongoing work.

According to WSHS, “the directive introduces regulatory instability at a time when Washington’s water, transportation, and agricultural systems cannot afford unnecessary disruption.”

WSHS Calls for Immediate Withdrawal of Ecology’s Directive

WSHS is urging Ecology to:

1. **Immediately rescind the July 2026 reinterpretation.**
2. **Consult the engineering licensing board** before issuing any further guidance.
3. **Release all records and communications** related to the reinterpretation.
4. **Engage collaboratively** with engineering and hydrogeology professional organizations to ensure regulatory clarity and compliance with state law.

WSHS states that “the directive must be withdrawn to restore stability, uphold statutory authority, and protect the integrity of professional practice in Washington.”

For more information, contact us at

Washington.State.Hydrogeological.Society@protonmail.com. Also, our office address has changed and we recently moved to 1201 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402.

About the Washington State Hydrogeological Society

The Washington State Hydrogeological Society represents groundwater scientists, engineers, and resource professionals across Washington. WSHS promotes scientific integrity, professional competence, and regulatory clarity in all matters affecting hydrogeologic practice.