

## Improving customer service for hazardous waste generators

**Agency:** Department of Ecology

### Project Impact

The Department of Ecology improved the annual hazardous waste generator billing process, resulting in a reduction in the number of phone calls from 8,623 in 2015 to 5,701 in 2017 and a reduction in refunds from 430 in 2015 to 137 in 2017.

### Project Summary

Each spring, we send a Hazardous Waste Generation Fee bill to all businesses that generate any amount of dangerous waste in Washington State. Thousands of Washington businesses are billed for the fee. Some customers are unsure why they received the bill, or whether they qualify for a waiver or exemption. This generates a high volume of calls, emails, and letters that we need to respond to.

In 2014, changes to the Department of Revenue's process and a new Ecology database led to a significant increase in the number of businesses receiving a bill. This in turn increased the number of calls, emails, and letters from our customers. We could not keep up with the increased workload, and by 2016, it was taking us up to three weeks to respond to our customers. One of the results of our inability to respond in a timely way was customers paying the bill in error, requiring Ecology to later issue a refund.

- Before, we issued 430 refunds per billing cycle, compared to our target of zero, which we want to reach by 5/1/2019.
- Before, we received 8,623 phone calls per billing cycle, compared to our target of 4,311, which we want to reach by 9/30/2018.
- Before, our average response time per call was 120 hours, compared to our target of five minutes, which we wanted to reach by 9/30/2017.

We implemented several changes aimed at improving customer satisfaction and maintaining a sustainable workload for team members:

- Updated the invoice to make it easier to understand.
- Revised the fee web site.
- Updated the phone system to an Automated Call Distribution system.
- Staggered the billing over a two-month period, instead of sending bills all at once.
- Added temporary staff to the team at least one week before mailing the bills.

### Project Results<sup>1</sup>



Decreased the number of refunds **from** 430 in 2015 **to** 137 in 2017.



*68 percent decrease in number of refunds.*



Decreased the number of calls **from** 8,623 in 2015 **to** 5,701 in 2017.



*34 percent decrease in number of calls.*



Decreased the average per-call response time **from** 120 hours in 2015 **to** five minutes in 2017.



*93 percent decrease in call response time.*

<sup>1</sup> The impact listed for project results represents the percent decrease from 2015 to 2017, not just this reporting period.

# Strategic Lean Project Report



Figure 1: Number of refunds from 2015-2017



Figure 2: Number of calls from 2015 - 2017



## Project Details

**Date improvement project was initiated:** 10/6/2016

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