

Watch for Ecology Youth Corps litter crews along highways

Local News

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BELLEVUE, Wash. - Middle- and high-school youths will return to northwest Washington roadsides this week to clean up litter tossed or dropped by motorists. The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), which operates the litter program, urges motorists to use extra caution when they see the orange "Ecology youth working" signs along state highways. Teens, ages 14 to 17, will work this summer along roadsides in King, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom counties. "Safety is our No. 1 priority," said Steven Williams, regional litter administrator and coordinator for the Ecology Youth Corps (EYC). "Every driver needs to stay alert when passing a litter crew. For most crew members, it's their first job. We're proud of their work to help keep our roadways litter-free." Crew members receive \$9.19 an hour, the state's minimum wage, and work 7.5 hours a day, Monday through Friday. Crews will operate this year in two sessions - June 26 through July 24 and July 25 through Aug. 20.

In 2012, EYC crews cleaned 6,372 miles of roadways, picked up 1,156,782 pounds of litter and recycled 142,825 pounds of materials. In King County alone, crews picked up more than 48,987 pounds of litter. This year, Ecology's regional office in Bellevue will have 13 six-person crews working in five counties. Six crews will work during the first session and seven during the second. For the first time, Ecology will have a youth crew in San Juan County in a partnership with the San Juan County Public Works Department. The popular program attracted 843 applications from young people interested in the 75 EYC summer crew jobs administered by Ecology's Bellevue office. In the past, this office has hired 90 to 100 teens for the summer season, but for the past five years, the transfer of some state litter account monies to the state's general fund has limited the number of teens hired. Statewide, EYC's summer crews number 299 with more than 3,100 teens applying for these positions. EYC is an important part of an overall Ecology-coordinated effort that removes more than 3,500 tons of litter and illegally dumped materials statewide annually. Other participants include county and city litter-cleanup programs and the state departments of Corrections, Natural Resources and Transportation. Littering can draw fines up to \$1,025. Fines for illegal dumping are \$1,000 to \$5,000, plus jail time.