



# Joint Media Release

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## EPA Awards \$1 Million to Lower Yakima Valley Environmental Justice Project

**Yakima, WA-** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) a \$1 million dollar grant to increase groundwater and air quality education and outreach in the Lower Yakima Valley.

The three-year project, which begins in January, connects community members with essential resources, information, and tools to create safer and healthier living environments.

For years people living in the Lower Yakima Valley have been exposed to environmental factors in groundwater and air quality which increase the risk of poor health outcomes. Recent studies show elevated rates of asthma in youth. The project aims to reach more than 15,000 residents to address these concerns.

“For too long, residents of the Lower Yakima Valley have been disproportionately harmed by water and air pollution. The EPA’s grant to the Department of Health, made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act, will provide a much-needed boost to state efforts to improve water and air quality in the region, providing outreach to over 15,000 residents and high-risk households. We deeply appreciate the Administration’s partnership with Washington State to further environmental justice and eliminate health disparities in our communities,” said Governor Jay Inslee.

“Clean water is an essential necessity for everyone in the State of Washington but historically access to clean water has not been uniform nor equitable. At the Washington State Department of Health, we work with large water systems to make sure residents have clean, safe and reliable drinking water but private wells can be overlooked,” said Assistant Secretary for Environmental Public Health Lauren Jenks. “This robust grant from the EPA will allow local, state and federal agencies to work together to provide education and resources to improve water quality and air

quality for the residents of the Yakima Valley.”

DOH will partner with the Yakima Health District (YHD) to empower residents in two crucial areas:

- Groundwater safety
- Air quality

Other organizations will also provide support, including Heritage University, Central Washington University, Northwest Communities’ Education Center, and Yakima County Public Services.

The project will provide support to vulnerable populations, address disparities in environmental health outcomes, and promote health equity in the Lower Yakima Valley.

“The Yakima Health District is pleased to bring vital resources to our community through a valuable EPA award, leading a transformative initiative to enhance education on groundwater safety and air quality in the Lower Yakima Valley. In partnership with federal, state, and local agencies, we’re committed to empowering residents with environmental awareness, addressing environmental health disparities, and fostering a healthier, more equitable future,” said Andre Fresco, Executive Director, Yakima Health District.

The Lower Yakima Valley project is one of 10 environmental justice projects the EPA awarded to Washington communities in 2023 totaling \$8.2 million dollars. The goal is to ensure disadvantaged communities that have suffered from underinvestment have access to clean water, air, and climate resilience solutions.

“This funding is critical to the state’s work in Central Washington and great news for people living in the Yakima Valley. Collaborating with local communities and agencies is an important part of protecting air and water quality in the area,” said Laura Watson, Director, Washington State Department of Ecology. “We are committed to keeping the public informed about our work, and federal support from the EPA underscores this priority. I look forward to further opportunities to strengthen our efforts in the Yakima Valley alongside the Department of Health and the Yakima Health District.”

“Expanding access to clean water and clean air is at the heart of our EPA environmental justice mission,” said EPA Regional Administrator Casey Sixkiller. “This project directly supports families of the Lower Yakima Valley that experience disproportionate exposure to pollution in the water they drink and air they breathe. Thanks to the federal government, we have the funding to expand our work with state and local partners to provide new resources for valley residents.”

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