

Washington: Overview

Everything in the main manual and the skill guides applies in Washington exactly as written. What's different here is the specific hazard profile and the state, local, and legal context around it. This page is the starting point; the other three pages under Washington go deeper on laws, local resources, and the data behind the risks named here.

Mount Rainier: the real danger is mud, not lava

Mount Rainier is an active volcano, but its most dangerous hazard to human life isn't an eruption, it's a lahar, a fast-moving slurry of volcanic debris, ice melt, and water that can rush down a river valley even without an eruption triggering it. More than 150,000 people live in Mount Rainier's lahar hazard zones, concentrated in Puyallup, Sumner, and Orting, and scientists estimate a lahar could reach Orting in as little as 30 minutes from origin, faster than many people could realistically evacuate on foot without early warning. See the Risks page for the full data.

The Oso landslide: the deadliest in U.S. history

On March 22, 2014, a hillside above the small community of Oso, about 55 miles northeast of Seattle, collapsed after weeks of unusually heavy rain, sending roughly 18 million tons of debris across the valley floor at highway speed. The slide killed 43 people and destroyed 49 homes, and it remains the deadliest landslide recorded in U.S. history. Neither this nor Mount Rainier's lahar risk has an equivalent case study anywhere else on this site.

Washington's share of the same fault system covered in Oregon

Washington sits on the same Cascadia Subduction Zone covered in depth on Oregon's page, and the earthquake and tsunami risk described there applies to Washington's own coast and Puget Sound region as well; that page's data isn't repeated here to avoid duplicating the same figures twice.

What this means for how you use the rest of this manual

The manual's Tier structure and the skill guides apply without modification. What's different in Washington: households in Mount Rainier's mapped lahar zones need a specific, practiced, fast evacuation plan, not a general one, since warning time can be measured in minutes rather than hours, and anyone living below a steep slope after a period of unusually heavy or prolonged rain should treat landslide risk as a real, not remote, possibility.

Sources

- Mount Rainier lahar hazard zone population and arrival-time estimates: Washington DNR; USGS
- Oso landslide death toll, scale, and cause: USGS; KOMO News

Washington: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: permit-free, with a specific structural condition

Washington’s Department of Ecology has determined that state law can reasonably be interpreted not to require a water right permit for on-site rooftop rainwater collection and use, but that interpretation comes with a specific condition most other states covered on this site don’t have.

Rule	Washington
Source water	Rooftop or "guzzler" catchment
Permit required	No, for on-site storage and use of rooftop-collected rainwater under the Department of Ecology's current interpretation
Structural requirement	Must come from a fixed structure whose primary purpose is something other than collecting rainwater, a purpose-built collection structure doesn't qualify
Use requirement	Rainwater must be used on the same property where it's collected
In-home/potable use	Regulated as surface water under the Surface Water Treatment Rule; requires local building department approval

This interpretation could change locally

If the Department of Ecology finds that rainwater collection in a specific area is measurably affecting existing water rights there, local restrictions on new systems could follow. This is a live administrative policy, not a fixed statute, so it’s worth checking current status for your specific area before assuming the general rule still applies unchanged.

Where to find it: the Washington State Department of Ecology (ecology.wa.gov) publishes current guidance.

Water rights: prior appropriation, the same doctrine as Utah and Oregon

Washington has used the prior appropriation doctrine since 1917, the same “first in time, first in right” system covered on Utah’s and Oregon’s pages.

Concept	How it works in Washington
Ownership	Water is a public resource owned by the people of Washington, managed by the Department of Ecology
Priority	The earlier of an application's filing date or the date water was first put to beneficial use establishes seniority
In a shortage	Junior water right holders are cut back first, potentially losing their entire allocation before senior holders lose any

Where to find it: the Washington State Department of Ecology administers water right permits and claims statewide.

Concealed carry: shall-issue with no training requirement

Washington requires a Concealed Pistol License (CPL) to carry concealed, but unlike the state’s stricter reputation on other firearm policy (a 10-day waiting period and an assault weapons ban among them), the CPL itself requires no training course at all.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Shall-issue: the local police chief (incorporated areas) or county sheriff (unincorporated areas) must issue a CPL to any non-disqualified applicant
Minimum age	21
Training required	None, for the CPL itself
Common disqualifiers	Firearm possession ineligibility under state law, outstanding warrants, active felony bond conditions, a CPL revoked in the past, court-ordered firearm forfeiture within the past year
Non-resident applicants	May face a 60-day wait if applying with an out-of-state driver's license or ID

A genuine contrast within Washington's own gun law framework

Washington pairs a no-training CPL with some of the stricter firearm purchase rules covered on this site (a waiting period and magazine/assault weapon restrictions), a different combination from every other state covered so far, where the concealed carry permit itself tends to track the state's overall restrictiveness more closely.

Sources

- Washington rainwater collection interpretation and conditions: Washington Department of Ecology
- Washington prior appropriation water law: WSU Extension; RE Sources
- Washington CPL requirements: Washington State Department of Licensing; Alien Gear Holsters

Washington: Local Resources

Washington EMD and “2 Weeks Ready”

The Washington Emergency Management Division runs public outreach under a “2 Weeks Ready” campaign, near-identical in name and framing to Oregon’s “Be 2 Weeks Ready” covered on that state’s page, a genuine regional consistency between the two Pacific Northwest states rather than a coincidence, both build household preparedness guidance around the same two-week self-sufficiency target.

Where to find it: mil.wa.gov/preparedness.

WSU Extension: the most extensive initial training of any state covered on this site

Washington State University Extension runs the same category of land-grant program as every other state covered here, but its Master Gardener core curriculum requires meaningfully more upfront training than any other state’s program on this site.

Why the hours are so much higher here

WSU’s Master Gardener core training, delivered through the Washington Green School online program, runs 120 hours, roughly double or triple the 40-60 hour range typical of most other states covered on this site. First-year volunteer service requirements still vary by county, generally 40-60 hours, and certified volunteers maintain status with 25 hours of service and 10 hours of continuing education annually.

Where to find it: mastergardener.wsu.edu lists the program by county.

CERT: local teams, coordinated statewide through Serve Washington

Washington’s CERT programs are organized at the county and city level, Snohomish County, King County (including the CERT Eastside Coalition, a group of Eastside King County teams sharing resources), SeaTac, and Kitsap County among the active examples, with Serve Washington providing statewide credentialing support.

Where to find it: servewashington.wa.gov for statewide credentialing information; search “[your county] CERT” for a local team.

Sources

- Washington EMD “2 Weeks Ready” campaign: Washington Military Department
- WSU Master Gardener Program training hours and structure: WSU Master Gardener Program; WSU Green School
- Washington CERT program structure and statewide coordination: Serve Washington; CERT Eastside Coalition

BY STATE › WASHINGTON

Washington: Risks & Trends

Same standard as every other page on this site: every figure below is independently sourced, and figures that vary across sources, or measure genuinely different things, are flagged as such rather than collapsed into one number that looks more precise than the underlying data actually supports.

Mount Rainier: a standing lahar risk, not a single event

Metric	Figure
Total population at risk from lahar impacts	150,000+
Residents in the primary lahar-hazard zone	~48,640
Employees in the primary lahar-hazard zone	~29,414
Most-exposed communities	Puyallup, Sumner, Orting
Estimated lahar arrival time at Orting	As little as 30 minutes
Historical frequency of major lahars	Every 500-1,000 years, with smaller flows more often

Why lahars don't require an eruption

A lahar can form from a flank collapse or major landslide on the volcano’s slopes even without any eruption occurring, driven by the volcano’s own weak, hydrothermally altered rock combined with its glacial ice. This is why lahar hazard maps and evacuation planning exist independently of any active eruption warning, the risk is standing, not conditional on volcanic activity picking up first.

The Oso landslide (2014): the deadliest in U.S. history

Metric	Figure
Date	March 22, 2014
Deaths	43
Homes destroyed	49
Debris volume	~18 million tons
Debris speed	~40 mph
Debris field size	~1 sq mi, up to 80 ft deep in places
Preceding rainfall (Feb-Mar 2014)	150-200% of the long-term average
National ranking	Deadliest landslide in recorded U.S. history

The slide struck the small community of Oso, about 55 miles northeast of Seattle, burying a neighborhood along the North Fork Stillaguamish River after weeks of unusually heavy rain saturated the hillside above it. Victims ranged from 4 months to 91 years old.

What these two have in common

Mount Rainier’s lahar zones and the slope above Oso share the same underlying lesson: some of Washington’s most dangerous terrain doesn’t look dangerous day to day. A lahar zone is a river valley that looks like any other until the volcano’s slopes give way; the hillside above Oso looked stable for generations until an unusually wet winter changed that. Both risks reward knowing the specific, mapped hazard zone for wherever you live, rather than assuming a place is safe just because nothing has happened there recently.

Sources

- Mount Rainier lahar hazard zone population, exposure, and arrival-time data: Washington DNR; USGS
- Oso landslide death toll, scale, and rainfall data: USGS; Fox Weather