

In the legal and technical fallout of 2025, the City of Edmonds' attempt to terminate Ross Hahn collided with Washington's whistleblower protections and a failing multimillion-dollar infrastructure project.

The following is a documentation of the facts, technical failures, and financial impacts as reported through 2025 and early 2026.

### **1. The Legal Conflict: Loudermill vs. Whistleblower Claim**

Under the Loudermill ruling, the City issued an "intent to terminate" notice to Hahn in July 2025. Hahn countered this by utilizing RCW 42.41 (Whistleblower Protection), alleging the firing was retaliatory.

\* The Claim: Hahn filed a \$5 million claim on July 8, 2025, stating the City's threat of termination was "in direct relation to his valid concerns" regarding false public claims about the plant's success (Edmonds Beacon).

\* The "Hahn Limbo": To avoid a wrongful termination lawsuit during the whistleblower investigation, the City placed Hahn on paid administrative leave. As of late 2025, Hahn remained on the payroll but was barred from the plant (Edmonds Beacon).

\* City Response: Official City statements avoided commenting on the specifics of the litigation, instead emphasizing a focus on "worker safety" and a partnership with L&I to review plant practices (Edmonds Beacon).

### **2. Technical Failures: The Eco remedy System**

Hahn alleged the \$28 million Eco remedy gasification system (designed to replace the old incinerator) was a "colossal failure." Documents and reporting confirm several technical breakdowns:

\* Continuous Downtime: As of October 2025, the system was not turning sewage into energy as promised. Instead, it was simply "squeezing and sanitizing" liquid, while the remaining solids were shipped to a landfill (Everett Herald).

\* Conveyance and Filter Issues: In December 2024, the City had to sign a secondary contract with Eco remedy to address ongoing issues with clogged conveyance systems, dust control, and carbon air filter leaks (MyEdmondsNews).

\* The PFAS "False Success" Claim: While the City publicly celebrated the plant's ability to "destroy PFAS," independent analysis suggested that while the solids were clean, a percentage of these chemicals were potentially escaping into the air or scrubber water (Hazen and Sawyer Study).

### **3. Financial Consequences for Taxpayers**

The failure of the plant directly triggered a "fiscal emergency" in Edmonds by late 2025:

- \* **Emergency Hauling Costs:** The City has spent over \$5 million on unplanned contracts to haul raw sludge to Oregon landfills via rail because the gasifier could not process it (Edmonds Beacon).

- \* **Utility Rate Increases:** To offset these costs, the City Council approved a three-year hike, including a 10% sewer rate increase for 2024-2025 and a 10.5% increase for 2026 (Edmonds Beacon).

- \* **The 20% Utility Tax:** In December 2025, the Council narrowly passed a measure to double the utility tax from 10% to 20% to cover budget gaps exacerbated by the treatment plant's technical and legal woes (MyEdmondsNews).

#### Key Legal Provisions Cited

- \* **RCW 42.41.040:** Prohibits local government from taking "retaliatory action" against a whistleblower.

- \* **Loudermill Hearing:** The constitutional requirement that prevented the City from firing Hahn without giving him the opportunity to air these grievances—which he ultimately did in the form of a \$5M claim.