



Pollution Fact Sheets

How to report pollution incidents

If you become aware of a pollution incident, it is important to know which authority to report to. Contacting the right authority and providing enough information about the incident will increase the opportunity for prompt and effective action.

Managing polluting activities

Polluting activities are generally governed by the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994 (EMPCA)*. EMPCA has a number of features, including:

- Regulation of activities that are expected to cause environmental harm (“Level 2 activities”). These include chemical works, sewage treatment works, quarries and rendering plants;
- Environmental impact assessment for Level 2 activities and other activities that may have environmental impacts;
- A system for encouraging best practice environmental management, including environmental management plans, audits and agreements;
- A range of incentive and enforcement measures;
- Appeals to the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal.

The assessment and management of environmental impacts varies depending on the type of development. Most developments are Level 1 activities, for which local councils issue permits and monitor impacts. The Department of Tourism, Arts and the Environment (*DTAE*) is responsible for assessing and managing Level 2 activities (which are listed in EMPCA). Projects of State Significance (such as Basslink and the Pulp Mill) are assessed by the Resource Planning and Development Commission (see **Environmental Impact Assessment Fact Sheet**).

What is pollution?

A pollutant includes a gas, liquid or solid, odour, organisms, energy (including noise and vibration), radioactivity & electromagnetic radiation or a combination of pollutants that may cause environmental harm. It is an offence under EMPCA to cause **environmental harm**, defined as any adverse effect on the environment (of whatever degree or duration). Key concepts include:

- **Serious environmental harm** – environmental harm that involves high impact or wide spread health consequences, serious adverse environmental impacts or property damage exceeding \$50,000;
- **Material environmental harm** – environmental harm that involves a health risk or environmental impact that is not negligible, property damage exceeding \$5,000 or a widescale environmental nuisance;
- **Environmental nuisance** – the emission of a pollutant (*which is widely defined*) that unreasonably interferes with your enjoyment of the environment.

Reporting Pollution

If you become aware of a pollution incident, you should report it as soon as possible to the responsible authority (see below). You should provide as much information as possible about the polluting activity – when it happened, areas that may be at risk, whether you have contacted the responsible person / company.

Ask the responsible agency to investigate the incident and inform you of the outcome of the investigation. Write down the name of the person that you speak with. Where possible, follow up this contact with a letter to the agency formally notifying them of the incident and requesting an investigation.

Who to Contact

STEP 1: Notify the company

It is a good idea to contact the person / company who you think is responsible for the polluting activity. Often, the company is not aware of the pollution (for example, if it is caused by a leak in a discharge pipe) and will take relevant steps to address the problem once it is notified.

STEP 2: Report the incident to the relevant authority

If no action is taken, report the polluting activity to the relevant authority.

Local Government

For level 1 activities, contact your local council and ask that the incident be investigated. Common pollution incidents that should be reported to local government include:

- Noise issues relating to parties, music events, lawnmowers, off-road vehicles and domestic animals (for after hours complaints, contact the police)
- Pollution from building and construction sites
- Noise from workshops or freight depots
- Domestic Fires, including wood fires, backyard incinerators and small-scale burn-offs.
- Storm Water
- Septic Tanks
- Waste, odours, noise complaints regarding hotels, restaurants, schools etc

If the local council does not investigate your complaint, or if the local government is responsible for the pollution, contact DPIWE (see below).

DPIWE

For level 2 activities, contact the Incident Response Unit at DPIW on **1800 005 171**. Examples of level 2 polluting activities include:

- Oil spills, disposal of hazardous and chemical products
- Odours from rendering works, sewage treatment plants, waste disposal sites or transfer stations
- Discharge from animal processing plants
- Air pollution from regulated factories, including textile factories, paper mills, fertiliser production plants, tanneries and breweries.
- Noise and dust from quarries

Director of Public Health

If the pollution is likely to impact on public health, contact the Director of Public Health on **1800 671 738**

Other types of pollution

There are a number of different contact points for specific pollution incidents. These include:

- **Agricultural spray drift** – contact the Spray Information and Referral Unit on 1800 005 244
- **Forestry Burn Offs** – on State forests, contact the Forest Practice Authority on 6233 7966. For other fires, contact the Fire Service on 1800 000 699
- **Noisy Trains** – contact Pacific National on 6337 2211
- **Aircraft Noise** – call 1800 802 584
- **Noisy Car / Building Alarms** - contact Tasmania Police on 6230 2111