



## Guidance to Licensees/COA holders on the Notification, Management and Communication of Environmental Incidents

### 1. Introduction

This guidance does not purport to be a legal interpretation of the requirements of licences/certificates of authorisation (COA) issued by the Environmental Protection Agency. The aim of this document is to provide guidance to licensees/COA holders on communicating the necessary information to those dealing with environmental incidents to ensure that they can respond promptly and effectively and relay the appropriate level of communication to stakeholders.

This guidance is related primarily to notification of incidents to the EPA, and other bodies. Licence's/COA's issued by the Agency include conditions requiring notification of incidents to the Agency and other relevant bodies. Licensees/COA holders are reminded of their obligations under these conditions and should ensure compliance as required.

Licensees/COA holders should strive to build a good relationship with their local community and keep local residences informed of the activities carried out within their area. The licensee/COA holder should ensure that the local community is kept informed of any incidents or issues that may affect them. This guidance also provides information on how information on incidents is published to the EPA's website.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material contained in this publication, complete accuracy cannot be guaranteed. The Environmental Protection Agency does not accept any responsibility whatsoever for loss or damage occasioned, or claimed to have been occasioned, in part or in full as a consequence of any person acting or refraining from acting, as a result of a matter contained in this publication. All or part of this publication may be reproduced without further permission, provided the source is acknowledged.

### 2. Classification of Environmental Incidents

To determine the significance of an incident the Agency provides the following classification system, which is based on their effect or potential to impact on the environment. Licensees/COA holders should rank all reported incidents into one of the rankings listed below when reporting incidents to the EPA.

An incident is typically defined in the IPPC/Waste licences as:

- (i) an emergency<sup>1</sup>;
- (ii) any emission which does not comply with the requirements of this licence;
- (iii) any exceedance of the daily duty capacity of the waste handling equipment;
- (iv) any trigger level specified in this licence which is attained or exceeded;
- (v) any indication that environmental pollution has, or may have, taken place.

and in UWWTP licences/COA's as:

- (i) any discharge that does not comply with the requirements of this licence;
- (ii) any incident with the potential for environmental contamination of surface water or groundwater, or posing an environmental threat to land, or requiring an emergency response by the relevant Water Services Authority.

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<sup>1</sup> An emergency is defined as any unexpected or potentially dangerous situation, requiring immediate action which may have caused, or might have caused if the action had not taken place, an unauthorised environmental release or breach of licence conditions



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Table 1 provides the definitions associated with each level of environmental impact and should be used as a basis for the assessment of an incident. The following should also be considered as part of the assessment:

- The effects on water quality
- The potential for damage to an ecosystem (e.g. impact on fish population)
- Any requirement for notification or closure of potable water extractors
- The potential reduction in amenity value
- The potential for damage to agriculture or commerce
- The broader impact on man
- The remedial action necessary
- The likely timescale of short term and longer term environmental consequences
- The environmental consequences of likely response action
- Any injury or loss of life caused by the incident

The environmental impact scale used in Table 1 is the same as that used in the National Framework for Major Emergency Management (MEM). The MEM definitions are given in italics below with further EPA criteria in regular font. The new classification system goes from 1 to 5 with one being a minor impact on the environment up to 5 being Catastrophic. The classification system being replaced went from 3 to 1 with 3 being the classification of minor impact.

***Table 1 – Environmental Impact Assessment Criteria***

Ranking	Classification	Impact on the environment
1	Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No contamination, localised effects</i></li> <li>• Minor effect on air quality as evidenced by dust or odour complaint(s)</li> <li>• ELV breaches</li> <li>• An emission which does not comply with the requirement of the licence/COA (A pattern of repeated minor incidents should be taken into account when considering the level of response)</li> </ul>
2	Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Simple contamination, localised effects of short duration</i></li> <li>• Local limited impact to water, land and air</li> <li>• Notification to and short term closure of potable water extractors required</li> </ul>
3	Serious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Simple contamination, widespread effects of extended duration</i></li> <li>• Significant effects on water quality</li> <li>• Major damage to an ecosystem (e.g. significant impact on fish population)</li> <li>• Longer term closure of potable water extractors</li> <li>• Significant reduction in amenity value</li> <li>• Significant Damage to agriculture or commerce</li> <li>• Significant Impact on man</li> </ul>
4	Very Serious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Heavy contamination, localised effects of extended duration</i></li> </ul>
5	Catastrophic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Very heavy contamination, widespread effects of extended duration</i></li> </ul>



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Rankings of very serious or catastrophic impact on the environment are new incident classifications and are for incidents at a level that would be considered major emergencies. A major emergency is defined as an event which, usually occurs with little or no warning, causes or threatens death or injury, serious disruption of essential services, or damage to property, the environment or infrastructure beyond the normal capabilities of the principal emergency services in the area in which the event occurs and requiring the activation of specific additional procedures to ensure an effective, co-ordinated response.

### **3. Response by Licensees/COA holders to Incidents**

Licensees/COA holders should take the appropriate response in accordance with the level of ranking of the incident. The licensee's/COA holder's response should include the following:

- Deploy the necessary resources to deal with the incident.
- Notify the relevant bodies as specified in the licence/COA plus other bodies as deemed necessary.
- Activate the facility's Emergency Response Procedure where necessary
- Initiate appropriate corrective actions to deal with the incident
- Initiate appropriate preventative actions to prevent a reoccurrence of the incident.
- Comply with the requirements of the licence/COA conditions in relation to the investigation, notification, management and reporting.
- Ensure an appropriate level of contact with the public/media for the impact ranking.

### **4. Notification of the incident to the EPA and other Bodies**

The licensee/COA holder is required to communicate the details of the incident by telephone and by fax to the EPA. The licensee/COA holder should fill in the Incident Notification Form in Annex 1 and fax it to the EPA as per the incident notification requirements of your licence/COA. The licensee should document an Incident Notification Procedure which incorporates the incident notification requirements of the licence and this guidance document. Licensees/COA holders should continue to report incidents to the EPA Regional Inspectorate from where your OEE inspector is based. The contact details for each of the Regional Inspectorates are provided in the attached guidance (Annex 2).

#### **During Office Hours**

The licensee/COA holder is required to communicate the details of the incident to an EPA inspector by telephone and by fax. It is not appropriate to email or leave a telephone message for an inspector. Office hours are 09:00 – 17:00, Monday to Friday.

#### **Outside Office Hours (Annex 3)**

The licensee/COA holder is required to communicate the details of the incident by telephone and by fax using the Incident Notification Form in Annex 1 of this Guidance. Notifications of environmental incidents outside normal working hours can be made by telephone to EPA headquarters on telephone



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number 053 9160600, or by telephoning any of the Regional Inspectorates<sup>2</sup>. Callers are given the option to record a message or an urgent environmental pollution incident message.

Licensees/COA holders are advised that all Rank 2 to 5 incident notifications should be recorded as urgent environmental pollution incidents to ensure that the message is accessed and assessed by EPA staff. The EPA staff member will assess the message and decide what action/response is required by the EPA. Rank 1 Incident notifications should be recorded as a non-urgent environmental incident.

### 5. Emergency Response Procedure (ERP)

The typical licence/COA requires that a licensee/COA holder prepare and maintain an environmental emergency response procedure. The ERP should be activated where necessary in responding to incidents. The ERP should reference the Incident Notification Procedure and/or the incident notification requirements of the licence. As part of the ERP the Environmental Manager is required to ensure that at a minimum the following action is taken:

The Environmental manager is required to:

- Contact the Emergency Response Agencies and the Environmental Protection Agency to communicate the incident details.
- Be available to take calls regarding the incident.
- Keep apprised of the on-going situation in order to determine the appropriate level of response from staff.
- Provide and support the technical response to the incident.
- Ensure that suitable safety precautions are in place regarding any on-site response.
- Provide and support the monitoring and analytical response.
- Advise on notification to the public and other Agencies.
- Advise on remedial action necessary including preventative action i.e. potable water supplies.
- Ensure compliance with the incident notification conditions of the licence.

#### Interaction with Other Agencies

The following emergency response Agencies have a role to play in incident response and should be contacted where necessary: Local Authority, Fire Service, Health Service Executive, Gardaí, Health and Safety Authority, Fisheries Board, Sanitary Authority, Food Safety Authority, Irish Coast Guard, RNLI, Harbour Masters.

As part of the ERP the licensee/COA holder should identify the relevant Agencies and their contact details that may be required for incident response at their facility.

### 6. Policy on Publication to the EPA Website

#### Publication of incidents to the web-site

Typically incidents of Rank 2 and higher will be posted to the Web where the following occurs or has potential to occur.

- Major fish kill.

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<sup>2</sup> Regional Inspectorates switchboards are forwarded to HQ at close of business each day. In the event of any line fault; licensees/COA holders should call the Wexford office directly.



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- Gross environmental pollution.
- Significant disruption of downstream WWTP'S.
- Disruption of drinking water supplies.
- Disruption to users of amenity areas.
- Danger as a result of environmental pollution to residents in the locality.
- Major fire resulting in environmental pollution.
- Significant clean-up expected as a result of a specific incident.
- Involvement of emergency services.
- Where there are a notable number of complaints or there is a need to reassure the public that there is no environmental impact.

Prior to publication of an incident on the website, a review with site personnel will be conducted by the EPA and the facility will be informed of the intention to post the notification.

In general, incidents that have no offsite impact or onsite health impact will not be posted on the website. Typical incidents that will not be published to the EPA web site include:

- Spills that are fully contained on site in bunds or tanks.
- Minor spills where the material is removed in sawdust/sand/soil.
- Non-compliance with licensed/COA emissions that are not significant and that are being dealt with by way of an agreed programme of works or corrective action by the company.
- Thermal oxidiser bypasses that are in accordance with the EPA protocol for such bypasses.
- Odour complaints unless indicating more significant pollution problems.
- Exceeded trigger levels at landfills that are not significant and that are being dealt with by way of an agreed programme of works or corrective action by the company.
- Landfill Flare breakdown.
- Acts of vandalism with no environmental impact.
- Minor fires that are dealt with on-site.

### **Follow up and close out of incidents by the EPA**

Following the investigation of an incident the EPA's site inspection report, when completed, will be placed on the public file. Further follow up of the incident may include verification of the corrective actions, preventative actions and remediation measures taken by the company, determination of the significance and impact if any and specification of any further enforcement action considered necessary by the Agency.

The timeline for close out of the notification on the website will vary depending on the complexity and seriousness of the incident. The objective will be to post an update to the original website notice within *one month* of the incident occurring in the case of non complex incidents and within *two months* of complex incidents. Notices will be removed from the website *two months* after the close out paragraph has been added to the original notice or in the case of incidents which result in enforcement action after the case has been heard.

**Annex 1**

**Incident Notification Form**

Licence/COA Number Licence/COA Name																	
Licencee/COA Address:																	
Incident notification form submitted by:																	
Licencees/COA holders Environmental Impact Ranking:	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 5. <input type="checkbox"/>																
Details of incident:																	
Date of incident:																	
Approximate start time of incident <small>(Provide range if time is not known)</small>																	
Details of when incident first noticed:																	
Still ongoing: Yes/No Finish time and date																	
New or reoccurring incident <sup>1</sup>																	
Uncontrolled release:	Air <input type="checkbox"/> Water <input type="checkbox"/> Sewer <input type="checkbox"/> Ground <input type="checkbox"/> No uncontrolled release <input type="checkbox"/>																
Incident Nature <small>(Explosion, Fire, Spillage, Odour, Breach of ELV, Monitoring Equipment offline, Trigger Level Reached, Uncontrolled Release, Other – specify)</small>																	
Details of any vulnerable receptors																	
Details of ELV Exceedance if available <sup>2</sup> <small>(Provide measurement units for values provided)</small>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Parameter</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Value</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Parameter								Value							
Parameter																	
Value																	
Grab or Composite sample																	
Location of incident: Discharge point/Other																	

## Annex 1

Digital Photographs taken:	Yes/No
Odour <sup>3</sup>	Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Odour detected <input type="checkbox"/>
Odours detected	
Extent <sup>4</sup>	Intermittent <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent <input type="checkbox"/>
Sensitivity <sup>5</sup>	Remote <input type="checkbox"/> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Extra <input type="checkbox"/>
Intensity <sup>6</sup>	Faint <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Very strong <input type="checkbox"/>
Weather at time of incident:	
Wind Direction:	
Details of who was notified:	EPA by telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority <input type="checkbox"/> Fisheries <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Corrective actions taken:	
Preventative actions taken or planned:	
Likelihood of reoccurrence	
Details of any other relevant detail or supporting information for submission to the Agency	
<b>This section should be completed by the licensee/COA holder for their records once the corrective and preventative actions are complete<sup>7</sup></b>	
Follow up actions	
Close out date	
Signed	
Position	

## Annex 1

### Explanatory notes:

1. A Reoccurring incident is defined as an incident that has taken place which is similar to a previous incident and both took place because of the same cause.
2. If monitoring results are not available at the time of the incident notification they should be forwarded to the Agency as soon as they become available.
3. For further information on Odour Assessment please refer to the document 'Odour impact Assessment Guidance for EPA licensed sites' on the EPA website: <http://www.epa.ie/downloads/advice/air/emissions/name,28713,en.html>
4. Odour Extent: Intermittent (detected intermittently during the period of assessment) or Persistent (detected throughout the period of assessment).
5. Odour Sensitivity: Remote (no housing, commercial/industrial premises or public area within 500m of observation point); Low sensitivity (no housing, commercial/industrial premises or public area within 100m of observation point); Moderate sensitivity (housing commercial/industrial premises or public area within 100m of observation point); High sensitivity (housing, commercial/industrial premises or public area within area of observation point); Extra sensitive (complaints arising from residents, business and users of public areas within area of observation point).
6. Odour Intensity: Faint Odour (barely detectable, need to stand still and inhale facing into wind); Moderate Odour (easily detectable while walking and breathing normally, possibly offensive); Strong Odour (bearable but offensive – might make clothes / hair smell?); Very Strong Odour (unbearable, difficult to remain in area affected by odour).
7. This section is separate to the initial incident notification. This section should be completed by the licensee/COA holder after the corrective and preventative actions have been completed and the incident can be closed out. It should be maintained on site as part of the licensee's /COA holder's records.



## **Annex 2**

### **EPA Regional Offices**

#### **EPA Headquarters**

PO Box 3000  
Johnstown Castle Estate  
Co. Wexford  
Tel: 053-9160600  
Fax:053-9160699

#### **EPA Regional Inspectorate Dublin**

McCumiskey House  
Richview  
Clonskeagh Road  
Dublin 14  
Tel: 01-268 0100  
Fax: 01-268 0199

#### **EPA Regional Inspectorate Cork**

Inniscarra  
Co. Cork  
Tel: 021-4875540  
Fax: 021-4875545

#### **EPA Regional Inspectorate Castlebar**

John Moore Road  
Castlebar  
Co. Mayo  
Tel: 094-9048400  
Fax: 094 9048499.

#### **EPA Regional Inspectorate Kilkenny**

Seville Lodge  
Callan Road  
Kilkenny  
Tel: 056-7796700  
Fax: 056-7796798

## Annex 2

## Annex 3

### Leaving a Phone Message Outside Office Hours

The licensee/COA holder is required to communicate the details of the incident by telephone and by fax. Notifications of environmental incidents outside normal works hours can be made by telephone to EPA headquarters on telephone number 053 9160600, or by telephoning any of the Regional Inspectorates<sup>3</sup>. Callers are given the option to record a message or an urgent environmental pollution incident message.

If a caller dials HQ, or a \*Regional Inspectorate they will hear a standard greeting and are given options to record a message as follows:

“Thank you for calling the Environmental Protection Agency. Our office hours are from 9 am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Please hold now to hear further options”

“If you wish to leave a message for the Environmental Protection Agency, which will not be dealt with until the following day, please dial 1 now”

“If you wish to report an urgent environmental pollution incident requiring immediate response please dial 2 now”

“To listen to this recorded message again, please dial 3 now”

If the caller selects Options 1 or 2 a further message is played as follows:

#### *Option 1*

“After the tone please leave a message for the Environmental Protection Agency and your name and contact telephone number. Your message will be dealt with when our offices re-open” If you wish to return to the main menu press 0.

#### *Option 2*

“After the tone please leave a message detailing the nature, extent and location of the environmental pollution and your name and contact telephone number. If you wish to return to the main menu press 0.

Note: Urgent environmental Pollution incidents are for incidents with a ranking of 2 to 5.

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