

# How EPA responds to reports of pollution

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ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY



# The principles that inform EPA's response

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The principles that guide our response to pollution reports are:

**Targeted:** using a risk-based approach ensures that we target our resources toward pollution reports that have the highest risks to the environment and human health.

**Consistent:** using a consistent approach ensures that similar incidents result in a similar response from EPA.

**Transparent:** explaining how we assess pollution reports and respond accordingly allows us to be transparent toward both the businesses and industries we regulate and the community we work with.



EPA officers review pollution reports to assess the risk to the environment based on the circumstances of the event and whether there have been any previous, related incidents. Based on this assessment, our officers then decide on an appropriate response.



# Assessment of reports

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Assessment of a report considers two key factors:

1. The potential harm to the environment, public health and/or community amenity
2. How likely it is that EPA can detect and mitigate that harm, and prevent future harm.

This is consistent with the risk-based approach in our Compliance and Enforcement Policy (available on the EPA website at [www.epa.vic.gov.au/our-work/compliance-and-enforcement/ce-policy](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/our-work/compliance-and-enforcement/ce-policy)).

The EPA assessments address the following criteria:

<b>Potential resulting harm to the environment, public health and/or community amenity</b>	<b>How likely it is that EPA can detect and mitigate harm, and prevent future harm</b>
<p>The actual environmental harm or potential environmental harm.</p> <p>Whether any impacts to human health were caused.</p> <p>Whether the wellbeing or amenity of the community was / is affected</p> <p>Amount of public concern.</p>	<p>The previous history of the alleged source of the pollution. We can only assess this if the alleged source is identified in the report and known to EPA through our records.</p> <p>Where the pollution has taken place (we consider factors such as how accessible the site is, whether the pollution can be contained and how stable the pollution might be in that environment).</p> <p>Whether the pollution has occurred before.</p> <p>How detailed the report is and who supplied it (eg whether the report is from someone known to us or from a self-reporting business).</p> <p>How many previous reports have been made about the incident.</p>

# Different types of response

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EPA may choose to respond in a number of ways, depending on the assessment of the pollution report.

Response	Description
Immediate response	We need to respond immediately and will defer other planned inspections in order to do so.
Planned response	A field inspection is recommended and prioritised based on the availability of officers, whether there are other scheduled inspections at the time and whether there are any partnership arrangements with co-regulators.
Desktop response	We will conduct a desktop investigation / enquiry, which might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reviewing any past reports</li><li>• contacting the reporter for additional information</li><li>• sending letters of advice to alleged sources</li><li>• working with the reporter to document the noise or odour</li></ul> EPA may escalate our response based on additional information we may receive through these activities.
Referral	We will refer the report on to one of our co-regulators (such as local councils) or portfolio organisations (such as Parks Victoria or the Department of Environment and Primary Industries).
No action	EPA will not conduct any further investigation but will log the report.

Even if EPA officers do not immediately respond to a pollution report, all reports are logged into our system to assist EPA with any potential future assessments on the same issue.

We also monitor geographic, weather, time and industry trends related to reports, particularly odour and noise reports, in order to better target our response.

The following are examples of various responses to pollution scenarios:

If a report is about water pollution that occurred in the past, a desktop investigation (including speaking to water authorities and others) may be deemed as more suitable.

We often plan inspections resulting from reports of unreasonable noise and odour to coincide with any reported patterns of pollution (for example, if noise is always reported between 8-9pm on week nights, we would schedule an inspection at that time). We might escalate our response to a report of unreasonable noise or odour if we can show that multiple people are affected.

A report of pollution entering a waterway may need a fast response, particularly if the pollution might still be occurring. EPA would therefore respond immediately.

A business that self-reports a small spill that has already been cleaned up may not be inspected by EPA following the report, but if we visit the site in the future, the report would be reviewed and considered during our visit.



# How you can help

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If you make a pollution report, you can help EPA make an accurate assessment by:

- **reporting as soon as possible** after first seeing, hearing or smelling pollution (this improves EPA's chances of tracing it back to a source)
- **giving us detailed information** about where and what the pollution is
- **letting EPA know if the issue is recurring or ongoing**, and whether there are any patterns (for example, if it happens at particular times in a day or on regular days)
- **encouraging others** who may be affected to make their own reports to EPA.

More information about how to make a pollution report can be found on EPA website at [www.epa.vic.gov.au/get-involved/report-pollution](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/get-involved/report-pollution)

## Incomplete reports

EPA occasionally receives pollution reports that don't contain sufficient information to enable follow up. In these cases, our officers will attempt to contact the reporter for additional information. If this is not possible, we will take no further action.

## Reports outside our authority

EPA's contact centre can refer the reporter to the appropriate agency if we don't have the power to deal with them under our legislation, or if other agencies are better equipped to respond. For example, reports of noise from private residences, or small-scale burning-off in residential areas would both be referred on to the local council.

## Our commitment to working with the Victorian community

EPA Victoria recognises that to be an effective environmental regulator we must work together with the Victorian community. This involves delivering quality customer service and encouraging a sense of environmental citizenship.

For more information about our commitment to working with the Victorian community, please see our Customer Service Charter, Engagement Policy and Environmental Citizenship Strategy, on EPA Victoria's website: [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au).

The public reports pollution through EPA's hotline, 1300 372 842 (1300 EPA VIC), and our online portal ([portal.epa.vic.gov.au](http://portal.epa.vic.gov.au)). We then assess those reports against a set of criteria (outlined inside) to determine an appropriate response by EPA officers. We use a risk-based approach to make sure that we are using our resources in the most effective way, and that we attend the right pollution reports.

This information complements the pollution reports section on our website at [www.epa.vic.gov.au/get-involved/report-pollution](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/get-involved/report-pollution)

This brochure does not cover what we do when we are in the field supporting emergency agencies such as the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.



If you need interpreter assistance or want this document translated, please call 131 450 and advise your preferred language.



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