

Report 99.676

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Report to the Environment Committee
from Kathryn Hooper, Resource Quality Officer

Annual Incident Report 1998/99

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the results of the Annual Incident Report 1998/99.

2. Background

The Wellington Regional Council provides a 24 hour incident response service. This service responds to complaints received about pollution incidents, and non-compliance with the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and regional plans. It also responds to consent non-compliance issues outside of normal working hours.

All complaints are received and responses are recorded. The Council is required under Section 35 of the RMA to have a summary of all written complaints received during the preceding 5 years concerning alleged breaches of the Act or a plan, and information on how we dealt with each complaint.

The Annual Incident Report provides a summary and analysis of the complaints received over the past year (1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999). It also makes a comparison with complaints received during 1997/98.

The information presented in the report is used to:

- Identify resource management issues that need to be addressed to ensure that we can achieve sustainable management of the Regions resources;
- Provide an indication of the nature and sources of pressures placed on our environment; and
- Assist the Consents Management Department in ensuring that resource consents are complied with.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Increasing Complaints

- Over 1998/99, 1145 complaints were received, which is an increase of 38% from 1997/98, when the Incident Response Service received 827 complaints.
- The continued increase in the number of complaints received may not necessarily reflect an increase in the number of incidents occurring, rather it may indicate that the community awareness of the Council's role in incident response is increasing, and that people are becoming less tolerant of environmental pollution. However, we anticipate that the increasing trend in the number of complaints received will continue at least into the short to medium term.

3.2 Odour

- Odour caused the most complaints (597, 51%) during the year. There were three main sources of odour.

- Moa Point Waste Water Treatment Plant

When the plant started operation in 1997/98, problems with influent quality caused substantial odour problems in the Strathmore Park area. These odour problems were resolved. However, low level odour problems continued. Due to a number of mechanical failures, the plant did not reach steady state operation until mid 1998. Problems caused by odour escaping from the site continued well into 1998/99. Enforcement action was taken by the Consents Management Department regarding the odour emissions from this site. Report 99.405 has more details on the Moa Point odour issue.

- Sludge De-watering Plant

Sludge from Moa Point is pumped to the Southern Landfill and de-watered. Odour problems arose when centrate (the liquid residue of de-watering), was discharged to the Wellington City Council sewer. This discharge created odour which affected residents in Happy Valley and Owhiro Bay. Wellington City Council and Anglian Water International (NZ) Ltd have implemented a range of measures to solve the problem.

- Taylor Preston Ltd Abattoir

Odours from the abattoir affected Rangoon Heights, and parts of Khandallah, Raroa, and Johnsonville. These odours were attributed to the stockyards, the rendering process, and waste water treatment plant. There is only a small buffer zone between the industrial and residential areas, which has exacerbated the odour problem. Taylor Preston is reviewing their odour management programme to ensure that they comply with their resource consent conditions.

- Waste water treatment plants, landfills, and animal processing operations located adjacent to residential areas cause odour which affects the amenity values of people who live nearby. Even with controls provided by resource consent conditions the effect of the odour on amenity values in residential areas is often considered unacceptable by the residents. The inescapable conclusion is despite all the modern technology available, if an odourous industry is placed close to housing then there will be complaints which require attention. Responding to complaints can be frustrating as there is often little that can be done to stop the odour in the short term.

There also appears to be an increasing trend in the number of complaints from people who live in the vicinity of food preparation premises (restaurants and cafes), particularly in Wellington City.

3.3 Surface Water Contamination

- Discharges of liquid waste contaminants into surface water (freshwater and marine water) were the second most common cause of complaints (450, 39%). These generally involved the discharge of paint, detergent, dye and hydrocarbons from a wide variety of sources. It is often difficult to find the source of most of these incidents because they enter surface water via the stormwater system. Mangaroa River, Ngauranga Stream, Porirua Stream, Wellington Harbour, Porirua Harbour, and Owhiro Bay were the most frequently affected surface water bodies.
- The large number of complaints received about discharges of contaminants into surface water continues to highlight:
 1. A lack of awareness that stormwater systems discharge untreated into rivers, streams, and coastal waters.
 2. The inadequacy or lack of spill prevention measures in the community.

4. Key Responses

- An additional Resource Quality Officer was employed in February 1999 to increase the level of service provided for incident response.
- In order to educate people, the Resource Investigations Department produced two pamphlets addressing discharges to stormwater, and a third about odour. The first was aimed at households, and provided information about the stormwater system and details on waste disposal.

The second pamphlet was aimed at small businesses. This pamphlet is part of a pollution prevention series, and outlines the rules in the Regional Plans, various stormwater management options, and ways to avoid pollution.

The third pamphlet provides guidance for odour management and is distributed to parties causing odour problems.

- Enforcement action taken in 1998/99 included 14 abatement notices, 3 enforcement orders and 3 prosecutions.

5. **Further Action**

As a result of the summary and analysis of the environmental incident information the following actions will be taken:

- Surveillance monitoring will be targeted at problem areas in the Region;
- Staff will talk with territorial authorities about the need to provide adequate buffer zones between odour producing activities and residential areas;
- Staff will promote the need for good practices to reduce odour emissions.

6. **Communication**

Copies of this report will be distributed to territorial authorities in the Region. Copies are also available for members of the public requesting information of this nature.

7. **RPS Implementation**

The aim of the Regional Councils incident response service is to provide an effective response to environmental incidents allowing the Council to meet its objectives under the RMA. It also gives effect to methods in the Regional Policy Statement (RPS).

8. **Recommendations**

That the report be received and the contents noted.

Report prepared by:

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