

Odour Checklist

Acute Response

Our sense of smell is a valuable source of information about chemicals in the environment. For some chemicals, the fact that we can smell them is a warning to move away from the source, hence protecting ourselves from further exposure. For the vast majority of chemicals we can smell them before toxicological effects, including irritation, occurs.

Suggested Actions

In the unlikely event of significant health effects due to odour exposure then an immediate response is necessary:

- Removal from source of exposure by eliminating source
 - Is the source of the odour known?
 - If known can it be removed?
- Interrupting the exposure pathway
 - Open windows (if the odour is inside)
 - Close windows (if the odour is outside)
- Removing receptor
 - Evacuate at risk individuals to location away from odour source
 - Advise affected individuals to seek medical advice
 - Inform local GP or hospital emergency department of possible presentation of those affected

Post Incident Investigation

- Effects on health may be a matter of concern; the local population should be closely involved in any investigations at an early stage and should be kept as fully informed of developments as possible

Detailed Questions in Relation to Odour (not all may be required)

Source and Nature of the Odour

- Describe the odour, what does it smell like? What is the strength of the odour (intensity), is it a faint, mild, strong or a very strong odour?
- Does the odour strength/intensity vary?
- Is the odour perceived to be pleasant, mildly pleasant, strongly unpleasant or very strongly unpleasant?
- When was the odour first noticed?
- Is the odour persistent or intermittent?
- Is there any temporal/seasonal variation in the odour?
- Has there been a chemical spill, accident?

- Can the source be identified? If so, where is it coming from?
- Is the odour inside/outside the building?
- Describe the environmental setting. Is it residential, industrial, commercial, a landfill site?
- Is the source a regulated activity?
 - If so, what is the activity e.g. wastewater treatment, landfill, incinerator, dry cleaners, animal renderers and who are the regulators?

Pathway

- Who first noticed the odour?
- Can everyone smell the odour?
- Where do they live in relation to the odour? Consider wind direction.
- How many people are potentially exposed to the odour?
- What are the age(s) and sex of those exposed?
- Have “at risk” groups been identified including those in schools, hospitals, residential and nursing homes etc.?
- Has any environmental sampling taken place?
 - Who is taking the samples?
 - Is there appropriate quality control?
 - Are duplicate samples being taken and analysed by an independent organisation?
 - What are the samples being tested for, which chemicals?
- Are there any sampling results available?
 - What chemicals have been detected?
 - At what levels/concentrations?
- Is there a possibility of biological odours as well as chemical?
- Has any environmental modelling taken place?
 - Has any dispersion modelling taken place?

Receptors

- Are there any reported health symptoms in relation to the odour?
- What symptoms have been reported?
 - sore throats
 - coughing/sneezing
 - eye irritation/watering
 - nausea/vomiting
 - headaches
 - breathing difficulties
 - if other symptoms, please specify
- Have any health professionals been contacted e.g. GPs. If so, by whom and who has been contacted?

- Have there been any health effects that require medical attention?

Useful resources

- Please see [Air Guidance Note 5 \(AG5\) Odour Impact Assessment Guidance for EPA Licensed Sites](#) as a key national guidance document
- Another helpful guidance document was developed by the New Zealand Ministry for the Environment in 2016. Appendix 2 is especially useful in dealing with any odour incidents. [Good Practice Guide for Assessing and Managing Odour. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, 2016.](#)