



Incident Response 2007/08

Key points:

- Environmental incidents were up 7% from last year, with no major change in the distribution of incidents across pollution types.
- Air and freshwater are the most commonly affected receiving environments for pollution in the Wellington region.
- Odour incidents are the most common primary pollution type making up 75% of all air incidents, and 29% of all incidents in 2007/08.
- Sediment and liquid waste are the most common causes of freshwater pollution.
- 44% of all sediment-related incidents were attributed to earthworks sites.
- Non-compliance with regional rules and the Resource Management Act 1991, was confirmed for 40% of all incidents reported.

Incident response

During the 2007/08 financial year, Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) responded to 1,446 notifications about 1,182 environmental incidents, ranging from waste oil and diesel spills to unconsented earthworks. Figure 1 shows the number of environmental incidents and total notifications received over the last eight years. There has been a 7% increase in environmental incidents and a 14% increase in notifications received since 2006/2007.

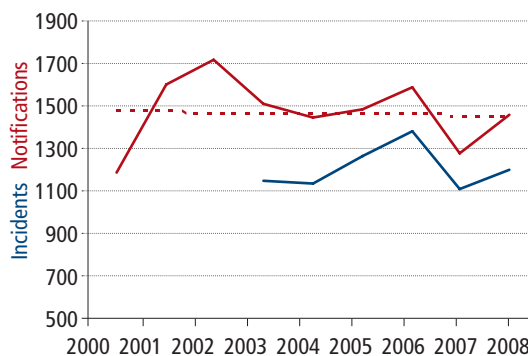


Figure 1: Incident Reporting from 2000 to 2008

When an incident notification is received by Greater Wellington, the duty Environmental Protection Officer will visit the affected site, taking steps to prevent any further pollution, and gather information about the event. The follow-up to the initial investigation will be determined by factors such as the severity of environmental effects, the level of environmental non-compliance and the responsible party's history of offending (see Enforcement 2007/08). As well as receiving notifications from the general public and other organisations, some incidents are referred from Greater Wellington consents staff as a result of routine compliance visits. (See Compliance 2007/08 and Enforcement 2007/08).

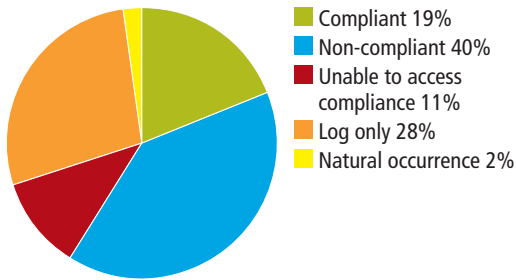
Severity of Environmental impacts

In 2007/08, only 15 incidents were assessed as having 'high' environmental significance. A further 41 were assessed as moderate, and 174 were minor. Compared to last year, this is an increase of 150% in high significance incidents and a decrease of 11% and 20% in moderate and minor incidents respectively. The large increase in incidents of high significance is due to more rigorous assessments and improved officer training, and does not necessarily reflect the worsening of environmental incidents over time. The environmental significance ranking system is based on the severity, extent and duration of the incident.

Environmental non-compliance

Of all incidents reported in 2007/08, 40% involved non-compliance, 19% were compliant, and for the remaining 41% a compliance rating was not made, either because the incident was a natural occurrence, or because compliance could not be assessed.

Figure 2: Environmental compliance for incidents reported in 2007/08



Receiving Environment

An incident can have an effect on one or more receiving environments. Figure 3 shows that in 2007/08 freshwater and air continued to be the most commonly affected environments, which is consistent with 2006/07. In 2007/08, 75% of all air incidents reported were odour related. Another 15% of air incidents were smoke-related, of which 46% were sourced from residential properties.

Of the incidents affecting freshwater, 32% were a result of liquid waste such as paint residue and vehicle wash water, and another 23% of freshwater incidents were due to sedimentation of waterways.

Figure 3: Receiving Environments

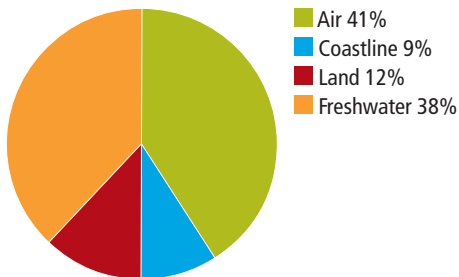
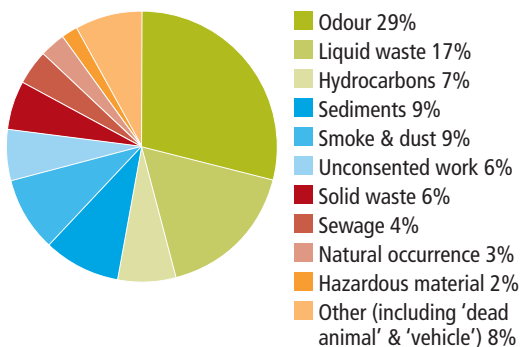


Figure 4: Main pollution types



Main types of pollution

Figure 4 shows that in 2007/08, 'odour' was the pollution type generating the largest number of incidents. Objectionable odour affecting neighbours has increased by 23% (or 69 incidents) since last year, which represents a significant reversal in the downward trend observed since 2003. In 2007/08, 56% of all odour incidents were linked to municipal facilities such as landfills, abattoirs, and wastewater treatment plants. Liquid waste was the second most common pollutant, and sediment the third (equal to smoke and dust). In 2007/08, 44% of all sediment related incidents were linked to earthworks sites.



Figure 5: Liquid Waste Incident

Following up on incidents

When the Environmental Protection team responds to an incident and confirms there has been a breach of environmental regulations, a range of formal and informal enforcement action can be taken (see Enforcement 2007/08). However enforcement action is not always the most appropriate way to deal with breaches. In some cases if a business is visited in response to an incident, there may be many ways they can improve their environmental performance in order to prevent further incidents occurring. In these cases the business may be referred to the Take Charge programme (see Pollution Prevention 2007/08).

Media communication, mail-outs and industry-based seminars are also effective tools used by Greater Wellington to raise public awareness of the effects of environmental pollution and how to prevent it (see Pollution Prevention 2007/08).

What can you do?

If you notice an environmental incident or an activity you think may have adverse environmental effects, please call Greater Wellington's Environment Hotline on 0800 496 734. This is a 24-hour service and our duty officer will respond within an hour on most occasions.

More information

For more information about how to avoid, reduce or respond to pollution, please call the Environment Helpdesk on 04 802 0355 or the Wairarapa office on 06 378 2484.

For more information on Greater Wellington's environmental regulation activities please visit our website at www.gw.govt.nz