



Incident Response 2010/11

Key points:

- The number of environmental incidents has increased slightly since 2009/10, from 1,157 to 1,174 incidents investigated in 2010/11.
- Air continues to be the environment most affected by pollution in the Wellington region, with 75% of all air incidents reported relating to odour.
- 23% of all environmental incidents reported resulted in confirmed breaches of regional rules and the Resource Management Act 1991 – a 12% decrease from last year.

Environmental incident response

During the 2010/11 year, Greater Wellington responded to 1,242 notifications and 1,174 environmental incidents. Figure 1 shows the total number of notifications and environmental incidents received over the last eleven years. Environmental incident numbers have increased slightly from the 1,157 incidents investigated in 2009/10.



Figure 1: Incident reporting from 2000 to 2011

When Greater Wellington is notified of an incident, the duty officer will visit the affected site and the source site, take steps to prevent any further pollution, and gather information about the incident. The follow up to the initial investigation will be determined by the significance of the environmental effects of the incident, the level of non-compliance, and the compliance history of the source.

Significance of Environmental Incidents

Incidents are categorised by their environmental significance (high, moderate, or minor). The significance of each environmental incident is assessed based on the severity, extent, and duration of the incident. These factors are assessed by the investigating officer and given computer generated weightings which are automatically tallied to assign the incident to a particular significance category.

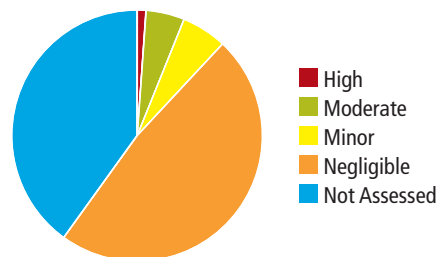


Figure 2: Significance of 1,174 environmental incidents received during the 2010/11 year.

In 2010/11, 15 incidents were rated to be of 'high' environmental significance (compared to 11 in 2009/10). Of these, 53% affected surface water (compared to 82% in 2009/10 and 80% in 2008/09). The 2010/11 incidents of high significance involved sediment and other liquid waste discharges to surface water, hydrocarbon discharges to the coastal marine area, unconsented works on properties, sewage discharges to land, and the inappropriate discharge of solid waste to land.

For resulting enforcement action see Enforcement 2010/11.

Environmental non-compliance

Of all incidents reported in 2010/11, 23% involved non-compliance, 14% were compliant, and 2% were attributable to a natural cause. For the remaining 60%, an assessment of compliance was not applicable, either because the pollution was not detected, the incident was logged and attendance not required, or the officer was unable to assess the compliance of the activity at the time of inspection.

The number of environmental incidents involving non-compliance has decreased by 12% from 2009/10.

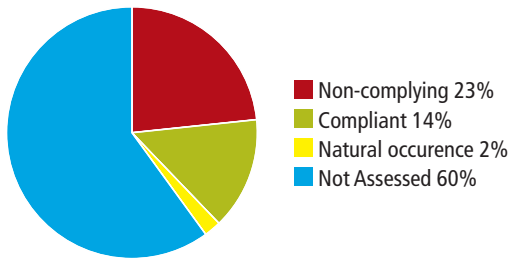


Figure 3: Compliance for incidents reported in 2010/11.

Receiving Environment

An incident can have an effect on one or more receiving environments. Figure 4 shows that in 2010/11, air continued to be the most commonly affected environment, which is consistent with previous years. In 2010/11, 75% of all air incidents reported were odour related. Common sources of odour include manufacturing and solvent use at industrial sites, farms, meatworks, hazardous waste treatment facilities, and municipal services such as landfills and wastewater treatment plants. A further 15% of air incidents were smoke related.

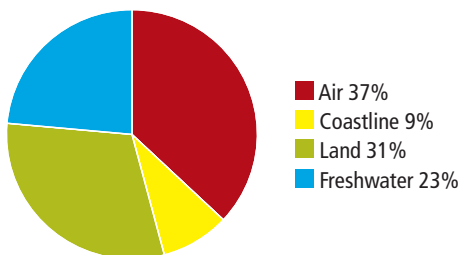


Figure 4: Receiving environments in 2010/11.

Main types of pollution

Figure 5 shows that in 2010/11, odour generated 28% of all incidents. Liquid waste closely followed at 21% of all incidents, which is similar to the 22% in 2009/10. This follows a continuing upward trend, with more liquid waste incidents recorded this year than ever before. Sources of liquid waste discharges include vehicle wash water from residential properties, concrete cutting or cement waste, and paint residue.

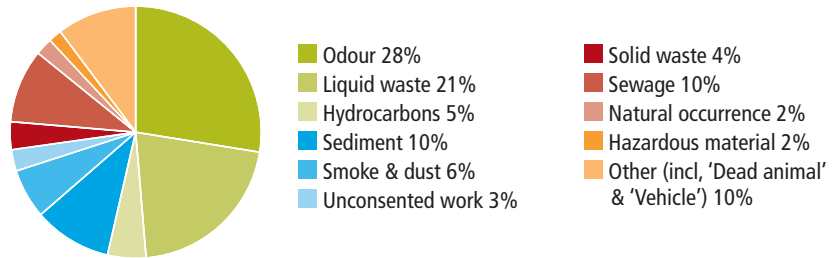


Figure 5: Main pollution types in 2010/11.



Paint discharge to the coastal marine area



Hydraulic oil from a refuse truck



Sediment discharge to the coastal marine area



Sediment discharge to a stream

Incident follow-up

When the Environmental Regulation team responds to an incident and confirms there has been a breach of environmental regulations, a range of formal and informal enforcement actions can be taken (see Enforcement 2010/11). 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 incidents, ways to improve its environmental performance can be identified, and further incidents prevented. In these cases a business may be referred to the Take Charge programme (see Take Charge and Pollution Prevention 2010/11).

When the source of pollution can't be traced or a breach is not confirmed, educational advice is given to parties involved or mailed out to neighbourhoods to raise environmental awareness. Media statements are also released asking the public for more information or to provide advice and information about how to prevent pollution.

Cost Recovery

It is Greater Wellington's policy to recover costs associated with incident response. In 2010/11 cost recovery notices were issued to the value of \$13,772.

What can you do?

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

More information

If you want more information about how to avoid, reduce or respond to pollution, please call the Environment Helpdesk, Wellington, 0800 496 734 or the Wairarapa office on 06378 2484.

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