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Report To The Environment Committee
from Kathryn Hooper, Resource Quality Officer

Annual Incident Report 1999/2000

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the results of the Annual Incident Report 1999/2000.

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 received are recorded. The Council is required under Section 35 of the RMA to have a summary of all written complaints received during the preceding five 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 1999 to 30 June 2000). It also makes a comparison with complaints received during 1998/98.

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.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Numbers of Complaints Received Appear to have Peaked

The number of complaints received appears to have peaked, with only slightly more complaints received in 1999/2000 (1176 complaints) than in 1998/1999 (1145 complaints). Generally, this may indicate that the public is now aware that they can direct concerns about pollution to the Wellington Regional Council.

It is anticipated that the numbers of complaints received over the 2000/2001 year will not differ greatly from the number received this year.

3.2 Little Seasonal Difference in Complaints

While complaints vary on a daily basis according to weather and climatic conditions, little seasonal variation in complaints was noted during 1999/2000.

3.3 Air the Most Affected Resource

Air is the most affected resource in the Wellington Region accounting for 58% of all complaints. As in previous years, odour was the major problem accounting for 49% of all complaints received. In 14% of odour complaints, odour was confirmed as offensive or objectionable at the time of investigation. It is noted that several sites that have been the source of significant numbers of complaints took steps to reduce odour emissions during 1999/2000.

3.4 Efficient Response Times

Ninety-four percent of red complaints were responded to within one hour, 98.5% of yellow responses were responded to within 24 hours and 100% of blue responses were responded to within 30 days. Distant sites and multiple call-outs were the reasons for the delay in responding to some complaints.

3.5 Stormwater

During 1999/2000, 86 complaints were received about discharges to stormwater. The main types of contamination were:

- Hydrocarbon spills from vehicles onto roads and subsequently into the stormwater system;
- Silt discharges from earthworks activities;
- Sewage discharges from blocked/overflowing sewer systems;
- Discharges from Automotive/mechanical premises. (e.g. automotive products including hydrocarbons, antifreezes and lubricants);
- Commercial cleaning and/or blasting activities discharging contaminants (detergents, blasting residues);
- Discharges of paint or paint wash water from domestic properties; and
- Discharges of liquid waste from industrial premises.

- Stormwater has been identified as one of the main resource management issues facing the Region, and as an area requiring more detailed investigation by the Council.

3.6 **Enforcement Action**

Enforcement action taken in 1999/2000 included 18 abatement notices, 6 infringement notices and 1 prosecution.

4. **Issues arising**

4.1 **Inadequate Buffer Zones Contribute to the Odour Problem**

Inadequate buffer zones between odour sources and residential properties is an issue that continues to be highlighted in the Annual Incident Report. This contributes to many odour complaints. However, it appears that many of these issues can be resolved through placing tighter controls on odour emitting industries. Tight enforcement of resource consent conditions appears to be resolving issues at some of the major odour sources in the Region (i.e. Taylor Preston Ltd, Moa Point Waste Water Treatment Plant, Paraparaumu Waste Water Treatment Plant and the Southern Landfill). Most improvements made to processes on these sites during 1999/2000 were a result of pressure applied to site managers by the Wellington Regional Council.

4.2 **Lack of Awareness About Stormwater**

There appeared to be a general lack of awareness about the stormwater system and the effects that unauthorised discharges to it can have on the environment. This results in lack of preparedness and few contingencies on sites to deal with spills to stormwater drains, or spills on sites which could lead to discharges to stormwater.

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 focus on known problem areas in the Region;
- An information sheet will be given to all people found to be discharging unsuitable materials into the stormwater system;
- As part of the Business Bridges initiative, a Pollution Prevention Kit will be prepared for small to medium sized businesses. This kit will provide a checklist and guidelines for ensuring that appropriate measures are taken to reduce pollution, including discharges to stormwater;
- Continued liaison with territorial authorities about the need to consider odour issues when new developments are planned.

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. Findings of this report will be released publicly through a press release.

7. **Recommendations**

That the report be received and the contents noted.

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