

Procedural guide

Environmental Protection Act 1994

Odour investigation

This document provides guidance on procedures to be followed for the investigation of odours under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 (the Act).

Table of contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Odour nuisance	2
3	Investigation procedure	2
3.1	Stage 1: Complaint received	2
3.2	Stage 2: Obtain relevant information	4
3.3	Information required before taking action	4
3.4	Stage 3: Select the investigation strategy	5
3.5	Stage 4: Conduct the investigation	5
4	New complaint (Procedure A)	7
4.1	Visit complainant's premises	7
4.2	Identify and investigate the source	7
4.3	Site inspection of alleged odour source	8
4.4	Odour management	9
5	Ongoing complaints (Procedure B)	9
5.1	Project team approach	10
5.2	Implement investigation strategy and action plan	11
5.3	Stage 5: Follow up action	11
5.4	Administrative requirements	11
5.5	Updating the complainant	11
6	Enforcement action to be taken	12

1 Introduction

Odour is common cause for complaint by the community. Odour investigations have a number of complexities not usually encountered in environmental compliance and investigations. As the perception of odours varies across the population, there is a need to ensure that odour investigations are conducted in a consistent and objective way, minimising the potential for subjectivity. This procedural guide provides for a consistent approach to odour investigations.

2 Odour nuisance

The mere presence of an odour beyond the property boundary of an alleged source does not necessarily constitute an offence, and is therefore not adequate grounds for enforcement action. The odour must be shown to have resulted in, or potentially result in, an adverse effect on an environmental value. Environmental values typically affected by odour include public amenity and air quality conducive to suitability for life, health and wellbeing of persons.

Department of Environment and Science (DES) outcome based conditions do not prohibit all smells but prohibit those that are noxious or offensive. “Noxious” odours are harmful or injurious to health or physical well-being, “offensive” odours cause offence or displeasure, are disagreeable to the sense, disgusting, nauseous or repulsive. “Noxious” and “offensive” odours are not smells that are trivial, negligible or minor nature.

3 Investigation procedure

A staged approach is taken to investigations of odour nuisance. The staged approach provides the ability to tailor the investigations relative the magnitude of the alleged odour nuisance. The basic overview of odour investigation process is explained in Figure 1.

3.1 Stage 1: Complaint received

Determine the appropriate administering authority to investigate the complaint.

Once a valid complaint has been received, the appropriate authority to undertake the investigation must be determined. The answers to the following questions can assist in making this determination:

- Is the alleged source a devolved, non-devolved or delegated activity? If it is a devolved source, the local government has the responsibility for investigating the complaint. If it is a delegated activity, the complaint is to be referred to the relevant state government department.
- If the alleged source is a non-devolved or non-delegated activity, DES is responsible for the investigation.

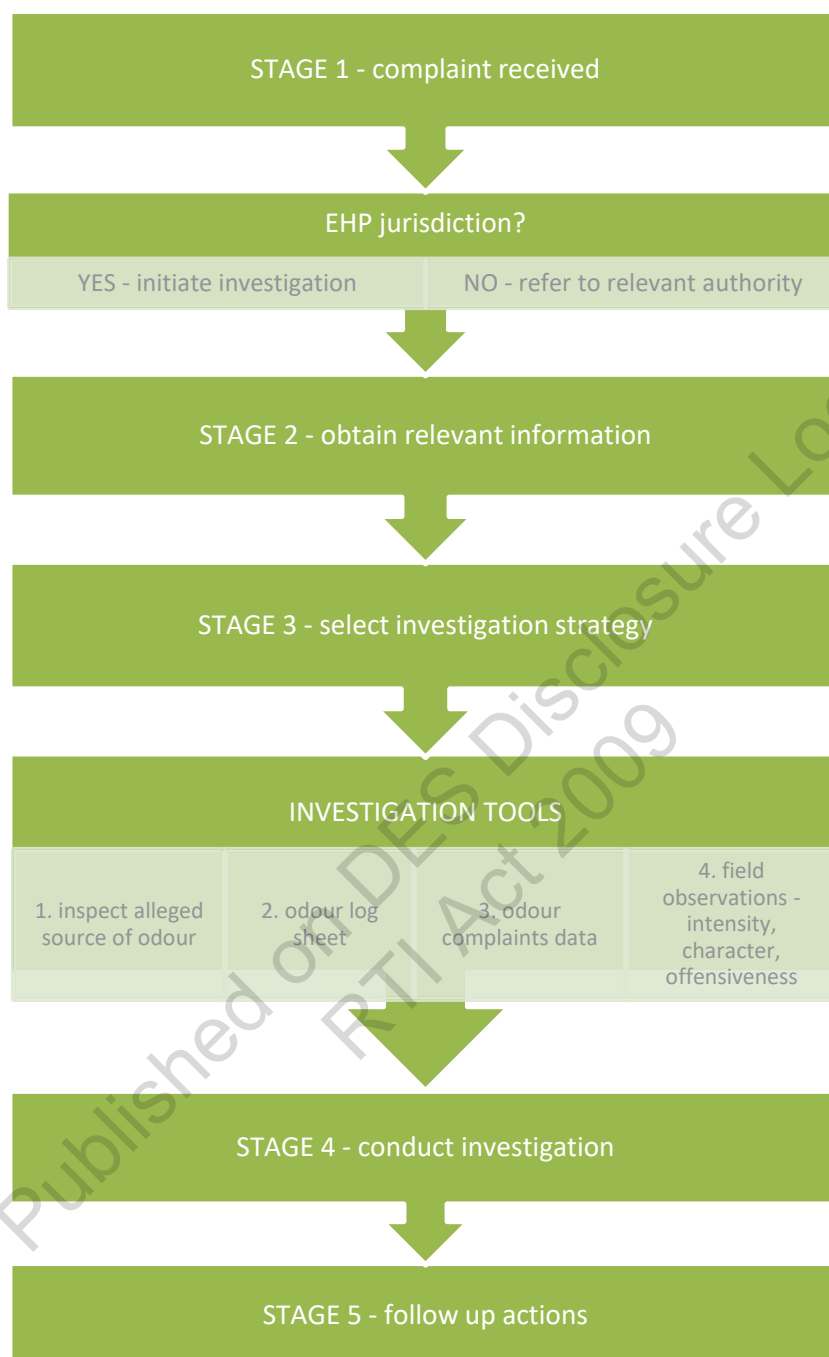


Figure 1: Basic overview of odour investigation process

3.2 Stage 2: Obtain relevant information

A relevant nuisance complaint can be made to the administering authority either in writing or orally, and must include the following:

- The complainant's name and residential address.
- A telephone number at which the complainant can be contacted.
- Enough details of the emission to allow the authority to investigate whether the emission is causing an unlawful environmental nuisance.

If at any time after a nuisance complaint has been made, the administering authority believes, on reasonable grounds, that the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or based on a mistaken belief, the authority may reject the complaint without further investigation. Similarly, should a complainant fail to provide sufficient detail to allow an effective investigation to be undertaken, the authority may decide not to investigate the complaint.

3.3 Information required before taking action

In order to establish whether an alleged odour nuisance has occurred, the investigator must conduct an investigation of the complaint. Investigator to contact the complainant prior to visiting the site to determine:

- Is the odour currently present?
- If still occurring, has it decreased or increased in intensity since first reported?
- If not present does the complainant think this is because the odour is intermittent or do they think it has ceased?
- Frequency of the odour occurring.
- A description of the odour's characteristics and qualities.
- The odour intensity (based on odour intensity scale of 0 to 6 – see Table 1 of the Odour investigation tools procedural guide (ESR/2016/3044)¹.
- Duration and time/s the odour occurs.
- Is odour continuous or fluctuating?
- Weather conditions (e.g. temperature, wind direction and speed) when the odour is observed.
- Suspected source.
- Likelihood of odour emissions from suspected source.
- Other persons affected by the odour.
- Any physical effects (Note: if serious scale physical effects are described, Emergency Services personnel must be contacted immediately);
- Approximate travelling time required to reach complainant; and
- What is the complainant's expected outcome of the investigation?

The investigator can also contact the alleged source and determine:

- If the alleged source considers that it is a source of odours?
- Details of any odour event and actions to prevent future release of odours.

¹ This is the publication number. The publication number can be used as a search term to find the latest version of a publication at www.des.qld.gov.au.

- If the alleged source is an ERA, the investigator must obtain a copy of the licence and become acquainted with the licence conditions.

The most appropriate response may include:

- Phone the alleged source advising that you have received a complaint and obtain their version of the events. If the event is a one off event the only action required might be a phone call back to the complainant advising them what has happened and the steps the source site has undertaken to ensure no further releases of odours.
- Immediate response: drive to the site and conduct a preliminary investigation.
- Delayed response: call complainant back within agreed timeframe, and if odour is still occurring, initiate a response.
- Contact alleged source to arrange site inspection.
- Odour log sheet completed by complainant(s).
- No response required investigation strategy already underway.
- No response required, complaint closed.
- Other action agreed between complainant and investigator.

3.4 Stage 3: Select the investigation strategy

Based on the preliminary investigation and the history of the alleged source, determine the most appropriate strategy and assessment tools to be used. Various assessment tools that may be adopted to determine odour nuisance are discussed in the Odour investigation tools procedural guide (ESR/2016/3044)². The selection of an investigation strategy will generally depend on alleged source(s) and their location, nature of complaints, number of complainants, and the history of odour complaint. DES may conduct odour investigation using tools such as:

- inspection of the facility allegedly causing the odour;
- odour log sheets; and
- odour complaints data
- field observations of odour intensity, character and offensiveness by authorised officers.

If this is a chronic odour nuisance issue, DES may require the alleged offender to conduct an environmental evaluation under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 using tools such as odour emission data collection and chemical analysis. Further details regarding these tools are available in the Odour investigation tools procedural guide.

3.5 Stage 4: Conduct the investigation

The odour investigation procedure is explained in Figure 2. Procedure A is to be adopted for the investigation of all new complaints received by an administering authority. When the source of an alleged odour is the subject of an ongoing investigation, procedure B is to be used (as procedure A should already have been completed). The investigator who is doing the field investigation may be screened for olfactory ability, if possible. This can be arranged through an environmental consultant.

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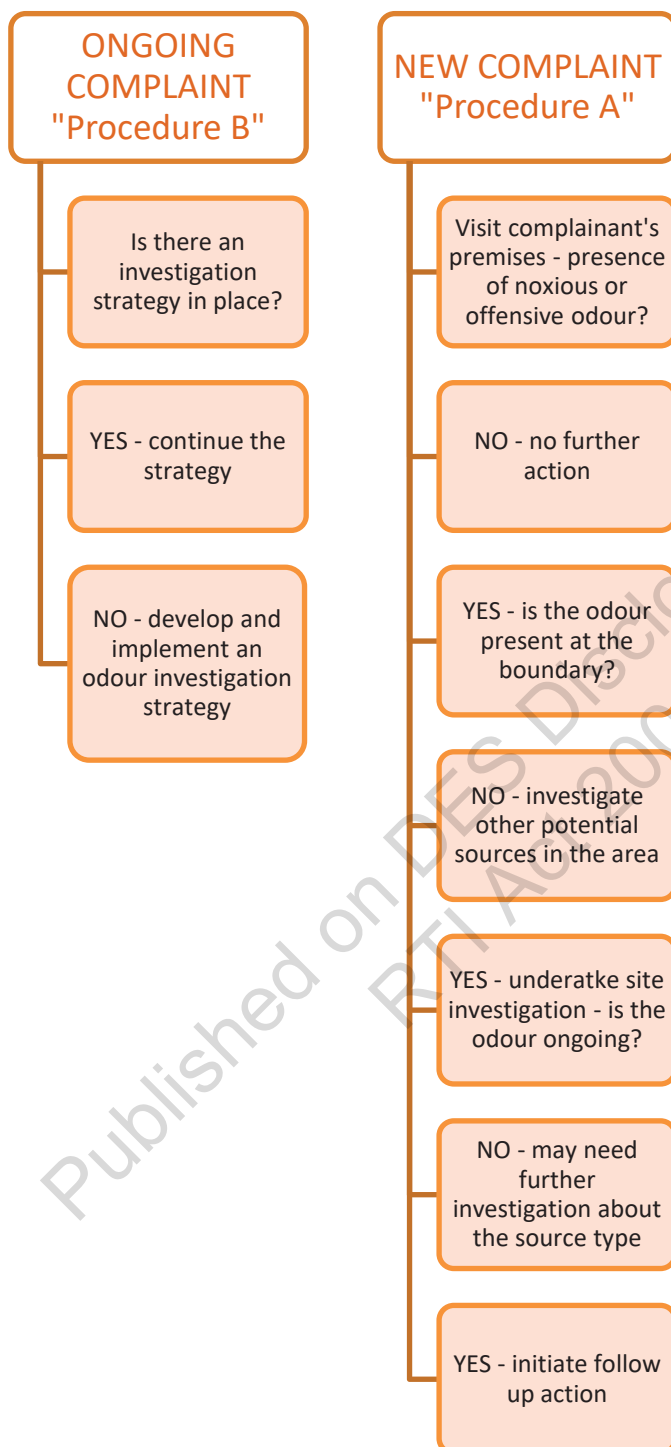


Figure 2: Stage 4 – detail of investigation procedure

4 New complaint (Procedure A)

4.1 Visit complainant's premises

Before leaving for the inspections check that you have any safety equipment necessary to be admitted onto the site of the alleged source (e.g. safety boots and hard-hat) and ensure that you have your authorised identification with you.

Record arrival time and verify the presence of an odour nuisance at the complainant's premises. Check the accuracy of the information provided by the complainant as necessary. Conduct the investigation as explained in the Odour investigation tools procedural guide ([ESR/2016/3044](#))³.

Describe and record the following characteristics of any odour nuisance experienced:

- Characteristics and qualities of the environment into which the emission is made (the "receiving environment").
- Any physical effect the odour may have on the investigator.
- Classify odour by odour-intensity using the rating as discussed in Table 1 of the Odour investigation tools procedural guide.
- Specify the odour character as describes in Table 2 of the Odour investigation tools procedural guide. This can later be used to reconcile with the process or source that is causing the odour.
- Record weather conditions, wind speed and direction, temperature and humidity. Note possible obstructions for example buildings and geological features.
- Specify the odour offensiveness as describes in Table 3 of the Odour investigation tools procedural guide.

A complainant may be requested to complete an Odour log sheet ([ESR/2016/3045](#))³ and to record the time/ date/ duration/ description and effect of any odour released from the alleged source.

4.2 Identify and investigate the source

- If the odour causing a nuisance as described by the complainant is present, drive or walk around the local neighbourhood and determine where the odour appears to be coming from. It is important to investigate whether the odour can be detected upwind from alleged source. This will eliminate other possible sources and is essential for evidence should enforcement action being taken. The locations of various odour observations must be marked on a map, including observations where odour is not detected.
- Starting from the point at which the odour can be detected or from where the odour is at its weakest, trace the odour plume by zigzagging back and forth while heading upwind towards the source.
- Record the route taken and your observations (e.g. the odour is weaker further down wind of the alleged source, the odour is much stronger closer to and downwind of the alleged source and appears to be emanating from the premises). Proceed beyond the alleged source and make odour observations to determine if any odour is present upwind of the alleged source. Plot roughly on a map of the local area the direction and width of the plume.

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- If the source and or characteristics of the odour are difficult to quantify it may help to ask other community members you meet whilst determining the source of the odour, their perception of any odours, and the times of day at which these odours are most prevalent.
- Note that odours particularly those emanating from stack emissions may be stronger away from the source than at the boundaries of the source premises.
- Record odour intensity and offensiveness in ambient air by field inspection using the Recording odour intensity, offensiveness and character form ([ESR/2016/3046](#))⁴.
- Write a brief report on the source identification in the Recording odour intensity, offensiveness and character form.

4.3 Site inspection of alleged odour source

- Record arrival time and verify the presence of the noxious or offensive odour at the source.
- Show proper identification and wear appropriate safety equipment.
- Facility personnel should be informed of the alleged problem and questioned concerning the emission point(s) of the odour being released.
- The investigator should then perform an inspection with the representative of the facility in an attempt to identify the specific source of the odour. If the source is an ERA, technical information may be available to assist in identifying the most likely management practice contributing to the odour.
- Questions relating to the operating conditions of the facility, time and cause of any incident or deviation from normal practice, the action taken to abate an emission including those taken prior to the investigators arrival, and during the investigator's visit, the composition and amount of odour released and any other related information are to be documented.
- If the specific source cannot be identified because of the presence of on-site interfering contaminant sources, every effort should be made to identify the process or area of the facility causing the odour. This information will be relevant to the department's review of the facilities action(s) to mitigate the effect of a breach and to prevent future noxious or offensive odour emissions.
- Collect information such as emissions amount and rate, duration and time of the release and whether the emission is continuous or fluctuating.
- Request copies of any relevant written records or reports from the facility.
- Once all possible evidence is gathered, inform the facility representative about the results of the investigation, including any potential breach of legislation or licence condition, and discuss any follow-up action the facility must take and any enforcement action that may be taken. It is often advisable to take this step after consultation with staff/managers back in the office. If in any doubt as to the action the DES will require advise the source that you will contact them after you have discussed the case with your manager.

Poor management practices and/or poorly managed control technologies may result in odour events that cause environmental nuisance. Ensure that best practice environmental management is reflected in the site's operating procedures, process management and odour control technologies.

If it is determined that a noxious and offensive odour is emanating from the site and the general environmental duty is not being complied with, for example best environmental management practices are not being used on

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site, site operators are required to change how they manage the site to remedy the odour emissions. Legislative provisions of the Act may be used to enforce this demand.

The regulatory agency may consider the compliance history of existing facilities when evaluating the appropriate response to odour nuisance. Other key general aspects to ascertain are whether the operators have an established odour prevention program (e.g. preventative maintenance, have implemented risk assessment and design measures to minimise the likelihood and consequence of a noxious/offensive odour release and have put in place a contingency plan in the event of such a release).

4.4 Odour management

A site inspection should identify individual processes or activities that are possible odour sources and determine whether specific management practices are adopted to avoid or minimise the release of odour, for example, is the odour control equipment working effectively?

Key aspects include odour avoidance measures, effective odour capture and treatment, monitoring of key parameters and the conditions under which release occurred. In the case of an activity subject to an environmental authority, development approval or other environmental management document approved by the administering authority, it is necessary to ascertain whether relevant conditions and requirements are being complied with.

Some best management practices applicable to odorous processes are:

- Manage process inputs to minimise those inputs likely to produce offensive odours (e.g. minimising sulphur content in wastewater streams).
- Manage materials to prevent them becoming odorous (e.g. keeping waste waters aerobic, keeping manures dry).
- Manage conditions to prevent volatilisation of odorous substances (e.g. high pH to keep hydrogen sulphide in solution).
- Manage process to avoid escapes of odours e.g. enclosure of odour generating equipment with collection of odours for treatment, cover potentially odorous materials.
- Manage and monitor treatment processes to ensure they are carried out effectively (e.g. wastewater treatment processes, odour treatment processes).
- Conduct odorous activities during the least sensitive time of the day or during the most favourable weather conditions e.g. turning compost windrows in circumstances conducive to wind dispersal away from odour sensitive places.
- Where there are a number of odorous processes on-site, it may be preferable to schedule them to happen separately rather than concurrently.
- Site management must ensure operational staff are aware of potential odour impacts and ensure implementation of work practices that minimise odour.

The most commonly used control equipment includes bio-filtration techniques, adsorption systems, anaerobic digestion, scrubbing systems and thermal oxidation.

5 Ongoing complaints (Procedure B)

Where the initial investigation has not identified the odour nuisance to be acute in nature, but rather an ongoing chronic issue, additional investigation may be required. It may be necessary to visit the complainant's location and or the alleged source on a number of occasions to verify the source. A field investigation of odour intensity, character and offensiveness may be required (see: Recording odour intensity, offensiveness and character form

and Odour investigation tools procedural guide). This investigation may include a detailed field survey using trained field sniffer(s) who has been screened for olfactory ability (detection sensitivity tested against the n-butanol). The investigator(s) can assess and record odour intensity, offensiveness and characteristics in the field as specified in the above form. Initiating field measurement from the point at which the odour can be detected, trace the odour plume by zigzagging back and forth while heading upwind towards the source. The extent of this investigation will be based on the complexity of the issue.

The strategy of the continued investigation will be determined giving consideration to a number of factors (listed below) including the complexity of the source(s). The complexity of a source can be categorised as follows:

- A single source complex odour describes that situation where one particular facility may have multiple potential sources. For example, a meat processing facility has odour emanating from wastewater treatment pond, a rendering plant stack emission and odour from the stock holding yards.
- A complex source odour describes those situations when there are a number of similar sources within the same vicinity that may each contribute to an unacceptable odour impact. For example, an industrial estate that includes two soil conditioner manufacturer's, a waste treatment facility and a sewage treatment plant.

The following procedure may be used for the investigation of chronic and complex odour nuisance complaints:

5.1 Project team approach

In complex odour issues it can be beneficial to establish a project team, however resource constraints dictate that most odour complaints are investigated by one or two officers. In complex odour cases that are difficult to resolve because of the complexity of the sources, the high cost of odour control technology, or any other reason it may be necessary to establish a project team to manage the investigation. The team will contain a project manager and support officers experienced in odour management and investigation.

The team should meet to identify the most effective method of investigation to be undertaken and establish an agreed approach. The approach established will balance the needs of the community with the resources available to the administering authority, to ensure a timely resolution to the odour nuisance.

The initial task of the meeting to consider all relevant information relating to the complaint, which may include:

- the complexity of the site.
 - o single site multiple source.
 - o multiple sites contributing to odour.
- nature of complaints.
- number of complaints.
- number of complainants.
- any complaint history and previous action taken by the administering authority.
- benchmarking study of industry.

The outcome of the meeting will be an action plan, which will incorporate:

- decision on assessment strategy, including any requirements for an environmental evaluation.
- complaint management processes.
- enforcement strategy, where required.
- internal briefings.

5.2 Implement investigation strategy and action plan

Implement investigation strategy using tools as discussed in Odour investigation tools procedural guide. All members of the project team are responsible for the implementation of their allocated tasks of the investigation strategy. Regular meetings are to be maintained to ensure that timeframes for implementation are achieved and that the strategy still reflects the most appropriate approach to complaint investigations.

5.3 Stage 5: Follow up action

5.4 Administrative requirements

- If the complaint has been received orally, i.e. no written complaint has been made, the complainant is to be provided with a complaint form [\(ESR/2016/2165\)](#)⁵ to be completed and returned to DES.
- The complainant should be advised that completion of a complaint form would provide valuable information that may be utilised if the matter proceeds to court. Without the complainant testimony, the case in court may be open to substantial challenge during an administrative hearing process.
- It is to be explained to the complainant that their identity will be anonymous unless they permit disclosure or it is required for an administrative proceeding.
- Ensure complaint is entered in complaint database.
- Contact any other relevant government bodies if necessary, e.g. local government, emergency services.
- Often a lot of time can be saved by telephoning the alleged source on receipt of the complaint – the alleged source may be able to identify the actual source, may have already implemented practices and procedures to minimise the odour releases.
- Advise the source in writing that the administering authority has received a complaint and has an obligation to investigate the matter, confirm in the letter any advice given by the source such as acknowledgement of odour releases.
- The source is invited to respond to this allegation in writing on or before a stated date, nominally 2 weeks. The source should be requested to provide detail of actions taken to investigate the allegation, any proposed measures that will be taken to reduce the odour and the applicable timeframes for completion of such measures.

5.5 Updating the complainant

It is important that the complainant be kept informed of actions taken, by both DES and the source, to address the odour nuisance throughout the investigation process. The manner in which the complainant is kept informed will depend on the individual circumstances of the complaint, that is, how long it will take to address the odour nuisance and the extent of the concerns of the complainant. It is suggested that the matter be discussed with the complainant and communication methods be agreed upon during the initial stages of contact.

The alleged source should be encouraged to consult directly with the complainant provided the complainant has no objections to direct contact. The alleged source should be encouraged to seek the input of the complainant in resolving the matter and should demonstrate responsiveness to the complainants concerns. The community will generally respond positively to a responsive industry neighbour. The establishment of good relations between the alleged source and the community will substantially assist in resolving complaints.

When a complaint is resolved, it is necessary in all cases to advise the complainant in writing.

⁵ This is the publication number. The publication number can be used as a search term to find the latest version of a publication at www.des.qld.gov.au.

6 Enforcement action to be taken

There are ranges of management tools within the Act that may be used to ensure action is taken to reduce or eliminate a noxious or offensive odour. This includes requiring an environmental evaluation, developing a transitional environmental program or issuing an environmental protection order. An environmental evaluation may include assessment tools such as odour emission estimation using dynamic olfactometry and chemical analysis as discussed in the Odour investigation tools procedural guide. The most appropriate enforcement action to take will depend on the amount of evidence obtained, the level of co-operation by the source and the on-going risk to the receiving environment. Consultation with management is required prior to advising the source of any action to be taken. For additional guidance on this matter please refer to the department's [Enforcement Guidelines](#).

Disclaimer

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Procedural guide

Environmental Protection Act 1994

Odour investigation tools

This document provides information on investigation tools to be used for the investigation of odour complaints under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 (the Act).

Table of contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Field observations of odour intensity, character and offensiveness	2
	Table 1: German VDI 3882 odour intensity scale and its description	3
	Table 2: Odour Character descriptors (Source: New Zealand Ministry for the Environment, 2003) ...	4
	Table 3: Offensiveness Scale and its description for rating adverse effects*	5
3	Odour log sheets	5
4	Odour complaints data	6
5	Collection of source samples	7
6	References	7
7	Further Information	8

1 Introduction

The following sets out various investigation tools that may be used in support of investigations of odour under the Department of Environment and Science (DES) Odour investigation procedural guide ([ESR/2016/3042](#))¹.

There are various investigation tools that may be adopted to determine odour nuisance which include:

- Field observations of odour intensity, character and offensiveness
- Odour log sheets
- Odour complaints data.
- Collection of source samples, chemical analysis and comparison against the licence limits.

Deciding which of these strategies to use will generally depend on alleged source(s) and their location, nature of complaints, number of complainants, and any history of odour complaint. An outline of each strategy is provided below. DES may ask the alleged offender to conduct an environmental evaluation under the Act using some of the above tools such as collection of odour emission data and chemical analysis.

2 Field observations of odour intensity, character and offensiveness

The primary strategy available for administering authority to determine the presence of an environmental nuisance due to noxious or offensive odour is detection by authorised officers who can form this opinion based on the objective evidence gathered.

Legislative provisions require only one authorised officer to determine an odour to be noxious or offensive for action to be initiated. However, due to the subjectivity and complexity of some odour nuisances, in cases where the authorised officer's perception of the odour differs from that of the complaint, it is recommended that at least two authorised officers determine whether or not the odour is noxious or offensive. Any authorised officer involved in odour assessment may have their detection sensitivity to n-butanol assessed as a means of indicating their general ability to smell environmental odours. This would serve to improve the defensibility of the officer's field observations.

For some chronic odour nuisances, an intensive investigation response involving additional authorised officers may be necessary. If the odour releases vary over time it may be useful to request that any authorised officers driving near the vicinity of the alleged sources and/ or address from which the complaint is being lodged, undertake a "drive by" check for odour releases in the general area of the alleged odour release.

In situations where there are multiple and/or intermittent sources contributing to odour nuisance, it may be necessary to undertake a number of site visits in order to determine the source/s of odour. It is important to note that this investigation also includes checking places from which odours probably are not being emitted to eliminate these locations as potential sources. One example would be checking a location upwind of a potential source to verify that the odours were not blowing onto that premises from elsewhere.

Useful information to determine the odour nuisance can be obtained by field investigations of combined records of odour intensity, character and offensiveness.

A useful scale for describing odour intensity during field observations is detailed in German Standard VDI 3882 (I) 1992: *Olfactometry Determination of Odour Intensity*. The odour intensity scale from the standards is given in Table1. The German Standard VDI 3940: *Determination of Odorants in Ambient Air by Field Inspection* also has a procedure for logging observations in the field which involves noting the odour intensity every 10 second over a 10-minute period in one location.

¹ This is the publication number. The publication number can be used as a search term to find the latest version of a publication at www.des.qld.gov.au.

The five factors that general influence odour complaints are: frequency, intensity, duration, offensiveness and location (FIDOL). The objective analysis of FIDOL factors must include the intrinsic nature of the odour that is often referred to as the odour character. The New Zealand Ministry for the Environment has developed the odour character descriptions (see Table 2). These can be used to identify the odour character. Deciding whether a specific odour event is “offensive or objectionable” can then be done using a scale as described in Table 3. When assessing the extent of adverse effects, the physical effects of the odour on the affected people should be considered.

A proforma to record odour intensity and offensiveness in ambient air by field inspection is given in the Recording odour intensity, offensiveness and character form ([ESR/2016/3046](#))².

Table 1: German VDI 3882 odour intensity scale and its description

Intensity Scale	Descriptor	Effect on Receptor
0	<i>Not perceptible</i>	Odour is not detectable, cannot be perceived by the sense of smell.
1	<i>Very weak</i>	Odour is just detectable in the outdoor air and activates the sense of smell.
2	<i>Weak</i>	Odour is detectable in the outdoor air, but is not clearly distinguishable, noxious or offensive.
3	<i>Distinct:</i>	Odour is present in the outdoor air, easily activates the sense of smell, very distinct and clearly distinguishable.
4	<i>Strong</i>	Odour is present in the outdoor air and would be noxious or offensive and cause a person to attempt to avoid it completely.
5	<i>Very strong</i>	Strong odour present in the outdoor air, which is so strong it is overpowering and intolerable for any length of time.
6	<i>Extremely strong</i>	Extremely strong odour in the outdoor air, which is immediately intolerable.

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Table 2: Odour Character descriptors (Source: New Zealand Ministry for the Environment, 2003)

01	Fragrant	21	Like blood, raw meat
02	Perfumed	22	Rubbish
03	Sweet	23	Compost
04	Fruity	24	Silage
05	Bakery (fresh bread)	25	Sickening
06	Coffee-like	26	Musty, earth, mouldy
07	Spicy	27	Sharp, pungent, acid
08	Meat (cooked, good)	28	Metallic
09	Sea/marine	29	Tar-like
10	Herbal, green, cut grass	30	Oily, fatty
11	Bark-like, birch bark	31	Like gasoline, solvent
12	Wood, resinous	32	Fishy
13	Medicinal	33	Putrid, foul, decayed
14	Burnt, smoky	34	Paint-like
15	Soapy	35	Rancid
16	Garlic, onion	36	Sulphidic
17	Cooked vegetables	37	Dead animal
18	Chemical	38	Faecal (like manure)
19	Etherish, anaesthetic	39	Sewer odour
20	Sour, acid, vinegar		

Table 3: Offensiveness Scale and its description for rating adverse effects*

Offensiveness Scale	Descriptor	Effects on Receptor
0	<i>Pleasant</i>	Odour perceived as pleasant to some degree.
1	<i>Neutral</i>	Odour is not perceived as pleasant, but is also not even slightly unpleasant.
2	<i>Slightly Unpleasant</i>	Faintly unpleasant, but easily bearable even for prolonged exposure.
3	<i>Offensive</i>	Causes recognisable displeasure to sense of smell, may be bearable for short exposure, but reluctance to submit oneself to longer exposures is likely. For a 'chemical' smell caused by substances hazardous to humans at relatively low levels, a response of worry is reasonably elicited (e.g. due to it being not practicable to avoid), but without any other physiological responses. Long-term exposure may cause stress-like symptoms.
4	<i>Strongly Offensive</i>	Repulsive. Disgusting. Strongly displeasurable to sense of smell. Would soon elicit attempts to avoid exposure. <u>OR</u> Causes slight physiological effects following exposure e.g. headaches, slight nausea.
5	<i>Noxious</i>	Causes almost immediate attempts to avoid. <u>OR</u> Causes noticeable physiological effects following exposure e.g. pronounced nausea, feeling faint headed.
6	<i>Extremely offensive or noxious</i>	Unbearable Effects. Immediately intolerable. Extremely strong effects such as retching, fainting or other adverse effects on physical wellbeing caused by exposure.

* Note: Use of this table assumes an odour is detectable to olfactory sense

3 Odour log sheets

The use of Odour log sheets ([ESR/2016/3045](#))³ is a relatively simple and effective way for administering authorities to actively involve the community in the investigation process and obtain meaningful information on which an investigation process can be progressed. A complainant may be requested to complete an odour log sheet and to record the time/ date/ duration/ description and effect of any odour released from the alleged source. Odour log sheets may be also used to monitor the impacts from a specific source within a defined time frame in order to determine the frequency and intensity of odour releases.

In cases where additional verification of the complaint is required to determine the frequency and intensity of odours at a number of different locations, a number of persons at varying locations around the alleged source of the odour may be requested to complete an odour log sheet. It is useful to arrange for the odour log sheets to be posted or faxed to the DES at the end of each week or fortnight.

On receipt of the odour log sheets the details recorded by the complainant need to be validated. In order to validate the odour log sheets, check the wind-direction at the odour source site, odours known to be emitted and activities conducted at the odour source site, at the time of each odour event recorded. Cross checking the activities being undertaken at the site, at the times odour is recorded by the complainant is useful in helping the

³ This is the publication number. The publication number can be used as a search term to find the latest version of a publication at www.des.qld.gov.au.

source site identify which of their activities are causing the odour, and/or determining the results of any odour release modifications that have been made.

In some instances the complainant's record of odour events will vary from those confirmed by the source site. This may be for a number of reasons such as:

- Records kept at the source site are not complete or not accurate.
- The complaint may be frivolous or vexatious.
- Complex meteorology applies and wind conditions at one place are not duplicated at the other.
- The odours are emanating from another site or a number of different sources.
- Odours emanating from the source are not clearly distinguishable from odours that may be emanating from a different source, e.g. odours emanating from wastewater treatment ponds may be similar to those emanating from nearby sewage pump stations.
- Persons located at the source site have become desensitised to the odour and perceive the odour as very weak or not perceptible. In such cases persons located at the source site may not be aware of the impact the odour releases are having on the surrounding community. This is more common in instances of chronic odour releases of a low to moderate intensity.
- The complainant's perception of the odour can differ from that of persons at the source site. This often reflects different past experiences with odours, as persons describing an unknown odour may do so with reference to previous unrelated experiences e.g. odours from a coal-fired process may be describes as smells like an old steam train.

In some situations, for example to characterise the pattern of odour impacts from an industrial complex, the odour log sheets can be distributed to a larger community surrounding that complex. In these situations, log sheets provide a method of obtaining information from a community regarding the zone of impact from an odour source and the associated characteristics of the odour exposure pattern. The aim of this data collection is to verify complaints and collect information on the frequency and intensity of odour exposures, at various locations, over a defined period of time, in order that action may be taken (if necessary). The information provided by odour log sheets needs to be validated by checking the wind-direction and site emission status during the time of each recorded odour event. This can assist in identifying the specific processes that may be contributing to the odour impact. The longer the monitoring period, the more accurate the results, however the time period should be limited as the impacted people will usually not accept the odour nuisance for extended periods and fatigue with the process will occur. This information can also be used in assessing the impacts from a specific source within a defined time frame.

4 Odour complaints data

An odour related nuisance complaint can be made to the administering authority either in writing or orally, and must include the following:

- the complainant's name and residential address;
- a telephone number at which the complainant can be contacted; and
- enough details of the emission to allow the authority to investigate whether the emission is causing an unlawful environmental nuisance.

If at any time after a nuisance complaint has been made, the administering authority believes, on reasonable grounds, that the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or based on a mistaken belief, the authority may reject the complaint without further investigation. Similarly, should a complainant fail to provide sufficient detail to allow an

effective investigation to be undertaken, the authority may decide not to investigate the complaint. The odour complaint data is stored on the Agency's database. This information can be used in determining the complaint history of an existing facility.

A sequential summary of odour complaints data can be used to indicate changes in long-term odour exposure. Trends can illustrate seasonal or other temporal changes in complaint frequency, which may be due to scheduling of activities, changes in plant production or changes in the prevailing meteorological conditions.

5 Collection of source samples

DES may request the alleged odour source to conduct contaminant monitoring and report the results within 14 days. Source samples must be analysed for odour concentration for mixture of odorants or/and odour causing chemical species. These results can be compared against the environmental licence conditions.

All determinations of contaminant releases to the atmosphere must be made in accordance with methods prescribed in the most recent version of the DES Air Quality Sampling Manual. If monitoring requirements for specific contaminants are not described in the Air Quality Sampling Manual, monitoring protocols must be in accordance with (a) for odour, Australian and New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 4323.3:2001, Stationary source emissions - Determination of odour concentration by dynamic olfactometry; and (b) for other contaminants, a method as approved by New South Wales EPA, Victorian EPA or United States EPA.

The odour concentration of unknown mixtures of compounds is measured using a technique called dynamic olfactometry. Dynamic olfactometry is the measurement of odour concentration by presenting a sample of odorous air to a panel in a range of dilutions and seeking responses from the panellists on whether they can detect the odour. The correlations between the known dilution ratios and the panellist response are then used to calculate the number of dilutions of the original sample required to achieve the odour threshold which is where 50% of the panellists detect the odour with certainty. The unit for odour measurement using this method is odour unit (ou), which is essentially "dilutions to threshold". DES adopts Australian and New Zealand Standard (AS/NZS 4323.3:2001) as the basis of all odour measurements. The standard covers the method for collecting a sample of odorous gas into a container.

The number of odour samples required will depend upon the nature of the source of the purpose of the measurement. Sufficient samples should be taken to ensure that the odour stream is properly quantified. Replicate samples will enable the calculation of some basic statistics of measurement. The number of replicate analyses required to achieve a definite precision is discussed in AS/NZS 4323.3:2001. This standard also describes sampling methods from point sources. Odours sample collected in a sample bag are transported to the odour laboratory for olfactometric analysis. Equipment used in the sampling process must be chosen to minimise the likelihood of adsorption, chemical transformation or diffusion both in the sample train and in the sample container.

Dispersion modelling can be used to simulate the effect on plume dispersion under varying atmospheric conditions. These models are used to calculate spatial and temporal fields of concentrations and particle deposition due to emissions from various source types. This enables prediction of the likely odour to be experienced by the community at various distances from the source. Odour dispersion modelling should not be used to try to prove the absence of an adverse effect from an existing facility when community data is already available to demonstrate the current level of effect.

6 References

- NSW DECCW (2005) Approved Methods for the Modelling and Assessment of Air Pollutants in NSW.
- NSW DECCW (2006). Technical notes: Assessment and Management of Odour from Stationary Sources in NSW.

- NSW DECCW (2006). Technical framework: Assessment and Management of Odour from Stationary Sources in NSW.
- New Zealand Ministry for the Environment (2003) *Good Practice Guide for Assessing and Managing Odour in New Zealand*. <<http://www.mfe.govt.nz/sites/default/files/odour-guidelines-jun03.pdf>>
- Standards Australia, Standards New Zealand (2001) Australian/New Zealand Standard 4323.3 – *Stationary Source Emissions Part 3: Determination of odour concentration by dynamic olfactometry*. AS/NZS.
- Verein Deutscher Ingenieure 3882 Part 1 (1992) *Olfactometry – determination of odour intensity*.
- Verein Deutscher Ingenieure 3882 Part 2 (1994) *Olfactometry – determination of hedonic odour tone*.
- Vic EPA (2001) *State Environment Protection Policy (Air Quality Management)*. <<http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2001/GG2001S240.pdf>>

7 Further Information

Further information and support material relating to compliance with odour management refer to the following documents:

- Odour investigation procedure guideline ([ESR/2016/3042](#))
- Odour log sheet ([ESR/2016/3045](#))
- Recording odour intensity, offensiveness and character form ([ESR/2016/3046](#))

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Approved:

15 July 2016

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Department of Environment and Science Enforcement Guidelines



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Contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Scope	4
1.2	Purpose	5
1.3	Procedure	5
1.4	Principles	6
2	Who enforcement action will be taken against	6
2.1	Identification of offender(s)	6
2.2	Notification	6
2.3	Corporate liability	7
2.4	Liability of employees and contractors	7
2.5	Liability of directors and executive officers	7
2.6	Unlicensed operators	8
2.7	Liability of external administrators	8
2.8	Liability of government agencies	8
3	Choice of enforcement action	9
3.1	Determining seriousness of a contravention of legislation	9
3.1.1	Objectives of legislation	9
3.1.2	Impact	9
3.1.3	Culpability	10
	Table 1. Criteria to be considered in determining impact of the contravention	11
	Table 2. Criteria to be considered in determining culpability of alleged offender	12
3.2	Application of objectives of legislation, impact, and culpability	13
4	Warning letters	13
5	Infringement notices	13
6	Administrative actions	14
7	Civil proceedings for court orders	15
8	Enforceable undertakings	15
9	Prosecution	15
9.1	The decision to prosecute	15
9.1.1	Prospects of success	15
9.1.2	Public interest considerations	16
9.2	Choice of charges	16
9.3	Mode of trial – summary or indictable proceedings	17
9.4	Charge negotiations	17
9.5	Sentencing considerations	17
9.6	Sentencing orders	18
9.7	Recording of convictions	18
9.8	Appeals against sentence	19
10	Suspension or cancellation of licence, permit or authority	19

1 Introduction

Queensland's economic, social and ecological welfare relies upon the sustainable management of its environment and conservation of its heritage.

The Queensland Government is committed to ecologically sustainable development—protecting the ecological processes on which life depends while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future.

The Department of Environment and Science is the government's lead agency for the administration of legislation that protects, conserves and manages Queensland's environment and heritage. The department has produced a solid policy platform on which it has built partnerships with the community and industry to encourage greater understanding of sustainable conservation, environmental and heritage practices and support for innovation.

To build a culture of compliance—where individuals, business and industry take responsibility for ensuring that their activities do not cause unlawful impacts—the department will sometimes need to take enforcement action. Enforcement action provides a strong deterrent to non-compliance.

The effective protection of the environment, as well as good regulatory practice, calls for the department to have clear guidelines governing the taking of enforcement action. These Enforcement Guidelines complement the department's Strategic Plan, and other documents which set out the department's approach to its enforcement activities (available on the department's website).

To the extent possible in the circumstances, it is the goal of the department's enforcement responses to:

- reinforce legal obligations under legislation
- achieve outcomes consistent with legislation
- deter non-compliant behaviour
- assertively apply consistent and proportionate enforcement action.

1.1 Scope

The department administers a number of pieces of legislation, including:

- *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*
- *Environmental Protection Act 1994*
- *Environmental Offsets Act 2014*
- *Forestry Act 1959*
- *Marine Parks Act 2004*
- *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
- *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*¹
- *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*
- *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011*
- *Water Act 2000 (Chapter 3)*
- *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993*.

Under these pieces of legislation there are also a number of different government authorities that may also have delegated or devolved powers, such as the police or local governments. To ensure consistency and transparency of enforcement actions, these Enforcement Guidelines apply to decisions about enforcement actions made by the department in administering its legislation. It is also intended to guide decisions made under this legislation by other

¹ The department may also take compliance action under the *Planning Act 2016* with respect to development offences, including in relation to Queensland heritage places.

authorities, however it does not bind these authorities.

1.2 Purpose

These Enforcement Guidelines assist the department and other relevant authorities in making decisions about taking enforcement action under legislation administered by the department. The guidelines set out principles of a general nature to provide an understanding of how the department will approach enforcement.

The department publishes its Enforcement Guidelines as part of its commitment to transparency in its compliance activities, and to educate the public about the department's expectations and compliance approach. People and businesses who have specific obligations under legislation administered by the department are encouraged to familiarise themselves with these guidelines.

It is important to note that these are guidelines and not directions. They are designed to assist the making of enforcement decisions to achieve consistency, efficiency, effectiveness and transparency in the administration of legislation by the department.

1.3 Procedure

The department will assess all notifications it receives of possible contraventions of its legislation, and based on these assessments and any associated investigations, will make decisions as to the appropriate response. In some cases, the decision may be to take no action, for example, if an investigation reveals that no contravention of the legislation has occurred. In some cases, the department may provide advice, guidance, or assistance to help a person comply with the legislation. In other cases, it may be necessary for the department to take enforcement action in response to a contravention of the legislation.

In these guidelines, enforcement action includes any action taken to punish a contravention of legislation administered by the department, to deter or prevent a person or persons from committing future contraventions of the legislation, or to require someone to remedy or stop committing a contravention of the legislation. Enforcement actions do not include measures intended only to inform or educate a person, and do not include investigations into alleged contraventions of legislation although such investigations may be required to inform various enforcement actions.

The range of enforcement actions available to the department includes:

- warning letters
- penalty infringement notices
- administrative notices and orders made under legislation
- proceedings for court orders provided for under legislation
- prosecution
- suspension or cancellation of permit, licence or authority.

Sometimes a number of enforcement actions may be taken in combination.

From time to time, the department becomes aware of matters that are offences against legislation it administers, and which are also offences against legislation administered by another government agency. In these circumstances, the following principles will apply:

- The department may consult the other agency to determine which agency should lead any investigation, and which agency would be the appropriate agency to take any enforcement action. There may be circumstances in which it is appropriate for a joint investigation to take place, and for each agency to take its own enforcement action;
- The department may be the appropriate agency to lead an investigation or take enforcement action where one or more of the following applies:
 - o the subject matter is more closely aligned with the department's portfolio of responsibilities than that of the other agency
 - o enforcement action by the department would more effectively prevent or remedy the contravention and its impacts
 - o the penalties that apply for the offence under the department's legislation reflect the seriousness of the offence

more accurately than the penalties under the other agency's legislation.

- The department will refer a matter to a local government for investigation or enforcement action where the matter is within the devolved responsibility of the local government
- Where dishonesty or other criminal offences are involved, the department may refer the matter to the Queensland Police Service, the Australian Federal Police or other authorities as appropriate.

1.4 Principles

The following principles guide the department in making decisions about taking enforcement action:

- enforcement action will be proportionate to the seriousness of the contravention
- decisions about enforcement action will be impartial, based on available evidence, and on the strategic objectives of the department
- where enforcement action involves litigation, the department is bound by the Queensland Government's Model Litigant Principles, which can be found on the Department of Justice and Attorney General website at www.justice.qld.gov.au. The principles ensure that, when conducting litigation, the department meets the community's and the courts' expectations that the State will conduct itself in a manner which exemplifies the principles of justice, and that the State's power will be used in the public interest.

The department is guided by the overriding principle that enforcement action must not be taken for improper purposes. A decision on whether or not to take enforcement action will not be influenced by factors such as:

- the alleged offender's gender, ethnicity, nationality, political associations, religion or beliefs
- a departmental employee's personal feelings towards the alleged offender or the victim
- possible political advantage or disadvantage to a government or any political group or party
- the possible effect of the decision on the personal or professional circumstances of those responsible for the decision.

2 Who enforcement action will be taken against

One of the main aims of Parliament in making a contravention of the law a criminal offence is to deter the offenders and others from similar behaviour. By extending criminal liability to many people (for example, landowners and directors and managers of corporations), the law generates increased awareness and responsibility for legal obligations within corporate structures and throughout the community.

Situations can arise where a number of people may be responsible for the commission of an offence and may therefore be liable for enforcement action. The department recognises that it may not always be appropriate to take enforcement action against every person who may be liable for an offence. The following sections set out what the department will consider when determining who enforcement action may be taken against.

2.1 Identification of offender(s)

In determining who was responsible for an offence, the department will take the following considerations into account:

- who was primarily responsible for the offence, that is:
 - o who committed the act
 - o who formed the intention (if relevant)
 - o who created the material circumstances leading to the alleged offence
 - o who benefited from the offence
- what was the role of each alleged offender (where there is more than one alleged offender).

2.2 Notification

The department will also take into account any notification it receives of a contravention by an alleged offender. It will

specifically consider whether:

- the alleged offender notified the department of the contravention promptly
- the information assisted in the control or mitigation of any impacts
- the information substantially aided the department's investigation of the incident
- the information was available from other sources
- there was a failure to comply with an obligation to notify the department of the contravention
- the notification occurred prior to the department or any other regulatory body obtaining knowledge of the contravention.

2.3 Corporate liability

Corporations as well as individuals can be liable for offences against legislation. Where an offence is committed by employees, agents or officers of a corporation in the course of their employment, proceedings will usually be commenced against the corporation. Where, however, the offence has occurred because the employee, agent or officer has committed an offence of their own volition, outside the scope of their employment or authority, proceedings may be instituted against the employee, agent or officer and not against the corporation. Another factor which will be considered is the existence and effective implementation of any training and compliance programs of the corporation.

2.4 Liability of employees and contractors

Employees' obligations under the department's legislation cannot be overridden by an instruction from their employer—it is not a defence for an employee to assert that he or she was acting under direction from a supervisor, although this may be a consideration and a mitigating factor in sentencing or choice of appropriate enforcement action. This principle equally applies to contractors. Therefore the guiding principle in deciding whether to pursue an employee or a contractor is their degree of culpability or responsibility.

In addition to the issues set out in section 3.1.3, factors to be considered in assessing the degree of culpability include:

- whether the employee or contractor knew or should have known that the activity was likely to be illegal or inappropriate
- the seniority of the employee and the scope of their duties
- whether, having regard to the employee's seniority and employment duties or the contractor's contract, the employee or contractor had taken reasonable steps to draw to the attention of the employer or any other relevant person the impropriety of the practice
- whether the employee or contractor has taken reasonable steps to mitigate or prevent any impacts (if it was in the employee's or contractor's power to do so).

2.5 Liability of directors and executive officers

Most of the legislation administered by the department contains provisions extending liability for offences committed by a corporation to its executive officers.

When determining whether to take enforcement action against an executive officer in accordance with such a provision, the key consideration will be whether the person had actual control or influence over the conduct of the corporation in a relevant respect. As a general policy, the department will take enforcement action under the executive officer liability provisions only where evidence links the person with the corporation's illegal activity. That evidence may show, for example, that the executive officer:

- intended to engage in the action or omission
- was negligent or reckless with respect to the action or omission
- intended to deceive the department
- failed to monitor or periodically assess and manage risks associated with the corporation's relevant activities or review supporting systems and programs.

The general legislative exceptions to executive officer liability are that:

- the executive officer was not in a position to influence the corporation's conduct; or
- the officer took all reasonable steps to ensure that the corporation complied with the law.

The department may take the view that reasonable steps were taken to ensure that the corporation complied with the law where it can be demonstrated the executive officer ensured that:

- the corporation had an effective risk management system in place which was aimed at ensuring compliance with relevant legislative requirements
- all staff were aware of the system
- the system had been effectively implemented throughout the corporation
- the system was regularly reviewed and was amended when necessary.

2.6 Unlicensed operators

When determining the appropriate enforcement action against people conducting regulated activities without necessary permits ('unlicensed operators'), the following principles will be considered:

- the department's first priority is to ensure that any risk of harm or impacts from an unlicensed operation is appropriately managed
- the department will work cooperatively with other regulators who may also have responsibility for regulating the unlicensed activity (for example, an unlicensed industrial site may have failed to obtain a development permit from local government as well as an environmental authority from the department)
- in deciding the appropriate response, the department will take account of the level of competitive advantage enjoyed by the unlicensed operator as one factor for consideration, however in most cases, some type of enforcement action will be taken in response to an unlicensed operator
- in rare cases, the department may defer enforcement action until an unlicensed operator has had the opportunity to obtain a licence and operate lawfully. In such cases the operator will be expected to meet contemporary standards for the management of its environmental risk.

2.7 Liability of external administrators

In terms of ensuring compliance with legislation administered by the department, external administrators (including liquidators, receivers and managers and administrators) who are responsible for the management of a corporation, will be subject to the same considerations as other executive officers. External administrators who assume control of a corporation and become aware of activities or conduct that contravenes legislation administered by the department should ensure that the activity or conduct ceases and that the department is informed of the activity or conduct. External administrators should also ensure that the company complies with any notices or orders given to the company by the department as far as is possible given the provisions of the *Corporations Act 2001*.

2.8 Liability of government agencies

The legislation administered by the department binds all persons, including government agencies. The decision to take enforcement action or alternative regulatory intervention against a government agency will depend on whether to do so is in the public interest. The department acknowledges that:

- legislation administered by the department applies equally to both the private and public sectors, and the public should hold equal expectations that both sectors will comply with legal obligations
- that for local governments, it is the community that is served by that local government who bears both the costs of a prosecution and ultimately any penalty imposed upon that public authority
- where regulatory intervention is required, consideration will be given to ensuring ratepayer monies remain in local communities while holding local governments accountable and requiring compliance with the law.

A decision about taking enforcement action against a government agency will consider these factors, together with the other matters set out in these guidelines.

When considering the appropriate enforcement response to any non-compliance by a government agency, the department will consider how the public interest will be best served.

3 Choice of enforcement action

3.1 Determining seriousness of a contravention of legislation

The department determines the seriousness of a contravention of legislation by reference to three general considerations:

- the objectives of the relevant legislation including the nature of the offence and type of impact the offence provision is designed to deter or prevent
- the actual or potential impact of the offence
- the level of culpability of the alleged offender
- the financial or other benefit received from the contravention.

The seriousness of the contravention of the legislation will inform the decision on the appropriate enforcement action taken in response to the offence. This guideline sets out five levels of seriousness for contraventions of legislation: low, minor, moderate, major, and serious. Outlined below are some criteria which can be used to assist the department in assessing the level of seriousness of a contravention. The tables below regarding the impacts of the offence and the level of culpability of the alleged offender indicate the seriousness of the offence.

3.1.1 Objectives of legislation

The objectives or purpose of any legislation are generally outlined at the beginning of the legislation, and provide context to the following legislative provisions. To determine the purpose of the particular offence provision, often it is useful to refer to both the objectives of the legislation and to other documents such as the explanatory notes or Parliamentary speeches.

The seriousness with which the Legislature views an offence may often be apparent by maximum penalty or class of offence assigned to it in the legislation. Where legislation designates levels or classes of offence, this will be considered in deciding the appropriate enforcement response.

3.1.2 Impact

The impact of an offence can be characterised by reference to the effects or consequences of the offence and also by reference to the act or omission the offence provision has been designed to prevent or deter (see the objectives of the legislation discussed above).

To determine the level of impact, for example for the offence of contravention of an environmental authority condition, reference may be made to the level and extent of impact on the environment resulting from the contravention. Similarly, the level of impact of an offence involving unauthorised works on a heritage place may be measured by the level and extent of impact to the building, structure or place. For conservation offences, the level of impact may be measured both by the impact on the specific wildlife or protected area involved, and by reference to impacts or potential impacts on the species or protected area. For public safety or licensing related offences, the level of impact may be measured by the impact or potential impact on the safety of the public or the desire to maintain good order in public spaces.

An offence not involving environmental, heritage, conservation, public safety or licensing impacts, for example for the offence of providing false or misleading information to the department, may be characterised as an administrative offence. This does not mean that the offence is not serious. For example, the provision of false or misleading annual returns to the department seriously undermines its ability to effectively administer its legislation. Examples of other administrative offences include:

- failure to comply with the duty to notify
- a contravention that undermines a legislative scheme (e.g. failure to pay estimated rehabilitation costs, registration or other fees etc.)
- the provision of false or misleading statements in applications or other material submitted to the department
- failures in respect of permit conditions that relate to reporting or the keeping of documents.

There may be some overlap between administrative and other types of offences.

Five levels of impacts have been developed to assist the department in classifying the seriousness of an alleged offence and inform a decision on the appropriate enforcement response (refer to Table 1 – Criteria to be considered in determining impact of contravention). These levels also include the risk or potential impact of an alleged offence. If an offence satisfies criteria across a range of the impact levels, generally, it will be assigned the highest applicable level. For example, if there is an incident which has caused permanent impacts on the environment (which falls into the serious level), however the level of public concern is low (which falls into the minor level); the matter will be regarded as serious.

3.1.3 Culpability

Culpability refers to the blame and responsibility of the alleged offender for the alleged offence. Three levels of culpability have been developed which, along with the levels of impact, will assist the department in classifying the seriousness of an alleged offence and therefore determine the appropriate enforcement response (refer to Table 2 – Criteria to be considered in determining the culpability of alleged offender). Again, if an alleged offender has satisfied criteria across a range of the levels, the most serious category will be assigned.

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Table 1. Criteria to be considered in determining impact of the contravention

IMPACT	5 Serious impact or risk of impact	4 Major impact or risk of impact	3 Moderate impact or risk of impact	2 Minor impact or risk of impact	1 Low impact or risk of impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • permanent, or potential for permanent, long-term impact • impact is on or potentially on a wide-scale, or of great intensity • widespread or high level of public concern or impact to public safety about the incident • where offence is of an administrative nature, it severely undermines the legislative scheme or the offender provides false or misleading information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • medium to long-term impact, or potential impact • impact is on or potentially on a medium to wide-scale, or of medium to great intensity • high level of public concern or impact to public safety • where the offence is of an administrative nature, it undermines the legislative scheme or the offender conceals information or avoids liability for fees or taking necessary actions to prevent offence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • temporary to medium-term impact, or potential impact • impact is on or potentially on a localised to medium scale, or is of a low to medium intensity • moderate level of public concern or impact to public safety • where the offence is of an administrative nature, it has a moderate impact on the legislative scheme, or the offender carelessly fails to comply with administrative requirement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transient impact, or potential impact • impact is on or potentially on a localised scale, or is of a low intensity • low level of public concern or impact to public safety • where the offence is of an administrative nature, it has no impact on the legislative scheme or is of an inadvertent nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no impact, or potential impact • no public concern or impact to public safety • where the offence is of an administrative nature, it could not have been prevented.

Table 2. Criteria to be considered in determining culpability of alleged offender

CULPABILITY	3 Serious culpability	2 Moderate culpability	1 Low culpability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intentional or wilful acts past non-compliances or convictions involving the same or similar legislative provisions non-compliances of an ongoing or long duration no attempt at clean-up or remedial action undertaken motivated by profit or obtained a material benefit from the non-compliance involves serious misleading conduct failure to notify the department effectively or notification outside of reasonable timeframes wilful ignorance of clear directions, warnings or administrative actions (from either employees, consultants, the department, or other government officers) which may have prevented or mitigated the impact the impact or risk of impact was obvious and/or preventable by implementing or following accepted industry standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> careless acts isolated prior non-compliances with legislation or similar legislation non-compliance of an medium duration genuine attempt at remediation or remediation partially effective attempt at notification of department of incident within reasonable timeframe may have benefitted from the non-compliance was aware of the risk of impact or the impact was foreseeable the impact or risk of impact may have been prevented by following accepted industry standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inadvertent acts no prior non-compliances with legislation or similar legislation non-compliance of short-term duration remediation effective notification to department of incident within reasonable timeframe did not benefit from the non-compliance the impact or risk of impact was not foreseeable the impact or risk of impact was not prevented by high standards of operation (greater than accepted industry standards).

3.2 Application of objectives of legislation, impact, and culpability

The department will exercise its discretion to take any enforcement action it considers appropriate in the circumstances, taking into account the seriousness of the contravention of the legislation. The objective of some enforcement actions may be considered punitive, whilst others may be aimed at preventing, deterring or rectifying impacts of offences. Some enforcement actions do both; for example a prosecution may result in a fine (being punitive or a deterrent) and orders to remediate an affected area (rectifying the impacts of the offence).

There are seven general categories of enforcement actions available to the department:

- warning letters
- infringement notices
- administrative notices and orders made under legislation
- proceedings for court orders provided for under legislation
- enforceable undertakings
- prosecution
- suspension or cancellation of permit, licence or authority.

The choice of the enforcement action will be determined by reference to the seriousness of the contravention of legislation and the desired outcome having regard to the facts and circumstances of each matter.

As a guide, warning letters are generally reserved for low or minor contraventions; infringement notices for minor contraventions, administrative notices and orders (with the exception of cancellation of licences or permits) for moderate to serious contraventions; enforceable undertakings are considered to be an alternative enforcement action for moderate contraventions; and court orders, prosecutions and cancellation of permits or licences are generally reserved for major or serious contraventions of legislation.

4 Warning letters

Warning letters or verbal warnings are generally not provided for in legislation, but are an enforcement response that the department may take in relation to minor contraventions of legislation. It may be where the imposition of a financial penalty is not considered appropriate, and where a warning that the offender's conduct is a contravention of the legislation is considered a sufficient compliance response based on the circumstances of the matter, for example, a first contravention or one that is easily remedied.

Warning letters should be used for minor contraventions of the department's legislation, involving little or no impact and where the offender has a low level of culpability. They are not appropriate for ongoing or repeated minor contraventions.

5 Infringement notices

Infringement notices are a means of dealing with minor contraventions of legislation administered by the department which warrant some form of sanction, but which are generally not serious enough to warrant a prosecution. Such contraventions might include a minor contravention of a licence or permit condition, littering of rubbish or cigarette butts, or illegal dumping of waste. Infringement notices have the advantage of allowing an offence to be dealt with quickly and without the time and cost involved in a prosecution.

The issuing of infringement notices is governed by the *State Penalties Enforcement Act 1999*. The offences for which infringement notices can be issued, and the associated penalties, are set out in the *State Penalties Enforcement Regulation 2014*.

While an infringement notice is issued because a person has committed an offence, payment of the fine is not an admission of guilt (although the department will record the infringement notice against the person's compliance history). If a person fails to pay an infringement notice, it is referred to the State Penalties Enforcement Registry and is recoverable as a debt.

If a person elects to contest the infringement notice, the department will review the matter, and investigate whether the evidence establishes that an offence has been committed, and if so, commence a prosecution in the Magistrates Court. If a person who contests an infringement notice is found guilty, the Court may impose a penalty higher than the amount of the infringement notice, and may order the payment of costs and the recording of a conviction.

In making decisions about issuing an infringement notice, the department will be guided by the following principles:

- Infringement notices should be issued where the contravention is minor and the scale of the impact is known and small.
- An infringement notice will generally not be appropriate where the contravention is ongoing.
- Infringement notices should not be issued for multiple offences arising out of the same course of conduct, unless the offences go to separate and distinct aspects of that conduct.
- Infringement notices should be issued only where the facts of the offence are clear.
- Infringement notices should be issued only where the infringement notice is likely to act as a deterrent. If an infringement notice is not likely to deter the offender from committing a similar offence in the future, consideration should be given to whether prosecution is a more appropriate response. For example, an infringement notice should not be issued where the benefit gained by the commission of the offence is greater than the fine issued.
- Infringement notices should be issued as soon as reasonably possible after the offence comes to the attention of the department.

6 Administrative actions

Administrative actions are enforcement actions that include the range of notices and orders that the department may issue under legislation it administers in order to secure compliance with obligations under that legislation. They are generally used to remedy contraventions of the legislation. Administrative actions differ from prosecutions and infringement notices as they are usually aimed at preventing or rectifying a contravention, while prosecutions and infringement notices are usually aimed at punishing and/or deterring unlawful conduct.

The department may take an administrative action where:

- it is the most effective means of preventing or rectifying impacts on the environment
- it is reasonable and proportionate in light of all of the relevant circumstances.

The taking of a particular administrative action by the department does not preclude it from taking other enforcement action (including other administrative actions). In order to properly and effectively address contraventions of the legislation, a number of enforcement actions may need to be taken either simultaneously or overtime as part of a strategy for addressing the offending conduct and achieving the desired regulatory outcome.

For example, it may be appropriate to issue a notice to conduct an environmental evaluation to a corporation to determine the cause of a particular equipment failure which led to an unlawful emission. However, this administrative action does not prevent the department from prosecuting the company for the unlawful emission associated with the equipment failure. In this example, the environmental evaluation informs the necessary steps to rectify and prevent the equipment failure in the future, whilst a prosecution will punish and deter the conduct that resulted in the unlawful emission.

In some situations it may not be appropriate to take more than one enforcement action in response to a situation. For example, it may not be appropriate to issue an environmental protection order to require certain actions by the recipient where a transitional environmental program is in force (and is being complied with) to rectify the same issue.

When deciding whether to take or not take administrative action, the department will comply with the requirements of the legislation that authorises the action, the principles of natural justice and any other requirements of a lawful administrative decision.

7 Civil proceedings for court orders

Most of the legislation administered by the department enables it to apply for civil court orders requiring a person to stop committing an offence, or to remedy or rectify an offence. Applications for court orders are generally appropriate in circumstances where there has been a major or serious contravention of the legislation.

These applications are civil proceedings (governed by civil procedures and burden of proof) as opposed to criminal proceedings as is the case with prosecutions. In commencing and conducting proceedings for court orders, the department will adhere to the Model Litigant Principles (refer to section 1.4 of these guidelines).

The department may commence proceedings for such orders where:

- sufficient evidence exists to satisfy the requirements of the legislation under which the proceedings are to be brought
- the department has reasonable prospects of success
- the orders sought by the department will likely address the offending behaviour or the consequences of the offence.

Should a court order be contravened, the department will consider commencing further proceedings in accordance with these guidelines to address the non-compliance.

8 Enforceable undertakings

An enforceable undertaking is a published agreement between the department and a person which can require the person to carry out a wide range of actions to achieve compliance with the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* and further improve the protection of the environment. An enforceable undertaking can be suggested by the department or initiated by a person where there has been a contravention or contraventions of the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, provided the contravention or contraventions are not indictable offences.

An enforceable undertaking is essentially an alternative to prosecution and whilst it does not require an admission to be made in relation to a contravention(s), it does require the inclusion of a statement of regret and must detail the circumstances that led to the contravention(s). For further information on enforceable undertakings, refer to the Guideline – Enforceable undertakings under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* available on the department's website.

9 Prosecution

Prosecution is part of the department's strategy for achieving its legislative and policy objectives, however as outlined in these guidelines it is usually not the only enforcement action available and will be used after careful consideration. If an alternative to prosecution may be more effective in achieving the objects of the legislation, then that alternative will be considered. Prosecutions may be an appropriate enforcement action in response to major or serious contraventions of the legislation.

9.1 The decision to prosecute

The decision to prosecute is generally made by the Deputy Director-General of the Environmental Services and Regulation division on behalf of the department. The decision is based on:

- whether the available evidence provides reasonable prospects of successfully obtaining a conviction; and
- if so, whether it is in the public interest to exercise the discretion to commence a prosecution.

9.1.1 Prospects of success

The determination of prospects of success of a proposed prosecution will consider whether:

- the available evidence is capable of proving each element of the offence beyond reasonable doubt
- the admissibility of evidence
- the credibility of available witnesses
- the availability or strength of any expert evidence required to prove the offence

- any defences that are plainly open to the alleged offender.

9.1.2 Public interest considerations

The commencement of a prosecution is discretionary, and the dominant factor in the exercise of that discretion is the public interest. When deciding whether to commence a prosecution the department may take into account the following public interest considerations:

- the seriousness of the offence including the impacts or potential impacts caused by the alleged offence
- the degree of culpability of the alleged offender including any mitigating or aggravating circumstances (including notification, cooperation or a display of contrition)
- the availability and effectiveness of any alternatives to prosecution
- the alleged offender's compliance history
- whether the alleged contravention is a continuing or subsequent offence
- the prevalence of the alleged offence and the need for general deterrence
- the length of time since the alleged offence occurred
- the age and physical or mental health of the alleged offenders
- whether there are counter-productive features of the prosecution
- in cases involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander use or management of natural resources, the views of the traditional owners of the area
- the length and expense of any court hearing
- the likely outcome in the event of a conviction having regard to the sentencing options available to the court
- any precedent which may be set by not instituting proceedings
- whether the consequences of a prosecution would be unduly harsh or oppressive
- whether proceedings are to be instituted against others arising out of the same incident
- the sentencing principles set out in the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992*
- the extent to which the alleged offender cooperates in the investigation or prosecution of other offenders.²

In addition to the public interest factors, the decision to commence a prosecution will also take account of the principles in section 1.4 of these guidelines.

Once a decision has been made to prosecute, the department must present the evidence fairly and impartially to the court. The department's only interest in procuring a conviction is to ensure that the right person is convicted, that the truth is known and that justice is done.

9.2 Choice of charges

The charges against an alleged offender must reflect the nature and extent of the conduct disclosed by the evidence, with the aim of providing a basis for the court to impose an appropriate penalty and make appropriate orders. There will be occasions where the same conduct is prohibited under separate statutes and involves an offence under each. In circumstances where it would be inappropriate to lay both charges, the department will consider the legislation and exercise its discretion to commence proceedings for one of the offence provisions taking into account the circumstances of the conduct and the penalties available for each offence provision. Where another prosecuting

² The department does not have the power to grant indemnity from prosecution to accomplices; this power resides with the Attorney General. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) Guidelines set out how an application for an indemnity from prosecution can be made. The ODPP Guidelines are available online at <http://www.justice.qld.gov.au>. An accomplice who pleads guilty and agrees to testify against an alleged co-offender may receive a sentencing discount for that co-operation.

agency is involved, the department will liaise with the other agency to ensure the most appropriate charge(s) is commenced (refer to section 1.3 of these guidelines).

9.3 Mode of trial – summary or indictable proceedings

Most offences under legislation administered by the department are summary offences which are heard and dealt with by a magistrate. However, some offences are indictable and may be heard in the District Court at the election of the prosecution, the defendant or the magistrate.

Proceeding summarily on an indictable offence may have the effect of limiting the custodial or financial penalty that may be sought by the prosecution and imposed by the Magistrates Court. For prosecutions commenced by the department, the decision as to whether to proceed on indictment rests with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP). Before referring the matter to the ODPP, the department will consider the ODPP's guidelines which sets out the test to be applied to determine whether a prosecution should proceed on indictment.

9.4 Charge negotiations

Once a prosecution has commenced, the department may enter into discussions with a defendant about which charges should proceed to a hearing. No agreement can be reached with a defendant who is not prepared to take responsibility for the impacts of their unlawful conduct. When taking part in discussions, the department will take into consideration the public interest considerations outlined in section 9.1.2, and:

- any new information received by the department that was not available when the original decision to prosecute was made
- whether the potential penalty, remaining charges, or remaining defendants adequately reflect the offending conduct
- whether a negotiated response provides an adequate deterrent for similar conduct, and/or adequately reflects the seriousness of the matter.

9.5 Sentencing considerations

The *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992* outlines the general factors that can be considered by a court at sentence. The following is a non-exhaustive list of factors which may be considered by the department in preparing sentence submissions:

- the impacts or potential impacts resulting from the offence, including:
 - the seriousness of the impact, or risk of impact, on the 'victim' of the offence
 - the potential for the impacts to be rectified or mitigated.
- the culpability of the offender, including:
 - the steps taken by the defendant to rectify or mitigate the impacts
 - the level of cooperation by the defendant with the department
 - any prior convictions of the defendants relevant to the matter currently being considered
 - any benefit or profit derived by the defendant due to the offence.
- the level of penalty sufficient to deter others from similar conduct
- the prevalence of the offence
- the availability and appropriateness of alternative sentencing orders
- the maximum penalty for the offence
- any relevant sentencing precedents or comparative cases.

9.6 Sentencing orders

In addition to any penalties, fines or orders which may be made by the courts under the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992*, legislation administered by the department provides for additional specific orders upon sentencing an offender for certain offences. The availability of these additional orders is to provide the court with the flexibility to impose a penalty or order that:

- is proportionate and tailored to the particular circumstances of the case
- will enhance compliance with the legislation or achieve deterrence
- will allow for remediation or remedying of any impacts caused
- will provide for the recovery of any financial benefit received because of the contravention
- will restore or enhance for the public benefit.

Many other jurisdictions around Australia have incorporated these types of orders into their legislation, and have been successfully applying them for some time. The department will seek such orders in appropriate circumstances, and with reference to any applicable policies.

9.7 Recording of convictions

Section 12(2) of the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992* gives the Court the discretion to decide to record or not record a conviction for an offence.

The decision about whether a conviction is recorded lies entirely within the discretion of the magistrate or judge presiding over a particular case. Some factors which the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992* states must be considered by the magistrate or judge in exercising their discretion are:

- the nature of the offence
- the offender's character and age
- the impact that recording a conviction will have on the offender's economic or social wellbeing, and their chance of finding employment.

Factors which may also influence the department's decision as to whether to seek the recording of a conviction include, for example, where:

- there is a wilful element to the offence
- the nature of the offence is serious – such as serious environmental harm, material environmental harm, or providing false or misleading information or documentation to the department
- the defendant has previously been successfully prosecuted by the department or found guilty of a similar offence in Queensland or another jurisdiction
- there is a commercial element to the offence, that is, the offender obtained or was likely to have obtained a commercial benefit as a result of the offence
- the defendant is a corporation
- the defendant failed to notify the department of an offence where it was required to do so by legislation or other document (such as environmental authority, transitional environmental program or temporary emissions licence);
- the defendant has a relevant compliance history
- there is rehabilitation required as a result of the offence.

Whenever the department asks the Court to record a conviction, it will do within the ambit of the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992* and will take into account the factors that the Court must consider under section 12(2) of the Act.

9.8 Appeals against sentence

While the department may appeal against a sentence imposed by a court, such appeals are generally rare. In considering whether to appeal against a sentence, the department will have regard to the principles regarding appeals against sentence set out in the ODPP guidelines, as well as the Model Litigant Principles (refer to section 1.4 of the Enforcement Guidelines). An appeal will only be instituted where the department considers that the appeal is likely to succeed.

10 Suspension or cancellation of licence, permit or authority

Legislation administered by the department usually contains a list of grounds for the suspension or cancellation of permits, licences or authorities. These grounds might include a failure to perform administrative requirements such as payment of fees or lodging of returns. They might also include the holder being convicted of an offence under that legislation or not meeting specified suitability criteria for the permit, licence or authority.

Payment of fees due under legislation is a fundamental obligation of someone who holds a permit from the department. Operators who fail to pay fees obtain a commercial advantage over their competitors, and can undermine the legitimacy of the regulatory regime. Where legislation administered by the department permits, the department may suspend or cancel the relevant permit, licence or authority of an operator with overdue fees.

When deciding whether to cancel or suspend a licence, permit or authority, the requirements of the legislation will be complied with and the department may consider the principles within these Enforcement Guidelines.

The aim of cancellation or suspension of a permit, licence or authority is not punitive; rather it is based on the need to protect the integrity of the legislative regime, the environment and the community from unsuitable operators.

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