



National  
Operational  
Guidance

## Section

**Working with environment agencies**



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council

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## Working with environment agencies

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Partnerships between environment agencies and fire and rescue services are a key part of any strategy to control pollution. This approach is underpinned by national working agreements (memorandums of understanding) and local working agreements.

The main responsibilities of the environment agencies are:

- Managing water resources used for public and private water supplies
- Preventing and controlling pollution in inland waters, estuaries and coastal waters (to a distance of three miles)
- Protecting people and the built environment from flooding
- Regulating emissions and operations at large or complex industrial sites
- Setting consistent standards for treating, storing and moving waste
- Regulating the disposal of radioactive waste from nuclear licensed sites
- Regulating the keeping and use of radioactive materials on sites other than licensed sites

See Section 1.3, [Environmental Protection Handbook](#).

### Communicating with environment agencies

Fire and rescue services must have systems to advise environment agencies when there is potential for pollution, or when pollution has occurred. This includes pollution from fire and rescue service actions. There is no legal defence where pollution is caused by a fire and rescue service in non-emergency situations.

When informed of an incident, environment agencies will first provide help by telephone. A competent agency officer will assess how serious the incident is and decide on the response. The environment agencies classify environmental impacts into four categories:

- Category 1: Most serious and damaging
- Category 2: Significant damage and impact
- Category 3: Pollution confirmed - local impact
- Category 4: Event reported but no damage can be confirmed

Environment agencies will, as soon as is reasonably practicable attend incidents:

- Where there is or may be a significant environmental impact
- Where a fire and rescue service reasonably requests its attendance



If the environment agency decides attendance is not appropriate it will advise the fire and rescue service of its decision and will provide information to incident commanders over the phone if requested. See Section 3.1, [Environmental Protection Handbook](#).

### Scene protocols

The attending environment agency officer will assess the scene, offer advice or where appropriate, under the knowledge and supervision of the fire and rescue service incident commander, take action to prevent or limit pollution.

Environment agencies' officers take the following roles:

- Competent officer: the officer receiving initial details of the incident and determining the response
- Site controller: responsible for co-ordinating the environmental response at the scene
- Base controller: an experienced member of staff responsible for overall incident control

For smaller incidents the same person may perform more than one role.

Environment agencies may also take direct action to control pollution themselves if there is an immediate threat to the environment and the polluter cannot be found or is unable or unwilling to act. See Section 3.6, [Environmental Protection Handbook](#).