

ODOR FACT SHEET

How is odor regulated?

The Air Pollution Control Act prohibits the emission into the outdoor atmosphere of air contaminants in quantities that result in air pollution. Air pollution is defined as “the presence in the outdoor atmosphere of one or more air contaminants in such quantities and duration as are, or tend to be, injurious to human health or welfare, animal or plant life or property, or would unreasonably interfere with the enjoyment of life or property.” Odor is an air contaminant and therefore may be considered air pollution if it is present in a way that unreasonably interferes with the enjoyment of life or property.

What triggers an odor investigation?

The Department or a local health department will initiate an investigation in response to complaints from one or more citizens regarding objectionable odors.

Do all odor complaints result in violations?

No. In order to verify a complaint and issue an enforcement action, an investigation must be performed and the investigator must verify the odor on the complainant’s property and concur that the odor “unreasonably interfered with the enjoyment of life or property.” In making this determination, the department considers the character, severity, frequency and duration of the odor and the number of persons affected thereby.

How do we investigate an odor complaint?

1. After receiving a complaint, the inspector will first go to the complainant’s location and attempt to verify the presence of the air contaminant at that location. The inspector will then ask the complainant(s) to complete a “Statement of Complaint form.” By completing the form, the complainant is attesting that the odor “unreasonably interfered with the enjoyment of life or property.” Although this form is the primary basis for the violation, the investigator must independently verify that the odor “unreasonably interfered with the enjoyment of life or property” by performing his/her own investigation.
2. The inspector then proceeds upwind of the complainant in an attempt to identify the source of the odor. Once the inspector believes that he/she has identified the source, the investigator will proceed upwind of the facility and around the entire perimeter of the facility to ensure that no other sources are contributing to the odor in question. At that point, the inspector will enter the facility and attempt to identify the specific process or area of the facility from which the odor is emanating.
3. Before the inspector leaves, he/she will tell the facility representative whether or not a violation was verified. If a violation was verified, the inspector will issue a Notice of Violation to the facility.

What is the penalty for an odor violation?

In 1995, a grace period law was passed in NJ which allows the Department to designate certain violations

as “minor” and allow the violator a short period of time to achieve compliance before a penalty is assessed. First offense odor air pollution may qualify, providing the emitting facility promptly stops the releases upon the first notice from the Department. If continuing violative odor releases occur, the violator may be assessed penalties ranging from \$150 up to \$15,000 per violation.

Are all odors treated similarly?

No. Odors have different severity, duration and characteristics. All of these factors are taken into account when investigating an odor complaint and determining whether the odor constitutes “unreasonable interference with the enjoyment of life or property.” The inspectors use a scale to rate the odors:

0-not detectable	Odor not detectable; no odor perceived by the sense of smell
1-very light	Odor present, which activates the sense of smell but the characteristics, may not be distinguishable.
2-light	Odor present, which activates the sense of smell and is distinguishable and definite but not necessarily objectionable in short durations, but may be objectionable in longer durations.
3-moderate	Odor present in the outdoor air, which easily activates the sense of smell, is very distinct and clearly distinguishable and may tend to be objectionable and/or irritating.
4-strong	Odor present, which would be objectionable and cause a person to attempt to avoid it completely, and may cause physiological effects during prolonged exposure.
5-very strong	Odor present, which is so strong, it is overpowering and intolerable for any length of time and causes physiological effects.

Are the above procedures and information published anywhere?

Yes. As required by the Air Pollution Control Act, the guidelines for investigating air pollution were published in the New Jersey Register on January 2, 1996.

Who can I call if I have a question about odors?

You may call the regional field office that corresponds to your geographical area:

Central Regional Office (Mercer Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean and Union)

609 584-4100

Southern Regional Office (Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem)

856 614-3601

Northern Regional Office (Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Warren)

973 299-7700

Metro Regional Office (Bergen, Essex, Hudson)

973 669-3935

CALL IN COMPLAINTS OF ODORS TO THE DEPs 24 HOUR TOLL-FREE ENVIRONMENTAL HOTLINE at 1-877 WARN DEP (1-877-927-6337)