

# **Odour Complaints in Your Area:**

## **A Guide for Developing an Odour Complaint Process**

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## About This Guide

The Clean Air Strategic Alliance wanted to provide guidance and advice related to a good odour complaint management process for organizations that may not have background or a lot of experience in this area. This guide outlines the factors you should consider in developing processes for handling the complaints, managing the relationship with the caller and gathering necessary information for an investigation. Please note, this guide is not a field manual for odour investigations.

## Preparing for Odour Complaints

Even before your organization receives an odour complaint, there is a lot you can do to begin managing the public's expectations about odours in your area.

### Public communication

Giving the public information about odour management and your odour complaint process can go a long way to managing public expectations about odours and what can be done to address them.

- Provide a way for the public to access general information about odours and odour management, such as a web page or phone line.
- Explain how and where the public can report an odour.
- Be open and transparent about the complaint process.
- If there are known odour concerns, and it is appropriate to share them, consider providing current information to the public. Let them know you are aware of the issue and what steps you are taking to address it. Ensure your organization has a policy on this so employees know what they can and cannot say.
- If needed, provide the caller with the phone number to the Coordination and Information Centre (CIC) - 1-800-222-6514. One of the CIC's many roles is to serve as a contact point for spills and complaints, including odour complaints, for Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development and the Alberta Energy Regulator.

Sample information is provided in Appendix B (see Reporting Odours in Your Community).

### Media relations

Create a media relations strategy well before you need it. In the event of a widespread or harmful odour, you may receive media inquiries. Ensure your employees know the policy on speaking to media and who is authorized to do so.

### Training

Each organization will have odour investigation processes in place that meet their needs. This may include special training for investigators and the employees receiving complaints from the public.

Training for the employees who take the initial calls from members of the public, can make a positive impact on callers with odour complaints and help manage expectations. They should know how to:

- Stay calm when faced with an upset caller.
- Be able to listen without interrupting.
- Complete the Odour Complaint Form.
- Answer questions about why they are asking for the information on the form.
- Explain the next steps in the process to the caller.
- Understand their boundaries as to what they may and may not say to a caller. It is important they not speculate about the source of an odour.
- Stay up to date with current odour concerns so they can inform callers, if that is appropriate.

## Legislation

Before collecting information, review the legislation that pertains to your industry as well as legislation about the collection, use and disclosure of personal information. Put policies in place for the storage and retention of records and ensure your employees understand their responsibilities under all legislation that may apply to your organization.

## Coordinating with local agencies/organizations

Responding to an odour complaint will mean different things to different organizations depending on factors such as local industries and activities and if the location is rural or urban. It may be necessary to coordinate an investigation and response with other organizations and/or provincial agencies. It is important to do some initial work to determine:

- When your organization will be responsible for investigating the complaint.
- Under what circumstances you will pass the investigation to another organization or how you will share the work involved in the investigation.
- Who will call the complainant back within the specified timelines, especially if they did not give you permission to share their contact information.

Understanding these factors will help you develop a seamless response process for callers with odour complaints.

## Handling an Odour Complaint Call

Managing callers and helping them to provide useful information is an important part of the odour investigation process.

If your organization receives odour complaint calls, but is not always responsible for investigating, you may find it valuable to follow a referral process when answering these calls (See Referring the caller to another organization).

Organizations should be aware of the local industries and natural or seasonal occurrences that may affect the volume and types of complaints. Please work with your local partners to create a list along with the types of odours commonly associated with their activities. This way, when a caller makes an odour complaint you can more easily direct them.

## Communicating with callers

One important aspect of dealing with odour complaints is to ensure the caller feels they are heard and are not being dismissed.

- Thank them for calling.
- Collect the relevant details.
- Listen to them without interrupting.
- Tell them what the next step is or refer them to the appropriate organization.
- Let them know when they may receive followup information, if appropriate.

In that initial conversation it is important to gather the information outlined on the Odour Complaint Form, even if the caller believes they know where the odour is coming from. It will help you determine if they are correct.

If this is one of several complaints about the same odour, collect the information anyway as it may help pinpoint the source if it is unknown. Let the caller know that you are aware of the situation and tell them the current status, if you have that information and if it is appropriate to do so.

Remember that all complaints are valid. The caller felt it was important enough to take the time to make a complaint. It may seem urgent to them even if it does not require an urgent response (see Triaging the complaint).

## **Repeat complainants**

The same person may call repeatedly about the same odour. This may be because they do not feel the situation has been addressed:

- Ask as to whether the odour is the same intensity as previously reported or if it is worse.
- Let them know the current status of the investigation (if the information is available and it is appropriate to do so).
- Assure them that the information was passed on to the appropriate people.
- Let them know that some odour complaints take time to investigate.
- Ask if they would like a followup call when more information is available.

It is possible that repeat callers may be frustrated and use abusive or inappropriate language on the call. Organizations should develop a policy on managing abusive callers and ensure employees know how to manage these calls.

Your organization may receive multiple calls from different people about the same odour. This may influence the investigation of the complaint (see Multiple complaints).

## **Emergency or health concerns**

If at any point during your conversation the caller indicates the odour is causing health problems, advise them to call:

- Their family doctor.
- Health Link Alberta (1-866-408-5465).
- 911 (for emergencies only).

If it is an emergency, have them hang up and seek medical attention. They can call you back at a more convenient time.

You may suspect the caller's health is being impacted even if they have not specifically said so. For example, their voice, behaviour or speech may be affected. While you do not want to put yourself in the position of asking health questions, you may wish to suggest they contact their doctor if they are feeling unwell.

If at any point during your conversation you suspect natural gas may be the problem (rotten egg odour), advise the caller to leave the immediate area and to call 911.

## **Referring the caller to another organization**

Your organization may not be responsible for investigating particular types of odour complaints. In these cases, referring the caller to the appropriate organization or agency right away may help reduce the caller's frustration by reducing the number of times they need to repeat information.

The Odour Complaint Decision Tree and corresponding call log (See Appendix B) are tools to help determine if the caller is reporting the odour to the correct organization and, if not, to redirect them appropriately. This is a high-level process that should be customized, as appropriate.

## **Customizing the Odour Complaint Form**

The Odour Complaint Form captures information most commonly needed to investigate an odour complaint. Depending on your organization or industry, you may wish to customize the form to better meet your needs or record keeping requirements. In particular, ensure any legal language is specific to your organization and industry.

## Completing the Odour Complaint Form

Explain to the caller that you will be asking questions necessary to look into their complaint. Gather as much information as the caller is able to provide.

If the caller is not cooperating or answering your questions, don't speculate. Simply collect as much information as possible. You may not get answers to all of your questions.

### Caller information

Ask for the caller's name and phone number.

- The decision to collect an email address is up to each individual organization. It is generally not needed unless you intend to respond in writing.
- If they ask why you need the information, explain that it will be used to follow up with additional questions, if needed, as their complaint is investigated.
- They may choose to remain anonymous.
- If they choose to remain anonymous, explain that you still need to know the general location where they smelled the odour. For example, if they are in a city, what neighbourhood? If they are rural, what town or part of the county/municipality?
- If they choose to remain anonymous, they may not be able to receive followup information about their complaint.
- It is important to have a system in place to track complaints, such as reference numbers. If your organization uses reference numbers to track complaints, you have the option of providing the caller with this number so they can call in for an update.

Callers may ask why you are recording their name and number. Assure them that the collection, use and disclosure of personal information is in accordance with Alberta's privacy legislation.

### Odour description

Give the caller the opportunity to describe the odour in their own words before offering a list of words for them to choose from. Phrases such as "It's kind of like..." may indicate the caller is a little unsure and it may be helpful to offer them some comparison words to help narrow down the odour.

A wide range of odours have been included on the form. Organizations may choose to customize this list based on their location or industry. For example, use bold font for the most commonly reported odours.

Script: *Please describe the odour. What does it smell like?* (Check all described by caller)

Chemical	Earthy	Fruity	Offensive	Floral
<input type="checkbox"/> Acidic <input type="checkbox"/> Bleach <input type="checkbox"/> Glue <input type="checkbox"/> Mothballs <input type="checkbox"/> Nail polish <input type="checkbox"/> Paint-like <input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum/gasoline <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic <input type="checkbox"/> Rubbery <input type="checkbox"/> Solvent <input type="checkbox"/> Tar <input type="checkbox"/> Turpentine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Varnish	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassy <input type="checkbox"/> Hay <input type="checkbox"/> Musty <input type="checkbox"/> Mouldy <input type="checkbox"/> Mushroom <input type="checkbox"/> Peat-like <input type="checkbox"/> Pine <input type="checkbox"/> Swampy <input type="checkbox"/> Woody <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Citrus <input type="checkbox"/> Fermented <input type="checkbox"/> Fruity <input type="checkbox"/> Over ripened fruit	<input type="checkbox"/> Garbage <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic/onion <input type="checkbox"/> Rancid <input type="checkbox"/> Sour milk <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet & sour <input type="checkbox"/> Rotten eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting meat <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting vegetables <input type="checkbox"/> Skunky <input type="checkbox"/> Urine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Vomit <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Flowers <input type="checkbox"/> Fragrant <input type="checkbox"/> Herbal <input type="checkbox"/> Perfumy <input type="checkbox"/> Spicy
Smoky	Medicinal	Fecal	Putrid	Fishy
<input type="checkbox"/> Burnt plastic/rubber	<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/> Ammonia	<input type="checkbox"/> Manure <input type="checkbox"/> Septic	<input type="checkbox"/> Burning carcasses	<input type="checkbox"/> Dead fish <input type="checkbox"/> Perm solution

<input type="checkbox"/> Coffee-like	<input type="checkbox"/> Menthol	<input type="checkbox"/> Sewer	<input type="checkbox"/> Dead animal
<input type="checkbox"/> Exhaust	<input type="checkbox"/> Urine		<input type="checkbox"/> Decay
<input type="checkbox"/> Grass smoke	<input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar		<input type="checkbox"/> Rotting
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood smoke			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b> (describe)			

## Frequency and duration

Callers may be reporting an odour upon first experiencing it or it may have been a problem for a while.

The Odour Complaint Form will collect information on:

- When they first experienced the odour.
- Whether it is constant or comes and goes.
- What time of day it is noticeable.

This information is important as it may help narrow down the source by matching odour occurrence to specific activities in industry or the community.

## Intensity

Use the following categories to help the caller describe the intensity. Read all the options to the caller.

Script:

*I'm going to give you three options to help determine the strength of the odour. Please choose the one the best describes your experience. (Check one)*

- Faint: The odour is barely detectable, need to stand still and inhale while facing into the wind to notice it.
- Moderate: The odour is easily detected while walking and breathing normally but it is not overpowering.
- Strong: The odour is penetrating; you can't get away from it and it can easily be detected at all times.

## Weather conditions

Weather conditions can affect odour dispersion and intensity. Knowing the conditions can help in the investigation of an odour complaint.

Ask the caller about their local weather at the time they noticed the odour (which may also be at the same time as the call).

- |                                |   |                                     |  |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| General conditions             | Cloud cover                               | Wind speed                          | Wind direction                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dry   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clear            | <input type="checkbox"/> None/light | Which direction is the wind coming from? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rainy | <input type="checkbox"/> Light clouds     | <input type="checkbox"/> Steady     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foggy | <input type="checkbox"/> Scattered clouds | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snowy | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcast         | <input type="checkbox"/> Gusting    |  |

## Alleged source of the odour

The caller may know or suspect they know where the source of the activity is. It is still important to collect the information on the Odour Complaint Form to confirm the source and determine the extent of the problem.

Inform the caller that they may also report the odour directly to the organization, and provide them with the name and contact information (if available) of the correct person or agency to call. Explain that many organizations prefer to receive this information directly so that they can act more quickly to address the situation.

## **Odour reported before**

Ask if they have reported the odour before and if so, to whom. This may help you to coordinate with another agency who may already have started an investigation into the odour.

If they have reported the odour before, ask if they have a tracking or reference number to help you locate the previous complaint information.

## **Additional comments or information**

Ask the caller if there is any other information they would like to add. Don't ask leading questions about any specific topic as this may create unrealistic expectations about what can or cannot be addressed. However, sometimes additional information offered by the caller may be helpful to the investigation.

Possible information to capture would include:

- **Offensiveness:** The caller may use words about how unpleasant the odour is (not to be confused with the description of the odour).
- **Extent:** How widespread is the odour? For example, is it only noticeable when near the alleged source?
- **Health concerns:** The caller may mention the odour is causing them to feel ill. Don't ask any health questions. Advise them to call their family doctor, Health Link Alberta (1-866-408-5465) or 911 (for emergencies only), as appropriate.
- **Caller's expectations:** The caller may state what their desired outcome is. Simply make note of this but do not promise any particular result.

## **Followup**

If the caller provided their contact information:

- Ask if they would like to receive a followup call to let them know the status of their complaint or what steps were taken.
- If your organization is comfortable with providing responses in writing, you can offer them an option to follow up by email or mail. If you choose to do so, ensure there is a place on your form to collect this information.

Develop policies and procedures for handling followup with the callers. Here are some things to consider:

- Who will call the complainant back and in what timeframe?
- Will you provide followup in writing or only by phone?
- Would you prefer to provide the complainant with a reference number or phone number and they can call if they want to know the status?
- What mechanism will you use to track complaints if the complainant calls to check on the status of the investigation?
- How will you file and store complaint information so it can be accessed as needed?

## **Action taken**

For the purposes of accountability and record keeping, it is important to record what action was taken as a result of the call.

If your organization uses reference numbers to track complaints, record the number here. If appropriate, provide this number to the caller. This may reassure the caller that their complaint has been documented, and it gives them a way to follow up on their complaint if they do not want to leave a phone number.



## Sharing personal information

Organizations have a responsibility to ensure the collection, use and disclosure of personal information is in accordance with Alberta's privacy legislation.

- Ask if you can share their contact information with the person who will be investigating the complaint. If you are required to report to another agency, ask if you may pass their contact information on to investigators from another agency if it is required.
- If they do not give you permission to share their contact information, let them know you will still pass the complaint information on to the appropriate person. This may or may not affect their ability to receive a followup call if they request one.
- Be prepared to answer questions about which agency will receive their personal information.

You may customize the Odour Complaint Form to specifically name the legislation that your organization must follow (e.g., *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, *Personal Information Protection Act*). More information is available from the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta (oipc.ab.ca).

## Ending the call

Thank the caller for reporting the odour.

Let the caller know that some odour complaints take time to investigate.

Let the caller know what your next step will be, such as forwarding the information to an investigator or contacting another agency.

If they would like a followup call, let them know when they should expect to hear something about the status of their complaint. (See Initial Response to Odour Complaints).

## Triaging the complaint

Once an odour complaint has been made, the person who logged the complaint must decide how it should move forward to ensure an appropriate level of response. Do you call someone in on the weekend or at 3 a.m.? Do you wait for normal business hours?

To help guide these decisions, develop a matrix or flowchart. For example, a Level 1 event might be investigated through normal workplace activity, a Level 2 event might require some additional resources or quicker action, and a Level 3 event would require immediate action.

If you were to proceed with this type of model, determine what triggers a move from a Level 1 complaint to Level 2 or Level 3. Triggers to move from one level to the next might include:

- Multiple calls about the same odour.
- Reports of health concerns.
- An unusual odour that cannot be attributed to normal local activity.
- Environmental concerns.
- Detection of odours that could signal a serious or dangerous situation.
- The time the odour was noticed. (Did it happen a week ago or is it happening now?)
- Access to the alleged source.

You should also be aware of any special protocols for certain types of odours or odours detected in specific locations.

## Multiple complaints

You may receive multiple complaints about the same odour. In addition to being a factor in triaging the call, multiple complaints can provide other data that may be helpful in the investigation.

- Multiple calls from various locations can help determine the geographical extent of the problem. This may also help you determine the source.
- You can compare the data collected from the calls to identify patterns, such as the time of day the odour was noticed.

If it is allowed within your communication policies, you can collect the data and let callers know you are aware of the situation and are already investigating.

## Initial Response to Odour Complaints

Initial response refers to the first contact back to the complainant after they have made an odour complaint. The initial response is not intended to provide the complainant with an answer or results of an odour investigation. It is a touch point to let them know the status of their complaint and what the next steps are.

In cases where the caller has chosen to remain anonymous or does not wish to receive a followup call, the initial response is the call when they make the complaint.

Providing an initial response helps the complainant feel they have been heard and that your organization is taking their complaint seriously.

### Develop a framework for handling the initial response

It is important to develop a protocol for your organization's initial response. Here are some factors to consider.

- Within what time frames will you provide an initial response? A good practice followed by many organizations is to provide an initial response within 24 hours and no later than 48 hours.
- Who will call the complainant back? Consider situations where the complainant has not allowed their contact information to be shared with anyone but the person who took the initial call.
- What training will be provided to employees who answer calls from the public? What information do they need to provide an initial response if it is required of them?
- If employees are expected to answer questions from the public, how will you keep them updated about the progress of an investigation? What are the boundaries of the information they are allowed to share?
- What if you cannot complete or are delayed in completing investigation activities? How will you inform the complainant about this change?
- What broader communication channels are in place to address a situation where multiple complaints about the same odour are coming in?

# Investigation Response to Odour Complaints

The investigation response focuses on good practices for investigating complaints. This is not a “how to” or field manual for investigating odours, but rather an overview of factors to consider in developing an investigation process.

## Updating the complainant

Keeping someone updated about the status of their complaint sounds simple, but there are many factors to consider.

If the complainant has requested a followup call, ensure they get one within the timelines given during your initial response. Other questions your organization needs to ask include:

- If the investigation is long and complex, how often will you contact the complainant?
- If you're investigating with another agency or if you have passed on the information, who ensures followup is done?
- Who is authorized to speak to the complainant?
- What are the limits on the information that can be shared?

At a minimum, if a followup is requested, the complainant should be contacted at the conclusion of the investigation or if safety concerns delay the investigation or prevent it altogether. Follow up with the complainant even if you do not have any new information.

## Safety concerns

The safety of your investigators is a primary consideration in your odour investigation plan. Policies and procedures related to working alone, managing confrontation, equipment and vehicle safety, and other workplace situations will enhance on-the-job safety.

A number of factors could prevent or delay an odour investigation, such as weather, wildfires, confrontational/dangerous people or animals, dangerous substances or inaccessible physical locations. Develop strategies to help your investigators mitigate these risks.

Please note, in these cases, it is also important to let the complainant know if your investigation will be delayed.

## Alternative data sources

The information gathered on the Odour Complaint Form provides a place to start the investigation. However, it is possible that not all information will be provided or the complainant may be mistaken about some information. After all, most people are not trained in odour detection and investigation.

It's important to be aware of the alternative data sources in your area. Here are some of the common sources to become familiar with:

- Where is the nearest meteorological station?
- Do you have access to specialized monitoring equipment?
- What are the local industries and which of their activities can cause odour?
- How do you access historical investigative reports?
- What local or seasonal events trigger odour?

Each of these sources can provide valuable information but they are merely tools that should be combined with an investigator's experience and knowledge to reach a conclusion about the source of an odour.

## **Records management**

Every organization should have a records management policy to guide you in what records should be kept, how they should be stored and protected, and how long they should be retained.

Certain records are subject to provincial and/or federal legislation, and this varies by industry. Your records management policy should take those legal requirements into consideration and employees should be informed about their responsibilities.

You need specific policies to protect personal information as part of your record storage and archiving system.

Keep records readily available until they are no longer needed (for example, the complaint investigation is concluded).

Consider implementing a system to collect and record complaints data for trending and analysis purposes.

## **Conclusion**

Developing and implementing an odour complaint process can help your organization manage complaints in an efficient manner. Providing training to staff and managing calls from the public in a respectful and knowledgeable way can enhance your organization's reputation. Ensuring you are compliant with all relevant legislation can save you from encountering legal situations. If you don't have an odour complaint process, the time to develop one is now.

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Members of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance Odour Complaints Task Group provided valuable insight into the development of this guide.

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### Helpful resource websites:

Australian Ombudsman, Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Report. June 2009.

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*St. Croix Sensory, Inc. Copyright 2003.*

<http://www.fivesenses.com/Documents/Library/33%20%20Odor%20Basics.pdf>

Sundre Petroleum Operators Group. [www.spog.ab.ca](http://www.spog.ab.ca)

# Appendix A – Sample Odour Complaint Form

## Odour Complaint Form

		Reference number:		
Call date:	Call time:	Call received by:		
Caller name: <i>(May remain anonymous)</i>				Phone number:
Location where you experienced the odour:				
<b>Odour description (Check all described by caller)</b>				
<b>Chemical</b>	<b>Earthy</b>	<b>Fruity</b>	<b>Offensive</b>	<b>Floral</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Acidic <input type="checkbox"/> Bleach <input type="checkbox"/> Glue <input type="checkbox"/> Mothballs <input type="checkbox"/> Nail polish <input type="checkbox"/> Paint-like <input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum/gasoline <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic <input type="checkbox"/> Rubbery <input type="checkbox"/> Solvent <input type="checkbox"/> Tar <input type="checkbox"/> Turpentine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Varnish	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassy <input type="checkbox"/> Hay <input type="checkbox"/> Musty <input type="checkbox"/> Mouldy <input type="checkbox"/> Mushroom <input type="checkbox"/> Peat-like <input type="checkbox"/> Pine <input type="checkbox"/> Swampy <input type="checkbox"/> Woody <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Citrus <input type="checkbox"/> Fermented <input type="checkbox"/> Fruity <input type="checkbox"/> Over ripened fruit	<input type="checkbox"/> Garbage <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic/onion <input type="checkbox"/> Rancid <input type="checkbox"/> Sour milk <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet & sour <input type="checkbox"/> Rotten eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting meat <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting vegetables <input type="checkbox"/> Skunky <input type="checkbox"/> Urine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Vomit <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Flowers <input type="checkbox"/> Fragrant <input type="checkbox"/> Herbal <input type="checkbox"/> Perfumy <input type="checkbox"/> Spicy
<b>Smoky</b>	<b>Medicinal</b>	<b>Fecal</b>	<b>Putrid</b>	<b>Fishy</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Burnt plastic/rubber <input type="checkbox"/> Coffee-like <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaust <input type="checkbox"/> Grass smoke <input type="checkbox"/> Wood smoke	<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/> Ammonia <input type="checkbox"/> Menthol <input type="checkbox"/> Urine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar	<input type="checkbox"/> Manure <input type="checkbox"/> Septic <input type="checkbox"/> Sewer	<input type="checkbox"/> Burning carcasses <input type="checkbox"/> Dead animal <input type="checkbox"/> Decay <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting	<input type="checkbox"/> Dead fish <input type="checkbox"/> Perm solution
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b> (describe)				
<b>Frequency and duration</b>				
When did you first notice the odour?		Date:	Time:	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/No answer
How often have you noticed the odour? How long does it last?				
<input type="checkbox"/> One time	Start time:	End time:	<input type="checkbox"/> More than once a week	
<input type="checkbox"/> Continuous since	Date:	Time:	<input type="checkbox"/> Once or twice per month	
<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	Time of day:		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
<b>Intensity (How strong is the odour?)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Faint: Odour is barely detectable, need to stand still and inhale while facing into the wind to notice it. <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate: Odour is easily detected while walking and breathing normally but it is not overpowering. <input type="checkbox"/> Strong: Odour is penetrating; you can't get away from it and it can easily be detected at all times. <input type="checkbox"/> No answer.				

Continued on next page ...

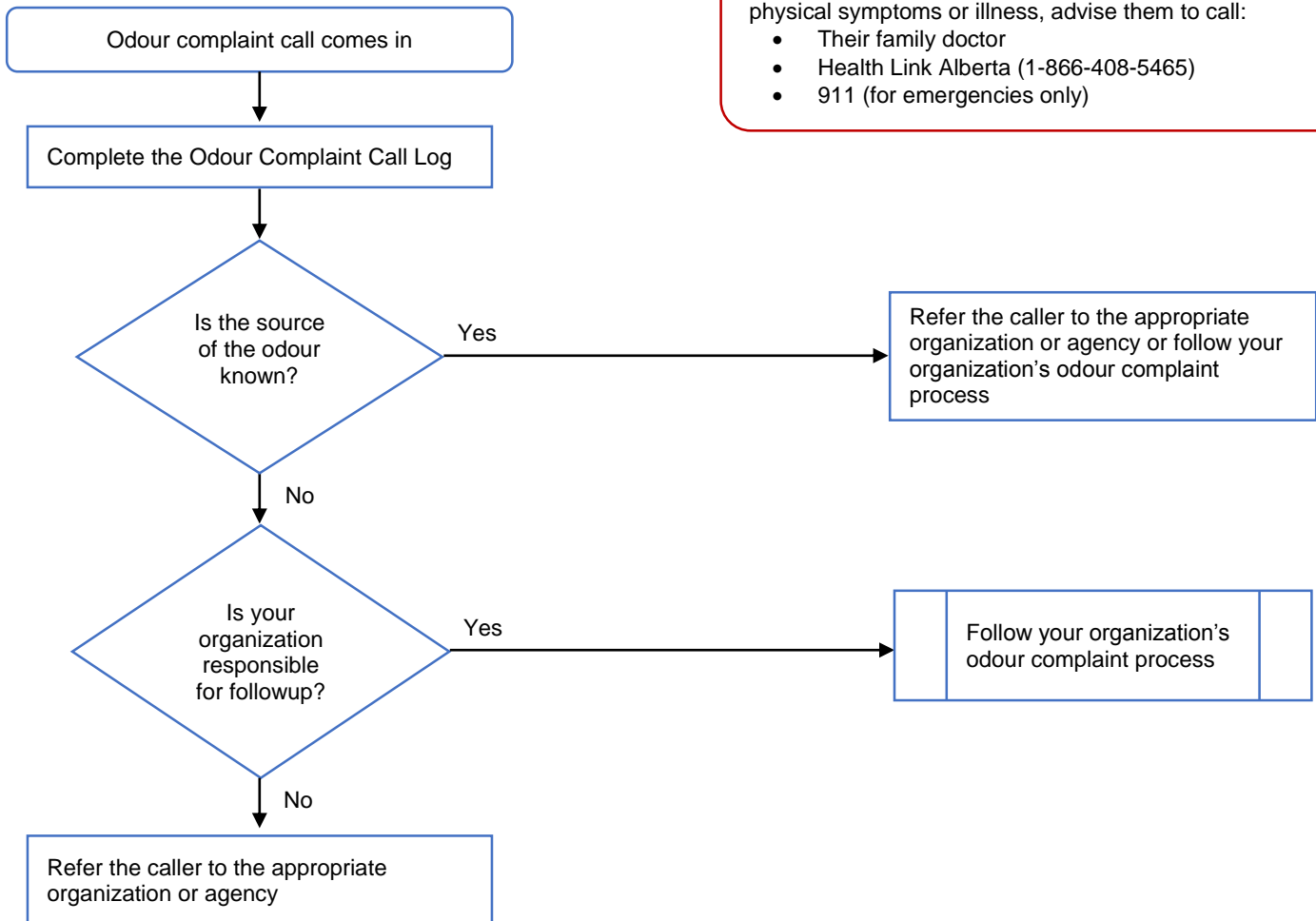
# Odour Complaint Form

<b>Weather conditions (When you noticed the odour)</b>			
General conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Dry <input type="checkbox"/> Rainy <input type="checkbox"/> Foggy <input type="checkbox"/> Snowy	Cloud cover <input type="checkbox"/> Clear <input type="checkbox"/> Light clouds <input type="checkbox"/> Scattered clouds <input type="checkbox"/> Overcast	Wind speed <input type="checkbox"/> None/light <input type="checkbox"/> Steady <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Gusting	Wind direction Which direction is the wind coming from? <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/No answer
<b>Alleged source of the odour (if known):</b>			
Have you reported this odour before? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes If yes, who and when:			
<b>Additional comments or information:</b>			
The odour investigators may have additional questions. May I give your contact information to our investigators or those of another agency?			<input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (ensure contact information is complete)
Would you like a follow up call?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (ensure contact information is complete)	If yes, date followup call was made:
<b>Action taken:</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Referred caller to: _____			
<input type="checkbox"/> Sent complaint for investigation to: _____			
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____			
_____			
<b>Notes from followup call:</b>			
<i>The collection, use and disclosure of personal information on this form is in accordance with Alberta's privacy legislation.</i>			

Odour Complaint Form adapted from the Natural Resources Conservation Board Odour Report Form

# Appendix B – Odour Complaint Referral Process

## Odour Complaint Decision Tree



If at any time the caller indicates the odour is causing physical symptoms or illness, advise them to call:

- Their family doctor
- Health Link Alberta (1-866-408-5465)
- 911 (for emergencies only)

**Chemical/Petroleum Odours**

*Possible sources:*

- Manufacturing
- Refineries
- Oil & gas operations

*Contact:*  
Local Organization  
AER/AERSD

**Manure/Sewer Odours**

*Possible sources:*  
Agriculture

*Contact:*  
Local Organization  
Municipality  
NRCB

**Rotten Odours**

*Possible sources:*

- Sour oil and gas operations
- Pulp mill

*Contact:*  
Local Organization  
AER/AESRD

**Odour**

*Possible sources:*

*Contact:*

**Odour**

*Possible sources:*

*Contact:*

**Odour**

*Possible sources:*

*Contact:*

- Alberta Energy Regulator (AER)  
1-800-222-6514
- Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD)  
1-800-222-6514
- Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB)  
1-866-383-6722
- 311 Calgary or 311 Edmonton

Customize the boxes as appropriate for your local industries and activities.



# Odour Complaint Call Log

(To be used with referral to another organization)

<b>Caller name:</b> (optional)		<b>Phone number:</b> (optional)		
<b>Call date:</b>		<b>Call time:</b>		
<b>Location where caller experienced the odour:</b>				
<b>Odour description (Check all described by caller)</b>				
<b>Chemical</b>	<b>Earthy</b>	<b>Fruity</b>	<b>Offensive</b>	<b>Floral</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Acidic <input type="checkbox"/> Bleach <input type="checkbox"/> Glue <input type="checkbox"/> Mothballs <input type="checkbox"/> Nail polish <input type="checkbox"/> Paint-like <input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum/ gasoline <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic <input type="checkbox"/> Rubbery <input type="checkbox"/> Solvent <input type="checkbox"/> Tar <input type="checkbox"/> Turpentine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Varnish	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassy <input type="checkbox"/> Hay <input type="checkbox"/> Musty <input type="checkbox"/> Mouldy <input type="checkbox"/> Mushroom <input type="checkbox"/> Peat-like <input type="checkbox"/> Pine <input type="checkbox"/> Swampy <input type="checkbox"/> Woody <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Citrus <input type="checkbox"/> Fermented <input type="checkbox"/> Fruity <input type="checkbox"/> Over ripened fruit	<input type="checkbox"/> Garbage <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic/onion <input type="checkbox"/> Rancid <input type="checkbox"/> Sour milk <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet & sour <input type="checkbox"/> Rotten eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting meat <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting vegetables <input type="checkbox"/> Skunky <input type="checkbox"/> Urine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Vomit <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Flowers <input type="checkbox"/> Fragrant <input type="checkbox"/> Herbal <input type="checkbox"/> Perfumy <input type="checkbox"/> Spicy
<b>Smoky</b>	<b>Medicinal</b>	<b>Fecal</b>	<b>Putrid</b>	<b>Fishy</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Burnt plastic/rubber <input type="checkbox"/> Coffee-like <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaust <input type="checkbox"/> Grass smoke <input type="checkbox"/> Wood smoke	<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/> Ammonia <input type="checkbox"/> Menthol <input type="checkbox"/> Urine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar	<input type="checkbox"/> Manure <input type="checkbox"/> Septic <input type="checkbox"/> Sewer	<input type="checkbox"/> Burning carcasses <input type="checkbox"/> Dead animal <input type="checkbox"/> Decay <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting	<input type="checkbox"/> Dead fish <input type="checkbox"/> Perm solution
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b> (describe)				
<b>Source of the odour (if known):</b>				
<b>Have you reported this odour to another organization?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes If yes, who and when:				
<b>Action taken:</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Referred caller to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Sent complaint for investigation to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ _____				
<b>Call received by:</b>			<b>Phone:</b>	

# **Odour Complaint Decision Tree and Call Log**

**Reference Guide**

## About the Odour Complaint Decision Tree and Odour Complaint Call Log

The Odour Complaint Decision Tree outlines a referral process that is intended to help organizations collect information about odour complaints received by phone and determine the next steps to be taken.

The decision tree and corresponding call log are tools to help determine if the caller is reporting the odour to the correct organization and, if not, then to redirect them appropriately. This is a high-level process that should be customized, as appropriate. Each organization may have its own procedures to follow if an odour is reported and if it is their responsibility to investigate.

***These tools are not intended to collect the comprehensive information required to conduct an odour investigation. They simply help to direct the caller to the correct organization for their complaint.***

### Communicating with callers

One important aspect of dealing with odour complaints is to ensure the caller feels they are heard and are not being dismissed.

- Thank them for calling.
- Collect the relevant details.
- Listen to them without interrupting.
- Tell them what the next step is or refer them to the appropriate organization.

In that initial conversation it is important to gather the information outlined on the Odour Complaint Call Log, even if the caller believes they know where the odour is coming from. It will help you determine if they are correct.

If this is one of several complaints about the same odour, collect the information anyway as it may help pinpoint the source if it is unknown. Let the caller know that you are aware of the situation and tell them the current status, if you have that information and if it is appropriate to do so.

### Repeat complainants

The same person may call repeatedly about the same odour:

- Ask as to whether the odour is the same intensity as previous reports or if it is worse.
- Let them know the current status of the situation (if the information is available and it is appropriate to do so).
- Assure them that the information was passed on to the appropriate people (if your organization is responsible for the investigation).
- Let them know that some odour complaints take time to investigate.

It is possible that callers may be frustrated and use abusive or inappropriate language on the call. Ensure you are aware of your organization's policies on managing abusive callers.

### Using the Decision Tree

The Odour Complaint Decision Tree is a high-level process. Organizations should take the time to customize this tool to suit their needs.

An odour complaint will mean different things to different organizations depending on factors such as local industries and activities and if the location is rural or urban.

- Organizations using this odour identification process will need to be aware of the local industries and natural or seasonal occurrences that may affect the volume and types of complaints. Please work with your local partners to create a list along with the types of odours commonly associated with their activities. This way, when a caller makes an odour complaint you can more easily direct them.
- For industry-specific organizations, this decision tree and form may be simplified to include odour information relevant to your organization. If your organization refers specific types of odours to different parts of your organization you may wish to add a flowchart that describes where these complaints are to be directed.
- Please keep in mind that you may receive calls about odours that are not due to your operations. You can use the decision tree to redirect the caller.
- Some organizations, such as municipalities, may have several possible sources for an odour.

### Example 1

The following example shows how a rural municipal office might customize the decision tree based on the industries in the area.

<b>Manure Odours</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i> ABC Plant XYZ Ranch  <i>Contact:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ABC Plant: 000-000-0000</li><li>• XYZ Ranch: 000-000-0000</li><li>• NRCB: 1-866-383-6722</li></ul>	<b>Rotten Odours</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sour oil and gas company ABC</li></ul> <i>Contact:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Company ABC: 000-000-0000</li><li>• AER: 1-800-222-6514</li></ul>	<b>Odour</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i>  <i>Contact:</i>	<b>Odour</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i>  <i>Contact:</i>
--	--	---	---

### Example 2

The following example shows one way the decision tree could be customized for an organization. If a caller reports one of these four odours, the organization begins an investigation within its own operation before referring the caller to another agency.

<b>Really Bad Smell (skunk): Methyl Mercaptans</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stripper gas system</li><li>• LVHC un-scrubbed NCGs</li><li>• Chip bin</li><li>• Foul condensate release</li><li>• Turpentine release</li></ul>	<b>Rotten Egg Smell: H<sub>2</sub>S</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kiln</li><li>• Recovery boilers</li><li>• Acid cleaning</li></ul>	<b>Rotten Vegetables: Dimethyl disulphide</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scrubber LVHC vents</li><li>• Chip bin vent</li><li>• DNCG vent</li><li>• Condensates or biodegradation in ponds</li></ul>	<b>Rotten cabbage: Dimethyl sulphide</b>  <i>Possible sources:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scrubber LVHC NCG vent</li><li>• Chip bin vent</li><li>• Dilute NCGs vent</li><li>• Condensates or biodegradation in ponds</li></ul>
--	---	--	---

## Completing the Odour Complaint Call Log

Explain to the caller that you will be asking a couple of questions to help you better direct their call.

### Caller name and phone number

Asking for the caller's name and number is optional. You may choose to collect this information on the call log if your organization plans to follow up on the complaint. If you are going to simply provide the caller with the phone number for another agency, it may not be necessary to collect this information.

If you do collect this information, ensure you comply with the appropriate privacy legislation.

### Identifying the location

Ask for the location where the caller noticed the odour. For example, if they are in a city, what neighbourhood? If they are rural, what town or part of the county/municipality?

## Describing the odour

Give the caller the opportunity to describe the odour in their own words before offering a list of words for them to choose from. Phrases such as “It’s kind of like…” may indicate the caller is a little unsure and it may be helpful to offer them some comparison words to help narrow down the odour.

A wide range of odours have been included on the form. Organizations may choose to customize this list based on their location or industry. For example, use bold font for the most commonly reported odours.

Script:

*Please describe the odour. What does it smell like? (Check all described by caller)*

Chemical	Earthy	Fruity	Offensive	Floral
<input type="checkbox"/> Acidic <input type="checkbox"/> Bleach <input type="checkbox"/> Glue <input type="checkbox"/> Mothballs <input type="checkbox"/> Nail polish <input type="checkbox"/> Paint-like <input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum/gasoline <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic <input type="checkbox"/> Rubbery <input type="checkbox"/> Solvent <input type="checkbox"/> Tar <input type="checkbox"/> Turpentine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Varnish	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassy <input type="checkbox"/> Hay <input type="checkbox"/> Musty <input type="checkbox"/> Mouldy <input type="checkbox"/> Mushroom <input type="checkbox"/> Peat-like <input type="checkbox"/> Pine <input type="checkbox"/> Swampy <input type="checkbox"/> Woody <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Citrus <input type="checkbox"/> Fermented <input type="checkbox"/> Fruity <input type="checkbox"/> Over ripened fruit	<input type="checkbox"/> Garbage <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic/onion <input type="checkbox"/> Rancid <input type="checkbox"/> Sour milk <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet & sour <input type="checkbox"/> Rotten eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting meat <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting vegetables <input type="checkbox"/> Skunky <input type="checkbox"/> Urine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Vomit <input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Flowers <input type="checkbox"/> Fragrant <input type="checkbox"/> Herbal <input type="checkbox"/> Perfumy <input type="checkbox"/> Spicy
Smoky	Medicinal	Fecal	Putrid	Fishy
<input type="checkbox"/> Burnt plastic/rubber <input type="checkbox"/> Coffee-like <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaust <input type="checkbox"/> Grass smoke <input type="checkbox"/> Wood smoke	<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/> Ammonia <input type="checkbox"/> Menthol <input type="checkbox"/> Urine <input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar	<input type="checkbox"/> Manure <input type="checkbox"/> Septic <input type="checkbox"/> Sewer	<input type="checkbox"/> Burning carcasses <input type="checkbox"/> Dead animal <input type="checkbox"/> Decay <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting	<input type="checkbox"/> Dead fish <input type="checkbox"/> Perm solution
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b> (describe)				

## Source of the odour

The caller may know where the odour is coming from, such as a specific plant or a particular lake.

Ask if they have contacted any other organizations about this odour.

If they have not, let them know they can report the odour directly to the organization, and provide them with the name and contact information (if available). Explain that many organizations prefer to receive this information directly so that they can act more quickly to address the situation.

## Next Steps

If they don’t wish to contact the organization directly, give them the number to the appropriate government agency. If they have already reported the odour to the organization and they do not seem satisfied with the response, provide them with the phone number to the appropriate government agency.

If your organization is responsible for addressing the odour complaint, tell the caller you will forward their report to the appropriate investigator.

If you are referring the caller to another organization, provide the name and number of the appropriate organization based on the information collected on the Odour Complaint Call Log.

If you are unsure who should handle the investigation, provide the number for Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (1-800-222-6514).

Explain to the caller that they may be asked some of the same questions again. The organization to which they are being referred will have their own methods for collecting data.

### **Closing the loop**

Thank the caller for reporting the odour.

Let them know that some odour complaints take time to investigate.

### **Information for the public**

Your organization may wish to provide some general information to the public about reporting odours. A generic public information sheet has been provided. The information can be used on your website, in a community newsletter, as a handout or in any other way you connect with the public in your area. You may wish to customize this information by adding local phone numbers or information about where people can get updates if there is a major incident (if this is relevant to your industry or area).

# Reporting Odours in Your Community

If you are troubled by an odour in your community, do you know where to report it? Do you know how to describe it?

Before you call, have the following information ready:

- Location:** Where you were when you noted the odour
- Description:** Words you would use to describe the odour
- Frequency:** Dates and times you noticed the odour
- Duration:** How long the odour was noticeable
- Weather:** Conditions when you noticed the odour

Here are some words used to describe odours. Which matches the odour you're reporting?

Chemical	Earthy	Fruity	Offensive	Floral
<input type="checkbox"/> Acidic	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassy	<input type="checkbox"/> Citrus	<input type="checkbox"/> Garbage	<input type="checkbox"/> Flowers
<input type="checkbox"/> Bleach	<input type="checkbox"/> Hay	<input type="checkbox"/> Fermented	<input type="checkbox"/> Garlic/onion	<input type="checkbox"/> Fragrant
<input type="checkbox"/> Glue	<input type="checkbox"/> Musty	<input type="checkbox"/> Fruity	<input type="checkbox"/> Rancid	<input type="checkbox"/> Herbal
<input type="checkbox"/> Mothballs	<input type="checkbox"/> Mouldy	<input type="checkbox"/> Over ripened fruit	<input type="checkbox"/> Sour milk	<input type="checkbox"/> Perfumy
<input type="checkbox"/> Nail polish	<input type="checkbox"/> Mushroom		<input type="checkbox"/> Sweet & sour	<input type="checkbox"/> Spicy
<input type="checkbox"/> Paint-like	<input type="checkbox"/> Peat-like		<input type="checkbox"/> Rotten eggs	
<input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum/gasoline	<input type="checkbox"/> Pine		<input type="checkbox"/> Rotting meat	
<input type="checkbox"/> Plastic	<input type="checkbox"/> Swampy		<input type="checkbox"/> Rotting vegetables	
<input type="checkbox"/> Rubbery	<input type="checkbox"/> Woody		<input type="checkbox"/> Skunky	
<input type="checkbox"/> Solvent	<input type="checkbox"/> Yeast		<input type="checkbox"/> Urine	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tar			<input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar	
<input type="checkbox"/> Turpentine			<input type="checkbox"/> Vomit	
<input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar			<input type="checkbox"/> Yeast	
<input type="checkbox"/> Varnish				
Smoky	Medicinal	Fecal	Putrid	Fishy
<input type="checkbox"/> Burnt plastic/rubber	<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/> Manure	<input type="checkbox"/> Burning carcasses	<input type="checkbox"/> Dead fish
<input type="checkbox"/> Coffee-like	<input type="checkbox"/> Ammonia	<input type="checkbox"/> Septic	<input type="checkbox"/> Dead animal	<input type="checkbox"/> Perm solution
<input type="checkbox"/> Exhaust	<input type="checkbox"/> Menthol	<input type="checkbox"/> Sewer	<input type="checkbox"/> Decay	
<input type="checkbox"/> Grass smoke	<input type="checkbox"/> Urine		<input type="checkbox"/> Rotting	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood smoke	<input type="checkbox"/> Vinegar			
Other (describe)				

## Where to call

If you smell natural gas (rotten eggs), leave the immediate area. Once safely away, call 911.

For other odours, if you know the source, you can call the organization directly. This will help your complaint to be acted on more quickly. Or you can call one of the following provincial or municipal numbers:

- Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) – Oil and gas  
1-800-222-6514
- Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) – Environmental  
1-800-222-6514
- Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) – Agricultural  
1-866-383-6722
- 311 Calgary or 311 Edmonton – Municipal for Edmonton and Calgary



If at any time the odour is causing physical symptoms or illness, call:

- Your family doctor
- Health Link Alberta (1-866-408-5465)
- 911 (for emergencies only)