

Guideline

Environmentally relevant activities

Notification criteria for sewage releases to the environment

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance in relation to notification for sewage releases to the environment.

Legislation

Notification is required to fulfil a person's obligations under ss. 320-320G of the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* (the Act), which is to notify the administering authority of any release that causes or threatens to cause, material or serious environmental harm. Notification applies to all persons including those operating a sewage treatment plant or pumping station under a current permit¹ unless the release is authorised.

The following are examples of sewage releases that may cause, or have the potential to cause material or serious environmental harm.

1. Any sewage release, regardless of volume, in dry or wet weather that involves one or more of the following:
 - a) poses a threat to public health (e.g. contamination of waterways with primary recreation values)
 - b) results in any observable environmental impact (e.g. fish kill, distress to wildlife, marine plants or other aquatic life)
 - c) discharges to, or is likely to impact, a sensitive environment (e.g. Ramsar wetland, marine park, or area designated as a conservation zone under a relevant planning scheme)

or

2. Any dry weather discharge of sewage of 10 000 L or more.

The following documents are available and provide information and reporting requirements for these types of releases:

- Notice of duty to notify of environmental harm (ESR/2016/2230 formerly EM468²)
- Guideline—Duty to notify of environmental harm (ESR/2016/2271 formerly EM467)

Other releases

The administering authority is also interested in other types of sewage releases that do not trigger the duty to notify under the Act. These releases may be from sewage treatment plants or pumping stations covered by a current permit, or from other sewage network infrastructure such as pipelines or pump stations that do not

¹ Permit includes licences, approvals, permits, authorisations, certificates, sanctions or equivalent/similar as required by legislation administered by the Department of Environment and Science.

² This is the publication number, which can be used as a search term to find the latest version of the publication at www.qld.gov.au.

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require a permit. Operators should be aware of all releases from their network in order to prioritise upgrades and reduce the potential for impacts to the environment.

It is recommended that all releases, other than approved releases, from sewage infrastructure be reported to the administering authority in the form of an annual report. This report should be provided on 30 September covering the period 1 July–30 June of the previous year.

Annual reports should clearly identify:

- a) the location of the release, being the GPS coordinates and the suburb by post code
- b) the reason for the release (i.e. equipment failure, wet weather etc)
- c) the waste water treatment plant which the network is connected to
- d) the number of releases
- e) the volume (or estimate of the volume) of each release
- f) if the release was reported under ss. 320-320G of the Act.

Reporting should be provided in a way in which the data is easy to handle and review. An example would be in an excel spreadsheet as shown below.

Figure 1– Example of excel spreadsheet layout for annual reporting.

| | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|----|---|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Annual report of releases by <name> | | | | | |
| 2 | <Name> sewage treatment plant and network | | | | | |
| 3 | Period: 1 July <year> - 30 June <year> | | | | | |
| 4 | Total = <number of releases> | | | | | |
| 5 | Location | | | Volume (L) | Reason | Notification ss.320-320G (Y or N) |
| 6 | Latitude | Longitude | Postcode | | | |
| 7 | -27.473657 | 153.02639 | 4000 | 1500 | Switch gear failure at pump station | Yes |
| 8 | | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | |

Disclaimer

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