

River Basin Management Service - Guidance

How the Community/Public can report a water pollution incident in Ireland?

There are many different organisations involved in the protection of water in Ireland each with similar but different roles and responsibilities.

Roles and Responsibilities

The **River Basin Management Service** is a national shared service working on behalf of all 31 local authorities in Ireland. We coordinate efforts to achieve good or high-water quality in our rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters, and groundwater, as required by the European Union Water Framework Directive. Healthy rivers and catchments support a healthy environment, a robust economy, our health, and wellbeing. **River Basin Management Service however, does not have a regulatory or enforcement function so complaints should be directed to the relevant implementing body as outlined below.**

The 31 [Local Authorities](#) across the country they are responsible for the implementation of several water related pieces of legislation. They enforce the Water Pollution Acts 1977 and 1990 and regulate small trade effluent or wastewater discharges; carry out inspection of domestic wastewater treatment systems (septic tanks) and farms amongst many other activities including planning authorisations. With the introduction of Uisce Éireann (Irish Water), local authorities are no longer responsible for the provision of public water supplies or public wastewater treatment plans, but they have a supervisory role in relation to private group water schemes.

[Uisce Éireann](#) (UE) is a national service provider for drinking water treatment and supply including management of leakage as well as the management and maintenance of wastewater treatment plants. The Environmental Protection Agency is the regulator responsible for oversight of UE.

The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) has many different responsibilities including licensing and enforcement; waste management; water management and environmental monitoring and assessment as well as supervision of the activities of local authorities and Uisce Éireann.

[Inland Fisheries Ireland](#) (IFI) is the statutory body responsible for inland fisheries in Ireland. The principal function is the protection, management, and conservation of the inland fisheries resource. IFI enforce the Fisheries Acts 1959 – 2010 and the Water Pollution Acts 1977 and 1990.

[National Parks and Wildlife Service](#) has a complex range of responsibilities. These range from significant policy and advisory functions to operational responsibilities in the National Parks and Nature Reserves, conservation, compliance, licensing, nature, and biodiversity and as a statutory consultee on planning. If you are aware of a pollution incident or an activity likely to cause pollution or damage within a protected area or concerned about damage or disturbance to habitats or protected species under the Habitats and Wildlife Acts, contact them.

[Waterways Ireland](#) is one of six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the British-Irish Agreement of 1998. It is the cross-border navigational authority responsible for the management, maintenance, development, and promotion of over 1000 km of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes.

Office of Public Works The OPW carried out several arterial drainage schemes on catchments under the **Arterial Drainage Act, 1945**, and flood defence schemes under the **Arterial Drainage (Amendment) Act, 1995**. The OPW is required to maintain drainage works in proper repair and effective condition. It is also responsible for leading and co-ordinating the implementation of localised flood relief schemes to provide flood protection for cities, towns, and villages, either directly or in association with relevant Local Authorities.

Information needed to report a water pollution incident.

This is a check list of the type of information you should provide when reporting a water pollution incident.

- **Where You Are:** Describe exactly where the incident has happened. If it is close to a known bridge, road, or important landmark, that information would be useful. Even better, if you can provide a specific reference point, because the person on the phone might not know the local area well.
- **Date and Time:** Make a note of when you saw the problem. Write down the exact time you noticed the issue.
- **Explain What You Saw:** Give a clear description of what happened. Can you see any unusual discharges? Is there a bad smell? Are there fish struggling in the water?
- **Identify the Source:** If possible, can you tell where the pollution is coming from? This might not always be obvious, but if you can figure it out, please report it. This detail could be really important in deciding who will investigate the problem.
- **Photos or Videos:** Nowadays, most of us have cameras on our phones. If you can, take pictures or short videos. These can be really helpful. You can capture things like water that's a strange colour or fish and other animals that seem to be in trouble.

In all cases, look for a reference number for the pollution incident report and request that you be kept informed.

Which organisation to contact?

The answer to this question is dependent on several factors,

- Location of the incident.
- Cause or source of the incident.
- Severity or Risk Posed by the incident.

A National Complaints Line has been put in place to help co-ordinate the response to environmental incidents and complaints as sometimes there are several different organisations who have responsibility to react to the complaint or incident. This should be your first point of contact when reporting a water pollution incident. Make sure you get a reference number, which can be used to track follow up actions.

- **A smart phone App 'See It? Say It!' is also available.**

Apple iPhone: [Download from the Apple App Store](#)

Android smartphone: [Download from the Android Play Store](#)

- **EPA National Environmental Complaints Line (NECL)**

Tel: 1800 365 123, open 24-hours, 7-days per week.

These systems are used to capture water pollution incidents and complaints in relation to waste and litter.

If you want to report directly to the responsible organisations, you will need to be able to answer the following questions. Please let each organisation know who else you have reported the incident to and provide any relevant reference numbers, where available.

1. Location of the incident:

- a. If within a protected area, contact NPWS.
- b. If within a canal managed by Waterways Ireland, contact them.
- c. If within a drainage network managed by OPW, contact them.
- d. If not within a known area identified above, **contact relevant LA environment section.**

AND

2. Suspected cause or source of the incident – it is difficult in many cases to be able to identify the suspected cause or source of the incident and more difficult to know who operates the facility but if you do know then this is a guide as to who to contact.

- a. If the incident is suspected to be caused by an Uisce Éireann facility (drinking water or wastewater):
 - i. contact UE and the EPA as the supervisory authority and copy the LA and IFI on the complaint.
- b. If the incident is caused by an industrial or waste facility, identify the type of activity:
 - i. If activity under LA's Authority
 - 1. Contact Environment Section of LA.
 - ii. If activity type is EPA regulated:
 - 1. Contact EPA.
- c. If the incident is caused by an agricultural activity, e.g., slurry spreading:
 - i. Contact the LA.
- d. If the incident is caused by in-stream works or works on a riverbank:
 - i. Contact LA and IFI.
- e. If the incident causes or is affected by flooding:
 - i. Contact LA and OPW.

AND

3. Risk Posed by the Incident:

- a. If incident poses a risk to drinking water supplies:
 - i. Contact UE, EPA, and LA.
- b. If incident poses a risk to waterbodies -fish/shellfish
 - i. Contact IFI.
- c. If incident poses a risk to habitats or birds:
 - i. Contact NPWS.
- d. If incident poses a risk to bathing waters:
 - i. Contact LA.
- e. If incident poses a risk to ecological health to waterbodies:
 - i. Contact LA
- f. If the incident poses a risk to the Marine water environment

i. Contact the [Marine Institute](#) (MI), [Sea Fisheries Protection Authority](#) (SFPA), [Food Safety Authority of Ireland](#) (FSAI) and [An Bord Iascaigh Mhara](#) (BIM)

4. Provide Information to Each Organisation:

When reporting to an organisation, inform them about other organisations you've contacted. Provide relevant reference numbers, if available. Licence's/Certificates of Authorisation's (COA) issued by the Agency include conditions requiring notification of incidents to the Agency and other relevant bodies. Licensees/Certificate of Authorisation (COA) holders are reminded of their obligations under these conditions and should ensure compliance as required.

What can I do if I am not happy with how my pollution incident is dealt with?

The EPA provides support and coordination to the county and city councils and also has a statutory role to supervise their environmental activities including their response to water pollution incidents.

[Support and supervision of county and city councils | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](#)

Organisation Contact Details

Local Authorities

Your local authority will investigate your incident complaint, you can use the different forms of contact as listed below:

- **Contact your local council directly.** [Find contact details for your local authority.](#)

Uisce Éireann (Irish Water)

Uisce Éireann is the new name for Irish Water. For any questions about public water services, or to report an issue in your area, we can be contacted 24 hours a day 7 days a week on **1800 278 278**.

Email: operations@water.ie Web: www.water.ie/contact Web: www.water.ie/contact

Environmental Protection Agency EPA

The EPA have their own information page on reporting incidents and making a complaint. See links.

[Incidents | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](#)

[Make an environmental complaint | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](#)

Inland Fisheries Ireland IFI



National Parks and Wildlife Service NPWS

It is an offence to destroy vegetation on uncultivated land between the **1st of March** and the **31st of August** each year. If you wish to make a complaint in relation to illegal damage to vegetation, please do so in writing to natureconservation@npws.gov.ie or contact your local Garda station. For concerns in relation to other activities, please [Contact Us | National Parks & Wildlife Service \(npws.ie\)](#) for further advice.

Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland has regional contact numbers and a complaints form on their website [Waterways Ireland | Contact Us](#)

Office of Public Works

[Have you checked our FAQ section?](#)

Email: floodinfo@opw.ie **Telephone:** [\(+353\) 46 942 2000](tel:+3531469422000)

Complainant Confidentiality

Complainants can specify in writing that they wish their details to be kept confidential. It should be noted that protection is given to complainants under the Freedom of Information Acts, as amended. However, each case will be assessed on its own merits and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. As a general rule, the contact details of complainants should always be treated with discretion.