

Odors & Air Quality



A Message from the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency

Background

Odors are a concern for residents and a frequent source of citizen complaints to the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency (Spokane Clean Air). Odors come from a variety of operations, such as animal rendering, asphalt plants, spray paint operations, wastewater treatment plants, coffee roasting, just to name a few. Odor is a sensitive topic because each person perceives odors differently. What smells bad to one person may not offend another. Individual sensitivities and reactions to odors are influenced by personal preferences, opinions, experiences, and the varying senses of our olfactory systems.

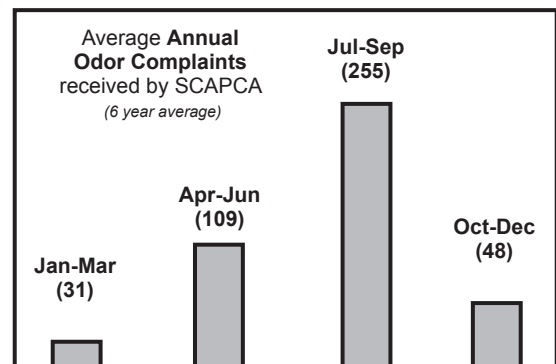
Spokane Clean Air is responsible for enforcing Washington's odor regulation, which states "Any person who shall cause or allow the generation of any odor from any source which may unreasonably interfere with any other property owner's use and enjoyment of his/her property must use recognized good practices and procedures to reduce these odors to a minimum." The intent of the law is **not to eliminate odors**, this is impossible in most instances, **but rather to reduce odors to a minimum.**

Health Impacts of Odors

Odors can be a nuisance, but are they a public health hazard? Odors are a complex mixture of gases, vapors, and dust. It is possible for certain odorous emissions to have an impact on physical health. The potential impact of any odor depends upon the concentration of odorous emissions, and the frequency and duration of exposure. The most frequently reported symptoms attributed to odors include headache, nausea, hoarseness, cough, congestions, palpitations, shortness of breath, eye, nose, throat irritation.

Odor Complaints

The graph below illustrates the average number of odor complaints by time of year, averaged over a six year period (1999-2005). Odor complaints tend to peak during the summer. This may be due to the fact that warmer temperatures mean more open windows, and more time spent outdoors.



Filing Odor/Nuisance Complaints

If you smell (or see) an air pollution problem, you should file a complaint. Here's how:

Contact Spokane Clean Air as soon as possible. Complaints can be called in to the agency at (509) 477-4727, or registered online: www.spokanecleanair.org under "contact us."

You will be asked to provide personal information, such as your name, address, and phone number. Your call may be answered by voicemail recording if you call during non-business hours. In addition to your name, address, and telephone number, plan on providing:

- ✓ your location when the odor was detected
- ✓ date and time odor was first detected

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- ✓ odor characteristics (What does it smell like?)
- ✓ suspected source of the odor
- ✓ estimate of wind speed and direction (e.g. light winds from the southwest)
- ✓ intensity or strength of odor
- ✓ duration of odor (e.g. started at 8 a.m. and still occurring)
- ✓ during the duration the odor was detected, has the odor been intermittent or constant?

Response to Odor Complaints

Spokane Clean Air has procedures in place to ensure that complaints are handled in a responsive, timely manner. Once a complaint is received, it is recorded into a database, then assigned to a field inspector for follow-up. Because odors can be fleeting, in many instances the odor is gone before the inspector arrives. In many cases when the offending party is informed about the odor complaint(s) and odor regulation, they are willing to fix the problem immediately, if a problem is found.

When is Enforcement Action Taken?

The inspector will review three key criteria before issuing a Notice of Violation (NOV) for an odor-related problem:

- ✓ Spokane Clean Air has received one of more previous complaints regarding the facility/source;
- ✓ The inspector detected and documented off-site odors; and
- ✓ The odors detected by the inspector area associated with the failure by the facility/source to employ recognized “good practices and procedures” to reduce odors to a minimum.

If the inspector finds that the source is in compliance with all applicable air pollution requirements, he/she will document the inspection findings and the agency will usually take no further action. If the source is in violation, the inspector may issued a NOV. The issuance of a NOV is typically followed by an assessment of a civil penalty (fine) which for odors, start at \$300. If you have any questions, please call Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency at 477-4727.

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