

ENVIRONMENTAL INCIDENTS

Highlights 2001-2002

- Seven hundred and forty seven incidents were reported during the year. This is slightly less than the annual average amount of 827 incidents received per year since the environmental hotline began operating.
- During the year 35% of incidents involved air-related complaints. Odour, burning/smoke nuisance and agrichemical spraydrift are the most commonly received complaints.
- Coastal incidents comprised 29% of complaints received by the Council. Generally, there is a high incidence of oil spills, sewage, refuse, various contaminant discharges and farm-related wastes.

Performance Targets

To investigate and take follow-up action on incidents reported to the Council where there are adverse effects on the environment and alleged non-compliance with the Resource Management Act by:

- **Providing a 24-hour, everyday environmental incident reporting, recording and response system.**
- **Reporting the response to incidents received to the incident reporter (as and when the follow-up action is completed) and to the Council in the following month.**
- **Operating the environmental incident, recording and response system to an ISO 9002 registered and externally audited quality management system.**

Background

On 1 November 1993, the Council began operating a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week toll-free hotline for the reporting of environmental incidents. The environmental incident system receives not only calls on the 0800 number, but also by letter or facsimile, as well as those reported by staff and people visiting our offices. Environmental incidents are defined as instances of pollution (actual or potential) and unauthorised activities covered by the Resource Management Act 1991. Where resource consents are involved, only serious events outside of consent conditions are recorded as environmental incidents.

The operational year is the same as the financial year (1 July to 30 June). The first year of operation contained eight months (1 November 1993 to 30 June 1994). As shown in figure 9.1 there were 747 incidents received during the year. The annual average for the last 9 years since the environmental hotline began operating is 827 incidents.

Air related incidents made up 35% of calls received by the hotline, with coastal incidents accounting for 29% of the total calls received. Figure 9.2 shows the breakdown of environmental incidents for each resource.

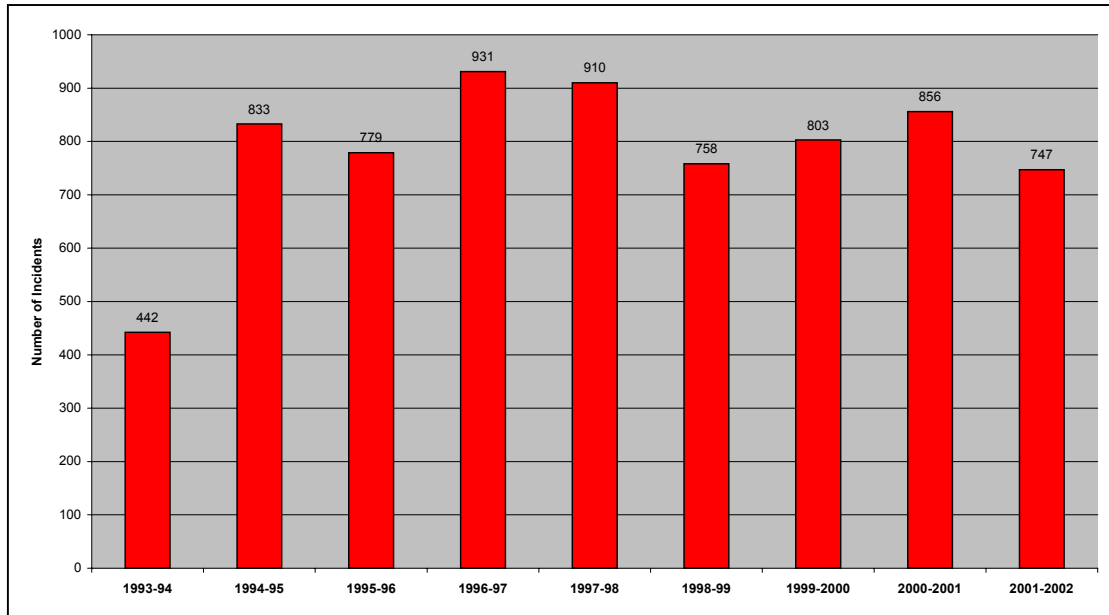


Figure 9.1: Number of incidents received by year

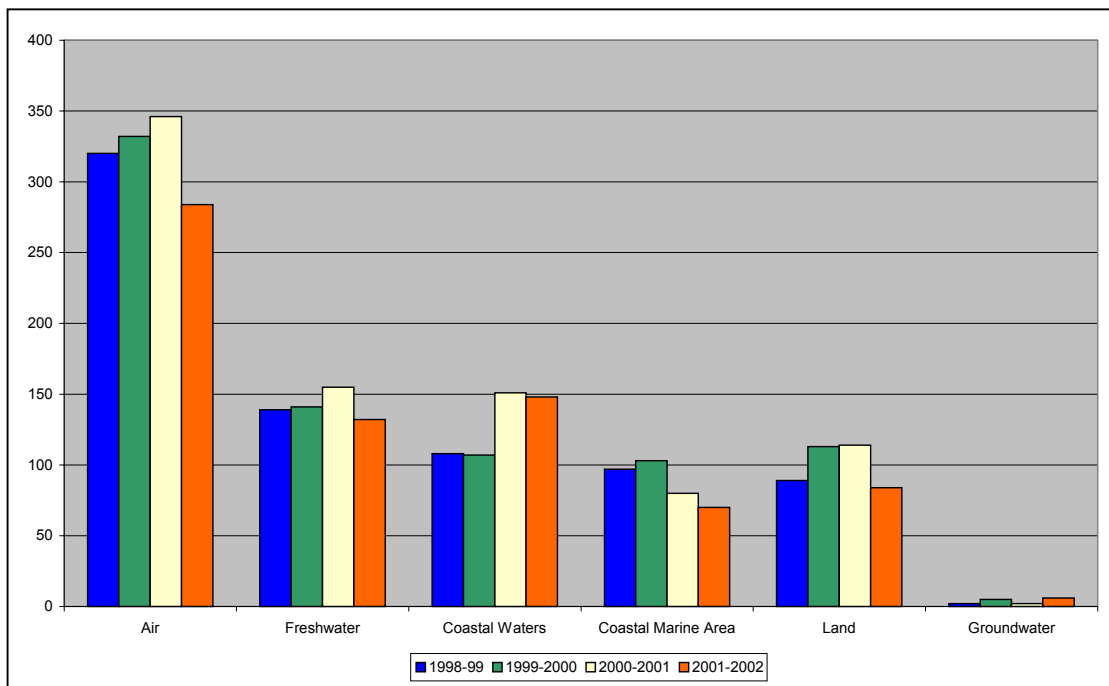


Figure 9.2: Incidents received between 1998 and 2002, divided into resource type.

The numbers of incidents received per resource group (e.g. air, coastal) has remained fairly stable over the last four years. Figure 9.3 shows the 10 most common types of incidents received by the Council, and how those have varied over the last three years.

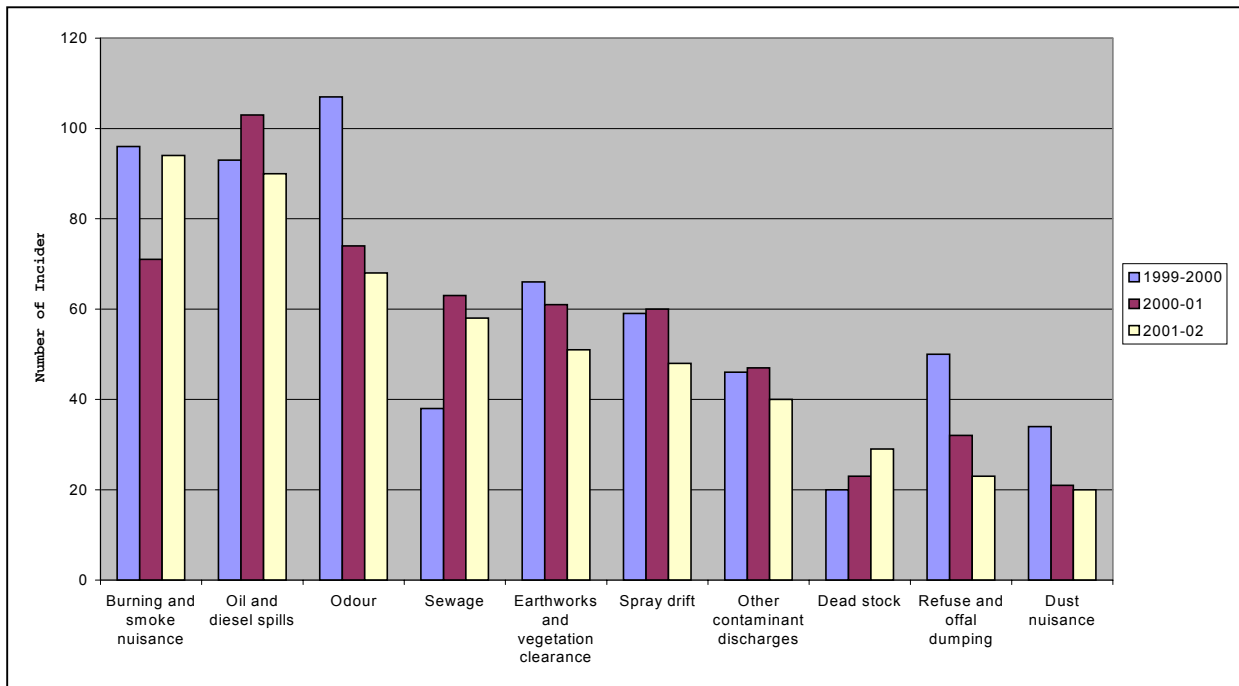


Figure 9.3: Ten most frequent incident types for 2001 – 2002 compared to previous year’s trends

Air Incidents

Air incidents can be divided into five main categories of burning/smoke nuisance, agricultural spraydrift, odour, industrial emissions and dust nuisance.

During the year burning and smoke nuisance was the most common complaint received by Council, closely followed by odour. As shown in figure 9.4, odour and spray drift incidents have decreased over the last couple of years, with the number of complaints for burning and smoke nuisance remaining about the same. Over the year the amount of air related incidents received by the Council decreased, this is largely related to a decrease in complaints regarding industrial emissions.

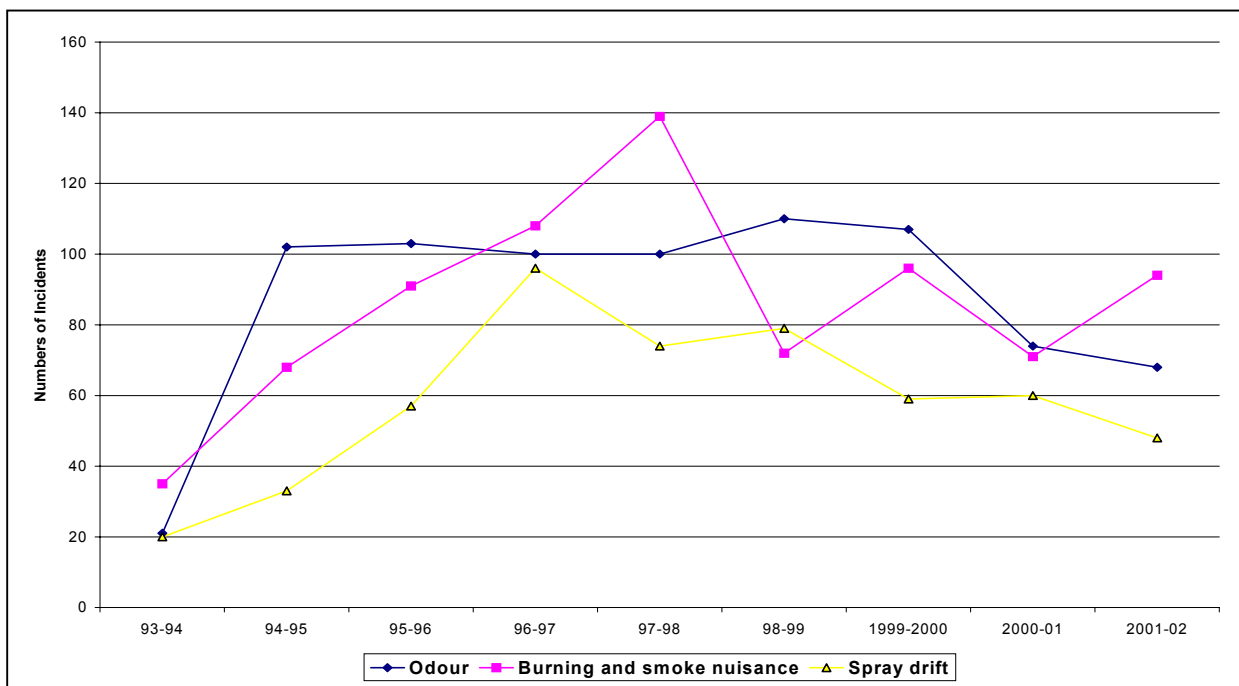


Figure 9.4: Trends in major air incident types 1993-2002

Coastal Incidents

The Northland Regional Council received notification of 218 incidents in the coastal marine area and coastal waters during 2001-02. Of the types of incidents that are reported oil spills are the most common, followed by incidents of sewage and refuse (see figure 9.5).

By breaking the environmental incidents down into various categories, an indication of the type and proportion of pressures on Northland's coast can be obtained. Generally, there is a high incidence of oil spills, sewage, refuse, various contaminant discharges and farm-related wastes. The proportion of these incidents reflects the high level of boat use (related to oil spills), development (contaminated discharges, farm-related wastes, dead stock) and humanisation (sewage, refuse, contaminated stormwater) of the Northland region.



The number of oil and fuel spills continues to be a significant problem in Northland

Land Incidents

Land incidents made up 11% of the total number of environmental incidents received during the year. Earthworks and vegetation clearance are the most common incidents received, many of these incidents relate to earthworks where sediment has entered watercourses through lack of sediment control measures. Other incidents involve discharges to land; some of these discharges have the potential to contaminate surface or groundwater. As shown in figure 9.5, the incidence of illegal dumping in Northland has declined over recent years, which is most likely attributable to a number of factors. These include more facilities available for waste disposal (transfer stations), and increased public awareness through education and enforcement action.

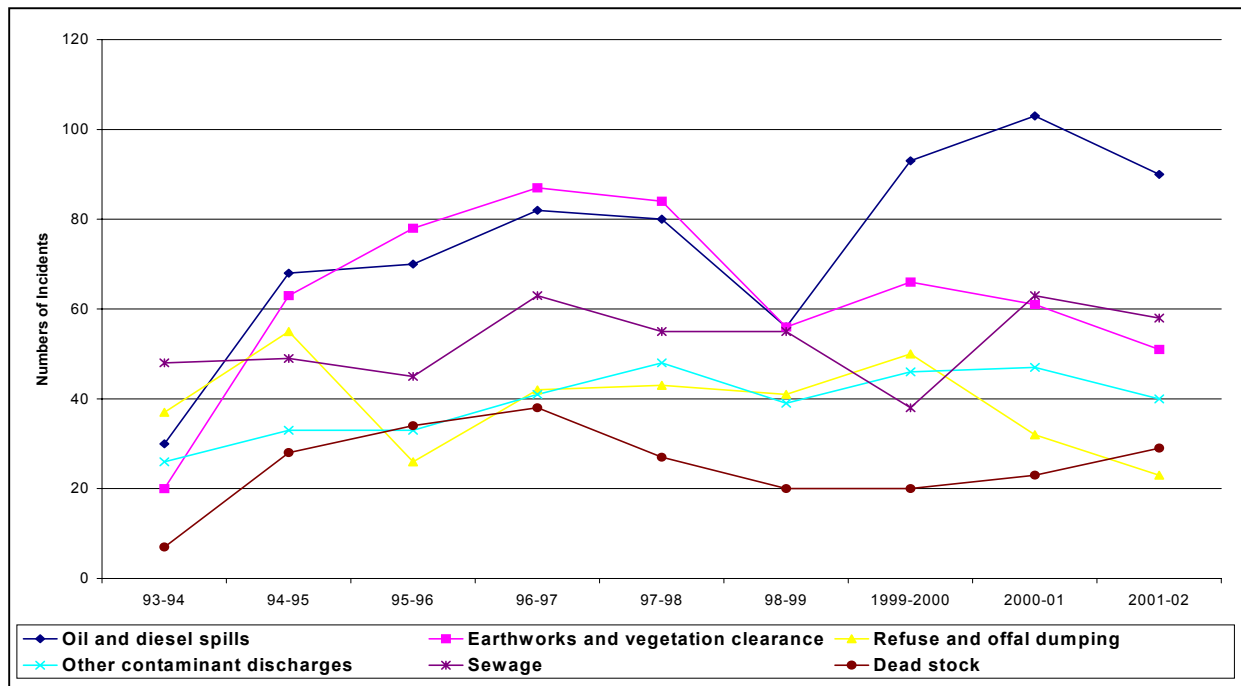


Figure 9.5: Trends in commonly received incident types 1993-2002

Surface Water Incidents

Surface water incidents made up 17% of the total numbers of environmental incidents received during the year. The most common incidents that are reported involve sewage, farm wastes (farm dairy effluent and other farm-related wastes), earthworks (sediment in waterways), refuse, oil and fuel spills and other contaminant discharges. The numbers of dead stock in waterways appears to have increased over the last two years (see figure 9.5).