

9 ENVIRONMENTAL INCIDENTS

Overview

- 811 environmental incidents were reported between July 1, 2002 and June 30, 2003, below the average 836 incidents per year reported since November 1993
- Air related incidents accounted for 42 % of all incidents, particularly concerning complaints about industrial emissions, burning and dust nuisance, and odour
- Incidents involving sewage, vegetation and earthworks clearance, and refuse have increased across all relevant sub-types (freshwater, coastal, and land related incidents)

Annual Plan 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**
- **Taking appropriate enforcement action in cases of significant non-compliance with statutory requirements**

9.1 Incident Reporting

An environmental incident is defined as: **actual or potential instances of pollution, as well as unauthorised activities covered in the Resource Management Act 1991, that have an adverse effect upon the environment.** Infringements of consent conditions may be considered to be environmental incidents, but only if such a breach is considered serious enough.

The Northland Regional Council has maintained a hotline for the purpose of environmental incident reporting since the end of November 1993. This hotline is open 24 hours, 7 days a week and is currently toll-free. Alongside the hotline, environmental incidents can be reported by fax, letter or in person by people visiting the Council's offices.

Since 1993, reported incidents have averaged 836 per year. In the 2002/2003 operating year (July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003), 811 incidents were reported, slightly lower than the two previous years (as presented in Figure 9-1).

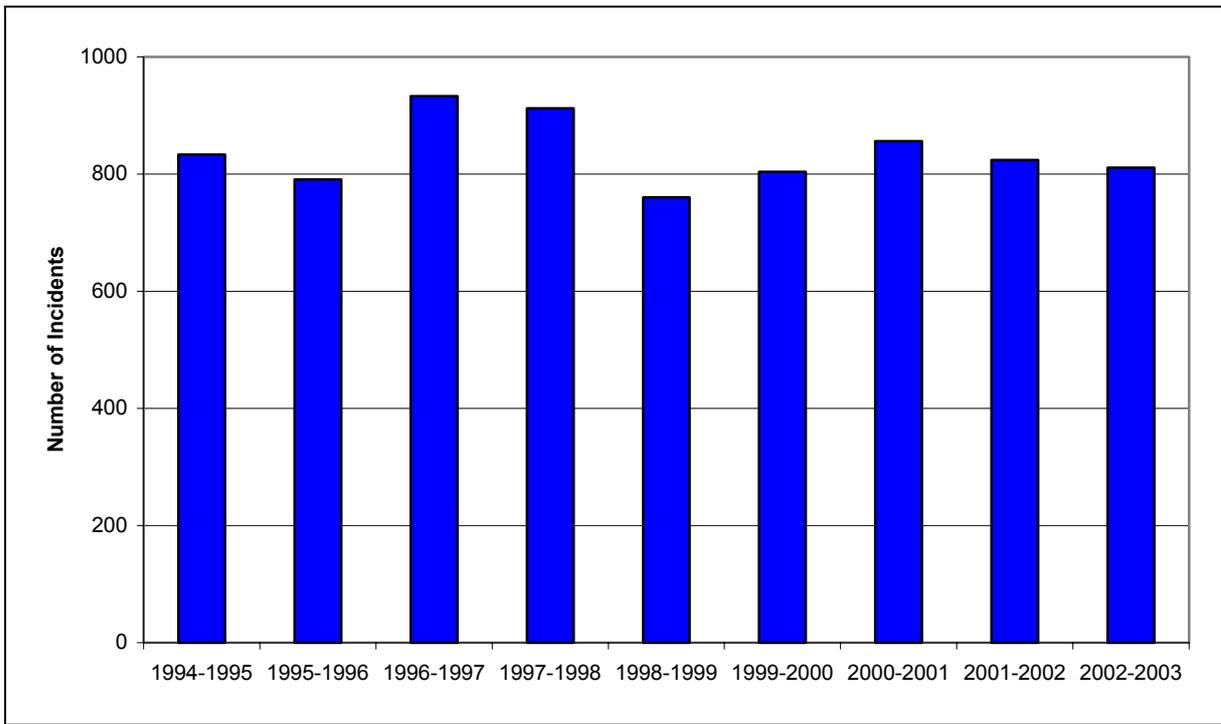


Figure 9-1 Number of incidents reported per operating year since 1994-1995 (The 1993-1994 operating year is excluded because reporting did not begin until November 1993)

Environmental incidents are divided into six sub-types: Air, Coastal Marine Area, Coastal Waters, Freshwater, Groundwater, and Land incidents. Over the course of the operating year, air incidents were the most common, accounting for 42% of all reported incidents (Figure 9-2). Coastal water incidents were much lower than previous years, partly due to the referral of some incidents to the **Maritime Monitoring Department**, whose marine mandate is somewhat broader than that covered by general environmental criteria. Freshwater incidents were significantly more numerous than previous years. Other sub-types were similar in frequency to previous years.



Smokes nuisances are one of the most commonly reported incidents

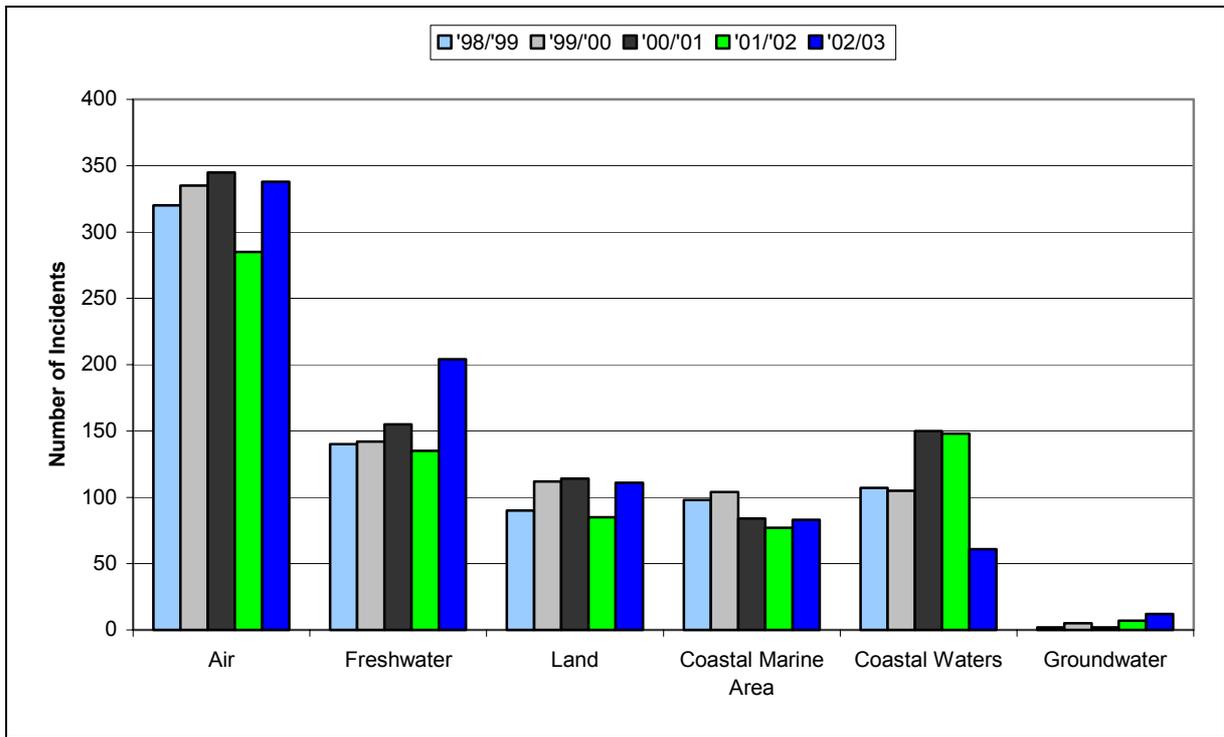


Figure 9-2 Environment incidents over the last 5 years, divided into sub-types

As shown in Figure 9-3, industrial emissions were the most commonly reported incident, and accounted for 12.5% of all incidents. Incidents relating to odour and spray drift were fewer than previous years, while sewage, earthworks and vegetation clearance, and refuse incidents increased.

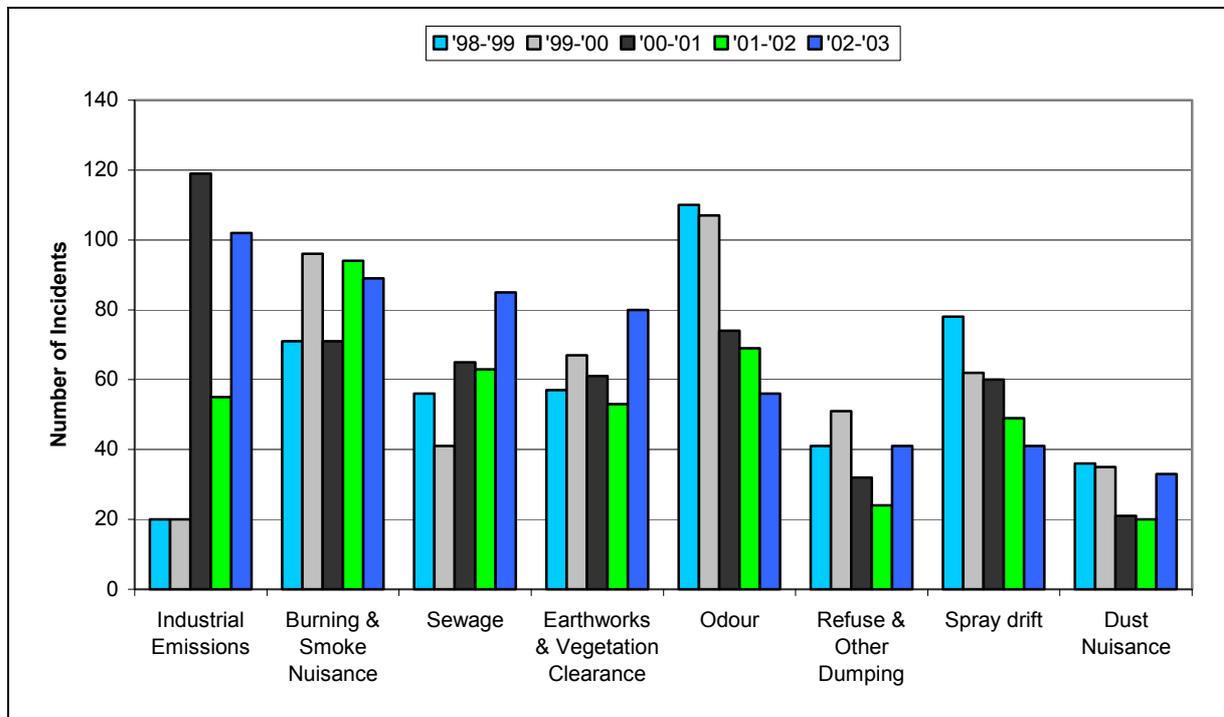


Figure 9-3 The seven most frequently reported incidents during 2002/2003

9.2 Air Incidents

Air incidents relate to any problems directly affecting our atmosphere. Such incidents include smoke emissions, excessive noise or concerns relating to horticultural sprays. 338 air-related incidents were reported during 2002-2003.



Dust nuisance caused by abrasive blasting

As previously mentioned, air related incidents accounted for 42% of all those reported. Air related incidents fall into five categories: burning & smoke nuisance, dust nuisance, industrial emissions, odour and spray drift. According figure 9-4, (depicting trends for the most commonly reported air emissions) no obvious trend is apparent for either industrial emissions or odour. However, it could be argued that incidents regarding industrial emissions are becoming more frequent. Incidents regarding spray drift have declined over the past 5 years.

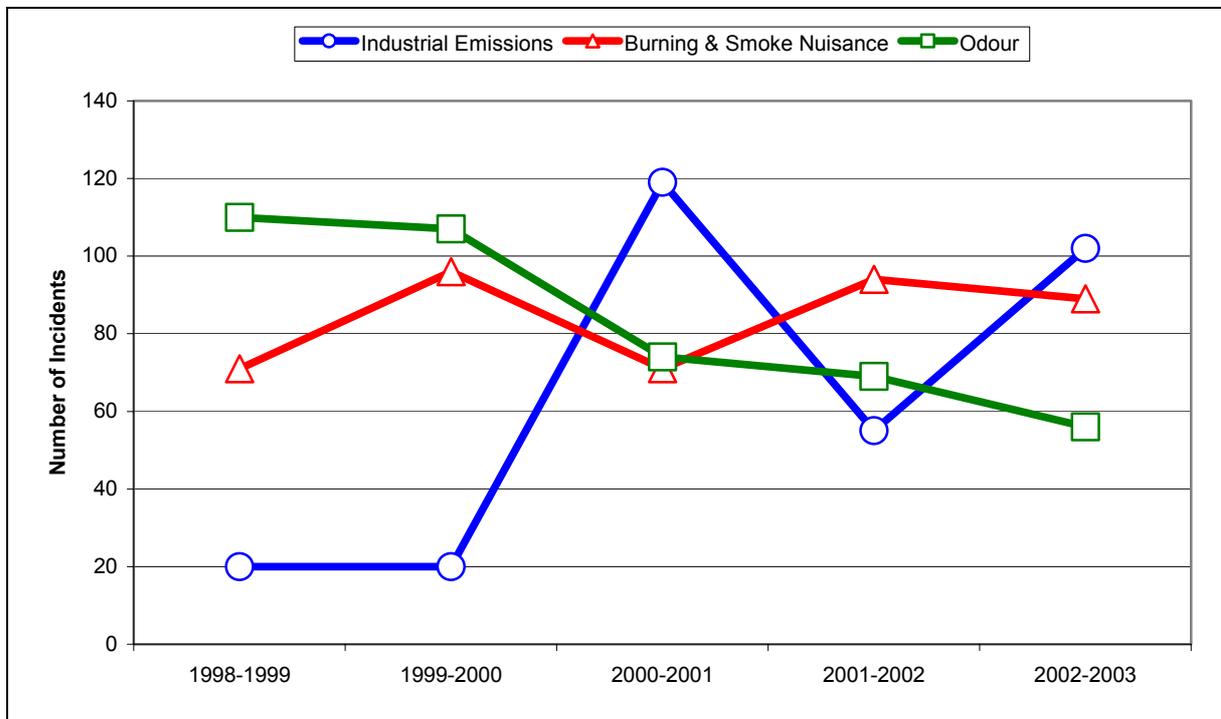


Figure 9-4 The most common air-related incidents reported over 2002-2003

9.3 Freshwater Incidents

A freshwater incident occurs when the integrity of a natural body of freshwater is compromised. Such incidents include the rupturing of sewer lines, the re-alignment or obstruction of streams, and the pumping of dairy effluent directly into waterways. In 2002-2003, 216 freshwater incidents were reported.



Paint washed into waterways is a common freshwater incident

Reported incidents relating to freshwater were noticeably more numerous than in previous years, and comprised 26 % of all incidents reported, up from 17 % during 2001-2002. The most commonly reported freshwater incidents regarded sewage, earthworks or vegetation clearance (when either entered waterways) and contaminated storm water (shown in Figure 9-5). While there is no obvious trend forming for either sewage or vegetation and earthworks clearance, it appears that contaminated stormwater spilling into rivers and streams is occurring (or at least being reported) with increasing frequency.

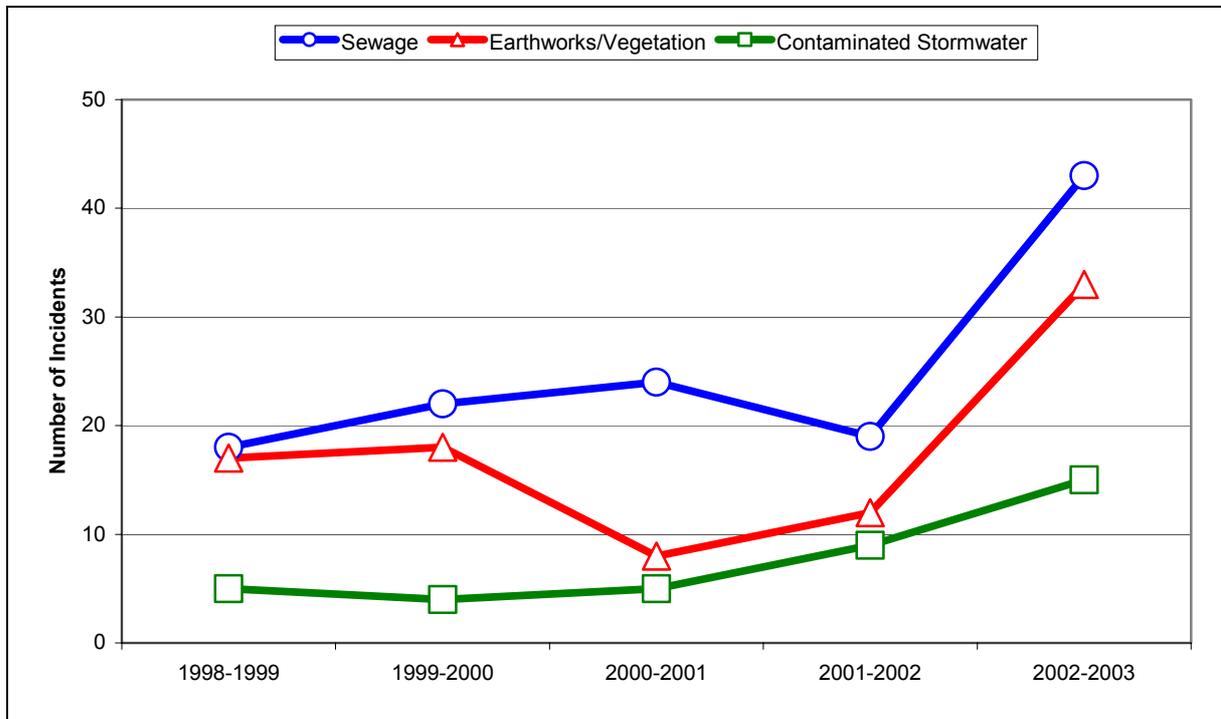


Figure 9-5 Trends for the most commonly reported freshwater incidents over the last 5 years.

9.4 Coastal Incidents

If an environmental incident occurs upon Northland's beaches or in the ocean itself, it is classified as a coastal incident. Such incidents fall into two categories: coastal water incidents (such as oil spills, sewage, or septic tank discharges directly into the sea), and coastal marine area incidents (for example, dead marine life washing onto beaches or the illegal extraction of sand). 144 coastal incidents were investigated over the past reporting year.



Sewage spills into the coastal marine area are serious environmental incidents

While incidents relating to coastal waters and marine areas have generally decreased (see section 9-1), reports of the most common coastal incidents have increased, as shown on Figure 9-6. While an increase is evident between 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, no pattern has emerged for earthworks and vegetation clearance, refuse, nor structures in water-bodies incidents. Overall, coastal incidents accounted for 18 % of all incidents recorded over the past year.

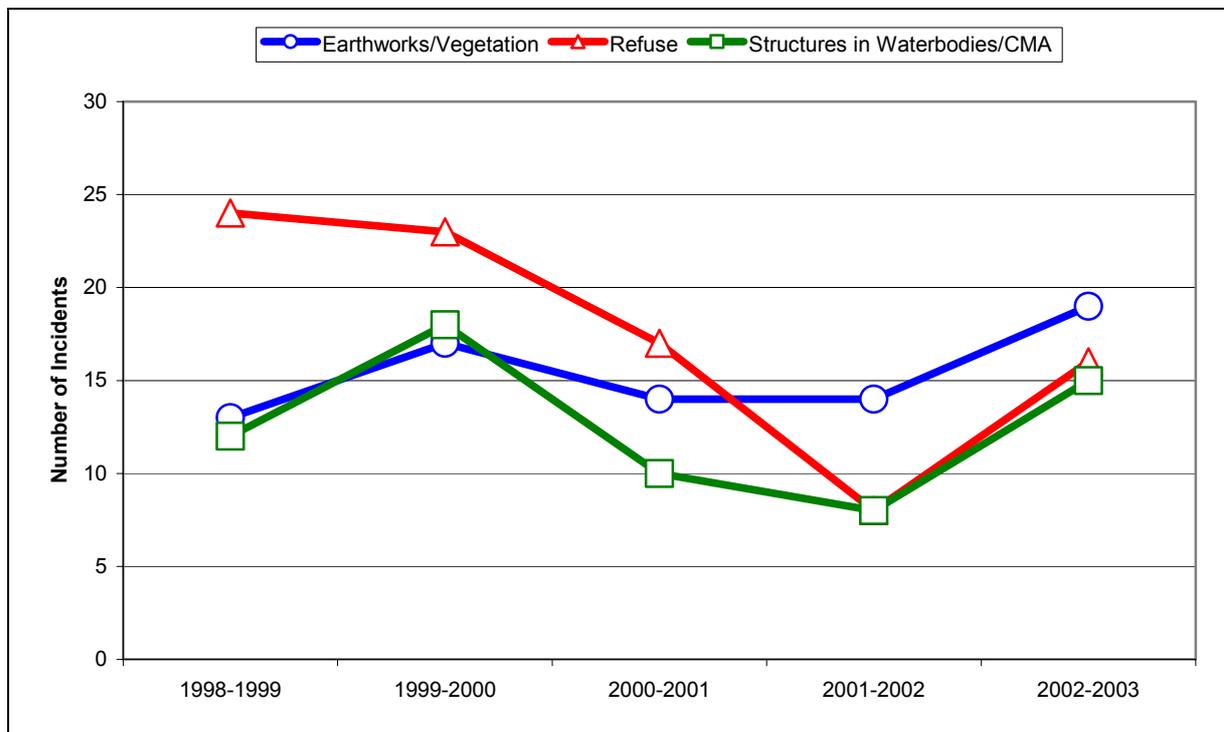


Figure 9-6 The most commonly reported coastal incidents

9.5 Land Incidents

111 land-related incidents were reported between July 1, 2002 and June 30, 2003. These incidents encompassed a wide range of scenarios, including discharges onto land (for example: sewage or refuse), tanker spills and the burial of asbestos.



Uncontrolled vegetation clearance can cause a variety of problems

The number of reported land incidents increased in both number and proportion (from 11 % to 14 % of all incidents reported) between the 2001-2002 and the 2002-2003 reporting years. However, when longer-term trends are compared, such increases are not particularly significant, as land-based incidents have generally fluctuated (Figure 9-7), averaging about 102 reports per year over the last 5 years. This is reflected in trends for two of the most commonly reported land-based incidents: Earthworks or vegetation clearance, and refuse (Figure 9-6). Incidents relating to sewage appear to be on the increase.

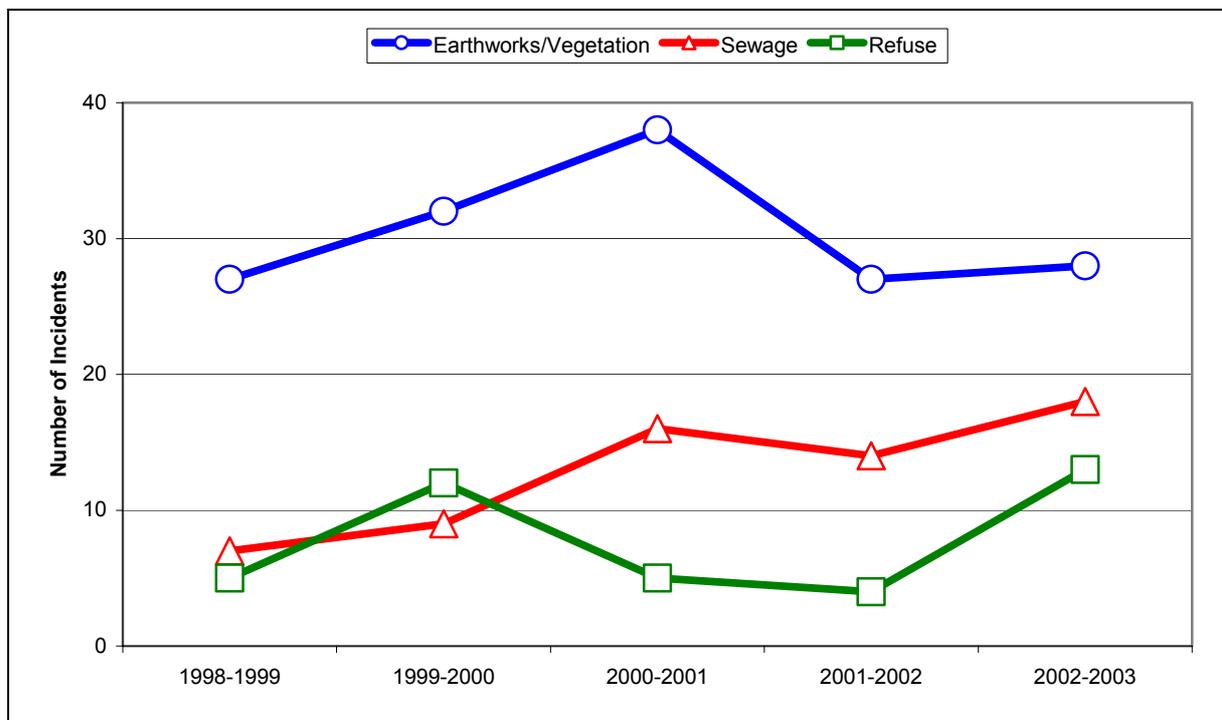


Figure 9-7 The most frequently occurring land-related incidents