

Environmental incidents

Introduction

The Regional Council operates a 24-hour, seven day a week environmental hotline for people to report environmental incidents in Northland. The incidents reported range from substances in water, dust nuisance and odour, to accidents that may have an impact on the environment, or activities that are posing a threat to the environment.

All incidents reported to the Council are recorded in a central database. Important information such as type and location of the incident, alleged offender(s), environment affected and impact are recorded.

All incidents reported to the Council are investigated by specially trained staff and site inspections are undertaken, where necessary. Where an incident is having or has had a negative effect on the environment, the necessary action is taken to stop, reduce or repair the damage.

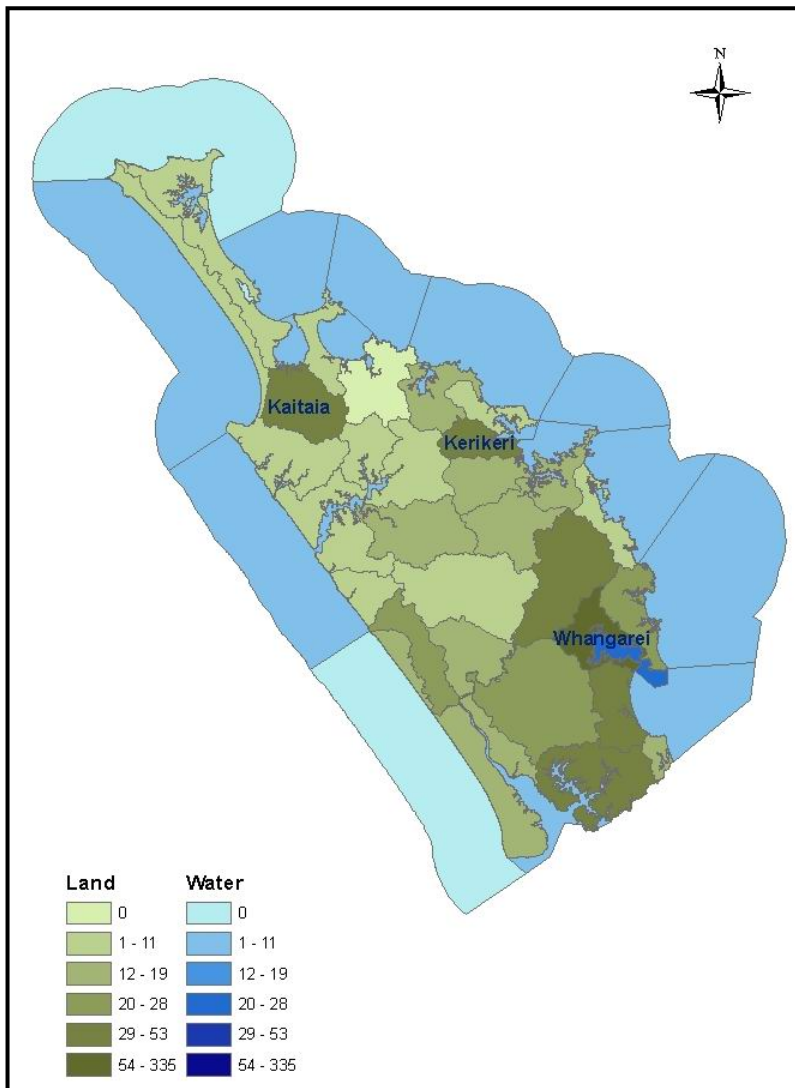
Environmental incidents performance targets

To minimise adverse effects on the environment of incidents and non-compliance with the Resource Management Act and Regional Plans by:

- Providing a 24-hour, every-day environmental incident reporting, recording and response system.
- Recording, investigating and taking follow-up action on incidents reported to the Council where there are adverse effects on the environment and/or alleged non-compliance with the RMA.
- Taking appropriate enforcement action in cases of significant non-compliance with the statutory requirements.
- Reporting on the response to the incident reporter (as and when the follow-up action is completed) and to the Council in the following month.

Key points

- ◆ The number of incidents reported to the Council decreased from 1037 in 2007-08 to 956 in 2008-09.
- ◆ The Council investigates all reported incidents.
- ◆ The greatest number of incidents reported were in the Whāngārei area.
- ◆ The highest number of reported incidents were for air pollution and were burning or smoke nuisance-related.
- ◆ 75% of reported incidents had no or only minor environmental impact.
- ◆ Other reported incidents were for odour nuisance, sewage in inland waters and earthworks and vegetation clearance.
- ◆ 3 incidents had a long-term environmental impact and required restoration.



Location of incidents

The map above shows the distribution of incidents reported to the Council during 2008-09. The greatest number of incidents was reported in the Whāngārei area – 335 in total. This was expected given the number of people living in this area, and the urban nature of the catchment. No incidents were recorded along the Far North and Kaipara coasts, or in the Whananaki and Houhora harbours and Oruaiti catchment.



The impact on Northland's environment

Every incident reported to the Council is graded according to the impact it has on the receiving environment — that is, where it ends up. In 2008-09, 19% (184) of incidents reported to the Council had no detectable impact on the environment and 56% (531) had only a minor impact on the environment. They were short-lived and/or affected only a small area and caused no significant damage to the environment.

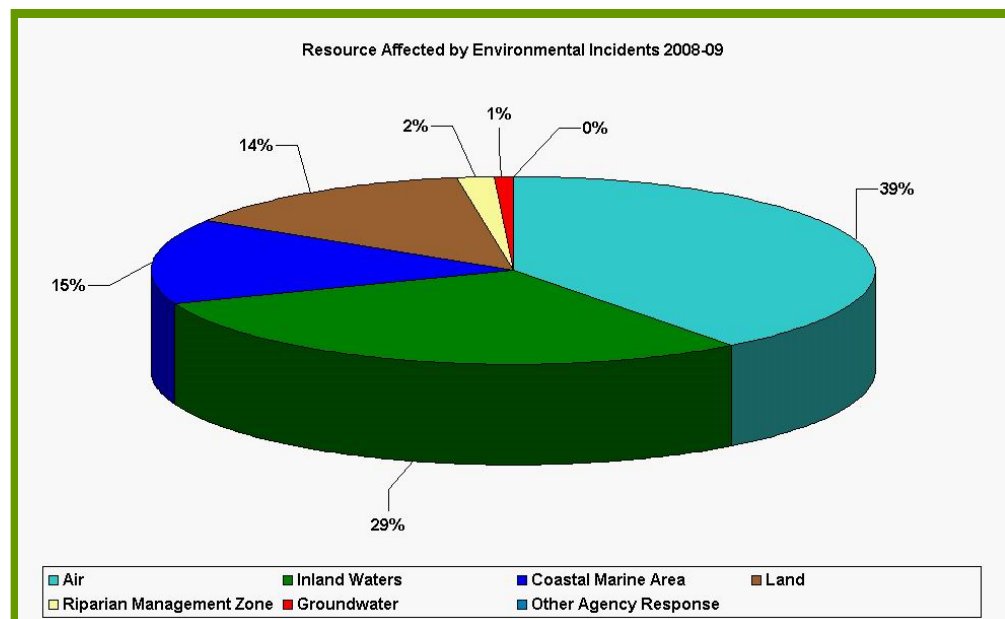
On the other hand, 7% (66) of the incidents reported to the Council had a significant impact on the environment. They were longer-lived and/or occurred over a larger area and had a significant affect on the environment.

Three of the incidents reported to the Council in 2008-09 had a large impact on the environment. These incidents had a long-term impact and, in some cases, the environment needed restoration.

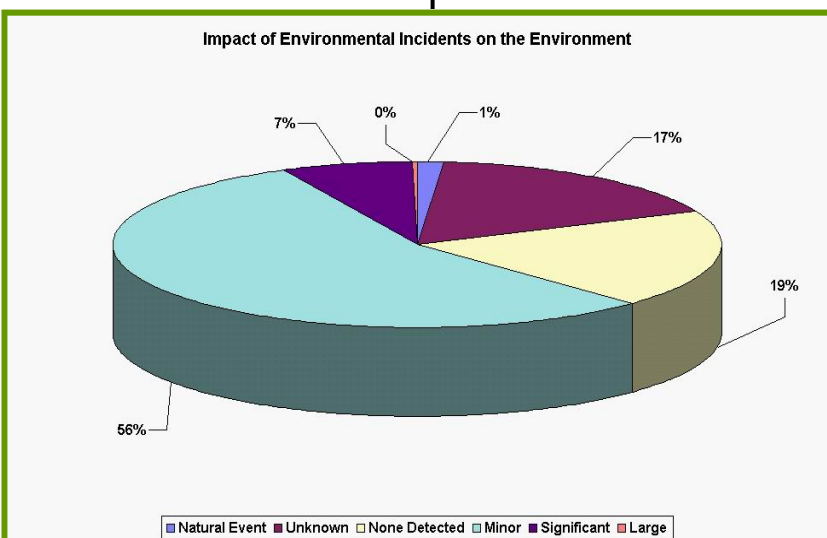
What environmental resources are affected?

Environmental incidents can be grouped according to the environment (called 'resource') they affect. In 2008-09, the largest number of incidents (380) — compared to 217 in 2007-08 — affected our air resource. Greater awareness amongst the public of the rules prohibiting backyard burning in the Whāngārei airshed may have contributed to this rise. For more information on the rules, go to www.nrc.govt.nz/air.

Incidents affecting inland waters — rivers and streams — recorded the second largest number of incidents (282), followed by incidents that affected the coastal marine area (139), land (130) and coastal waters (21).



The chart (above) shows the percentage of incidents recorded for each resource during 2008-09.



Types of incident

Of the 956 incidents reported to the Council in 2008-09, the most common type of incident related to burning or smoke nuisance — 228 incidents in total. Other frequently recorded incidents included odour nuisance (56 incidents), sewage in inland waters (51 events) and earthworks and vegetation clearance (41 events).



Incidents are not always man-made — 'scum' on the water in the Bay of Islands was found to be a natural product of mangrove swamp carried by the outgoing tide.