

# Do You Want to Make an Environmental Complaint?

## Do You Have Information About a Possible Violation?

If you think you have seen or experienced an environmental problem, you may wonder what to do, whom to call, and what to expect.

Answers to some of the questions you may have about reporting a problem and how to get detailed instructions on submitting information.





## What problems can TCEQ help with?

In general, we at TCEQ can help if you:

- See water that may be polluted.
- See or smell something unpleasant in outside air.
- See land that may be contaminated.
- Have problems with your drinking water.
- Have information or evidence about an environmental problem.
- Have problems with an individual or company licensed or registered by TCEQ.
- Need more information about a possible pollution source, including permitting status.

In some cases, we may not be the appropriate agency to assist you. For a list of some of those situations, please see “What problems fall under the jurisdiction of other agencies?,” on page 4.

## How do I report a complaint? How do I find out the proper way to gather and handle information?

We are available 24 hours every day to receive complaints. Use one of the ways below to report your complaint or to find out the specific requirements for gathering and handling information showing a violation:

- Call us toll-free at 888-777-3186.
- Contact your [local regional office](#).<sup>1</sup>
- Visit our [complaints webpage](#).<sup>2</sup>
- Or email us at [complaint@tceq.texas.gov](mailto:complaint@tceq.texas.gov).

## What will happen when I contact TCEQ?

Someone from the TCEQ regional office nearest you will talk with you about the details of your complaint. Please be prepared to tell us details about:

- The nature of the problem.
- The location of the problem.
- When the problem occurred (date and time).
- Who or what is the source of the problem.
- Any information you may have—particularly eyewitness information, documents or photographs, a video, or a water or soil sample.

1. [www.tceq.texas.gov/agency/directory/region](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/agency/directory/region)  
 2. [www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints)  
 3. [www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints)

## Do I have to identify myself?

You can file a complaint with us anonymously—either online or by telephone.

However, if you remain anonymous, it may prevent us from reporting back to you on the results of our investigation. In some cases it may impair our ability to take action. If you identify yourself, our regional office will discuss this when they talk with you about your complaint. Please note, TCEQ takes every action available to protect the confidentiality of complainants; however, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

## What is the difference between submitting a “complaint only” and submitting a complaint with information?

For a “complaint only,” we will listen to and review your concerns and then conduct an investigation if appropriate. The more details you can provide, the better we may be able to respond. You do not have to tell us who you are or where you live; however, if we do not know who you are, we will not be able to contact you for follow-up information or advise you of results. If enforcement action is appropriate, we will proceed as described under “What happens next?,” on page 3, based on our investigation findings.

For a complaint submitted with information, we will listen to your concerns and review the information you provide for relevance and credibility and conduct an investigation if appropriate. In evaluating if the information you provide can be used as evidence of a violation in an enforcement action, we may ask you to do one or more of the following:

- Sign an affidavit.
- Testify in court.
- Certify that you have followed TCEQ procedures for gathering and handling of physical evidence.
- Demonstrate that information was legally obtained.

If your information is used as evidence of a violation, your identity may be disclosed.

**Note:** Nonspecific information or rumor cannot be considered as credible evidence.

If you need help understanding agency procedures for gathering and preserving information or evidence, call us toll-free at 888-777-3186 or visit [our webpage](#).<sup>3</sup>



## What if my complaint is about nuisance odor?

Since people react to odors in different ways, and since environmental odors usually come and go, we have specific odor investigation procedures to help us evaluate nuisance odor complaints.

As with all complaints, if the situation appears to be an imminent threat to public health or to the environment, we will respond within 24 hours—usually much sooner.

Depending on the circumstances, we may not be able to document a nuisance violation without knowing your identity. However, if you want to remain anonymous, we can still conduct an investigation to determine if there is a violation of operational rules or standards.

When we investigate a nuisance complaint, we gather evidence to help us evaluate the four primary characteristics of odors—frequency, intensity, duration, and offensiveness (FIDO).

Depending on the nature of the odor, the presence of any of these four factors alone at a very high level can result in a nuisance violation, but usually it is a combination of the factors that results in a nuisance determination. To support the issuance of a nuisance violation notice, we may request additional information or evidence from you, such as an odor log, or a written statement or affidavit.

You can learn more about FIDO and our nuisance odor investigation procedures on [our website](#).<sup>4</sup>

## How long will it take you to respond to my complaint?

If the situation is an immediate threat to public health or the environment, we will respond within 24 hours after we receive your complaint—usually much sooner.

Other complaints usually take longer, but we take every complaint seriously, and we will investigate your concerns if it is within our jurisdiction.

## What happens next?

After we've received your complaint, here are the usual steps we take.

Unless you have chosen to remain anonymous, an investigator will be in touch with you to discuss your

4. [www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/odor](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/odor)

5. [www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints)

6. [www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints/waci.html](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints/waci.html)

7. [www.tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey)

complaint and any information you have. If you want to have further contact with your investigator, be sure to write down:

- your investigator's name
- your complaint number

In most cases, an on-site investigation will be conducted to see if any environmental regulations have been violated.

If the investigation reveals a violation, we will take appropriate action to ensure that the violation is corrected. Actions could include issuing an order requiring the violator to correct the problem and assessing a fine against the violator.

## Complaint Policies and Procedures

If you file a complaint or are the subject of one, you are entitled to a copy of our policies and procedures related to complaint investigation and resolution.

You can find these on our [Make an Environmental Complaint webpage](#).<sup>5</sup> If you would like to request a copy in a different format, please contact your local regional office.

## How will I know what you decided?

Our investigation may have been based on information you provided. Unless you have chosen to remain anonymous, we will notify you about the results. If you have any questions about the investigation, you can contact our investigator.

In addition, we will provide you periodic reports on any enforcement action we take, and you will have an opportunity to review and comment on any TCEQ order proposed to resolve the case.

You can also [track the status of complaints online](#).<sup>6</sup>

## What if I'm not satisfied?

Stay in touch with us. If you have the problem again, call and let us know. We may need to re-investigate the situation.

We welcome your feedback on our customer service. Consider completing our [Customer Satisfaction Survey](#).<sup>7</sup> You may also contact our Compact with Texans Help Line at 855-685-8237.



## What problems fall under the jurisdiction of other agencies?

There are times when you should probably call some agency other than TCEQ. If you:

- **See pollution around an oil well:**  
call the Railroad Commission district office.
- **Have a problem with a septic system:**  
call your city or county to find out if they can help.
- **Have a problem with noise pollution:**  
call your local police to see if there is a noise ordinance in your city.
- **Have a problem with litter, illegal trash, or used-oil dumping:**  
call your city or county officials.
- **Live in one of the following cities or counties and you have an air pollution complaint:**  
contact your local office listed; these offices have the authority to handle air complaints in their areas.

### Local Offices to Call About Air Pollution

#### Dallas

Air Pollution Control Program • 214-948-4435

#### El Paso

Air Quality Program • 915-212-6208

#### Fort Worth

Air Program • 817-392-1234

#### Galveston County

Air and Water Pollution Services • 409-938-2251

#### Houston

Bureau of Pollution Control and Prevention • 832-393-5730

#### Harris County

Pollution Control Services Department • 713-920-2831

There may be other situations when our jurisdiction is limited. In those cases, our regional office may direct you to another agency that has the authority to address your concerns.



TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

How is our customer service? [www.tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey)