

DUST NUISANCE

Environmental Protection Act 1994

IMPACTS OF DUST

Dust can be a nuisance to neighbours and interfere with normal daily activities. If severe enough, it can also damage property and impact on people's health.

Nuisance effects can be caused by particles of any size but are most commonly associated with those larger than 20 microns.

As many forms of dust are considered to be biologically inert, the primary effects on people relate to our sense of aesthetics. The most common areas of concern include:

- » the visual soiling of clean surfaces, such as cars, window ledges, and household washing
- » dust deposits on flowers, fruit or vegetables
- » the potential contamination of roof-collected water supplies.

Dust conditions can also affect people's ability to enjoy their outdoor environment, making activities such as barbecues and sports unpleasant and unappealing.

POTENTIAL HEALTH EFFECTS

The potential health effects of dust are closely related to particle size. Human health effects of airborne dust are mainly associated with particles less than about 10 microns in size (PM10), which are small enough to be inhaled into the lungs.

There can also be minor health effects, such as eye irritation, when the dust is airborne. Indirect stress-related health effects could also arise, especially if dust problems are permitted to persist for an unreasonable length of time.

TYPES OF DUST

There are many types of dust that can be generated by activities, including:

- » mineral dusts – e.g. coal and cement dusts
- » metallic dusts – e.g. lead, cadmium or nickel dusts
- » other chemical dusts – e.g. generated from manufacture or storage of pesticides
- » organic and vegetable dusts – e.g. wood or cotton
- » biohazards – e.g. viable particles, moulds and spores.

Different types of dust pose different risks to human health and to environmental values.

SOURCES OF DUST

Airborne dust can arise from a wide variety of sources, including:

- » land clearing exposing surfaces
- » construction
- » remediation of contaminated sites
- » mining and quarrying
- » crushing and screening activities
- » dry abrasive blasting
- » industrial processes such as timber milling, cement batching, mineral processing and fertiliser manufacture
- » loading, unloading and stockpiling dust material
- » vehicle movements on sealed and unsealed roads.

Large quantities of dust can also be generated from natural sources, such as dry riverbeds and pollen from plants.

RESULTS OF CAUSING A NUISANCE

It is an offence under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* to cause a dust nuisance. Council is responsible for enforcing nuisance laws arising from residential and commercial properties. If issues between neighbours cannot be resolved, Council can investigate.

If the dust is found to be causing a nuisance, Council may issue the person causing the dust with a Direction Notice, with a time-frame for the offender to rectify the problem. Non-compliance with a Direction Notice may result in on-the-spot fines for both an individual or corporation.

INVESTIGATION CRITERIA

When investigating a dust complaint, Council will consider:

- » the amount of dust being emitted
- » the duration and rate of emissions
- » the dust's characteristics and qualities
- » the sensitivity of the environment into which the dust is being emitted
- » the impact it has had or may have
- » the impact of the dust on any other neighbours.

REDUCING DUST EMISSIONS

Below are some suggestions for reducing the dust levels of your activities.

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Retaining vegetation

- » Retain as many plants and as much grass on the site as possible.
- » Strips of grass can act as dust barriers to neighbouring properties.
- » Even low or small amounts of vegetation can significantly lower wind speed and reduce the amount of dust leaving a site.

Construction sites

- » Plan what work needs to be done.
- » Try to carry out work in stages so some vegetation can be left as barriers as stages are completed.
- » Try using on-site waste as dust barriers. For example, unused sheeting or roofing could be used as a temporary dust barrier, or green waste could be mulched and spread on the ground to protect the topsoil layer.

Physical barriers

- » Physical barriers such as fences can be very effective when used properly.
- » Material such as shade cloth could be erected as a dust fence around the work area.
- » It is important to consider the location, height and width of fences prior to construction. Most importantly, check the wind direction.

Water use

- » Spraying water regularly onto topsoil can be very effective in reducing dust.
- » It is important that enough water is used to keep the topsoil layer damp and that spraying is completed before strong breezes develop.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information visit Council's website townsville.qld.gov.au, or call Council's Customer Service Centre on 13 48 10.