



Changes in the way we respond and record operational incidents

Introduction – What is an incident?

At Natural Resources Wales (NRW), we define a potential or actual incident as:

‘A specific occurrence, which is brought to our attention, is within our areas of responsibility, which may have an environmental and/or operational impact and may require NRW response.’

Issues arising which we may not class as an incident include occurrences brought to our attention that are:

- not within our statutory responsibilities,
- and/or do not have an environmental impact,
- and/or do not have an impact upon our own work and reputation.

What’s happening to our incident response?

Incident management is important to us and our [Incident Management Enabling Plan](#) has helped us deliver an integrated incident categorisation policy, as part of our overall approach to delivering natural resource management and the prevention of environmental damage.

With the formation of Natural Resources Wales, we identified the need to show simply how we categorise incidents was one the priorities in our recent Incident Management Business Area Review. Expert staff from across the business took part in workshops with the Task and Finish Group, and supported the development of a new streamlined Incident Categorisation Guidance (ICG) document.

We will continue to respond to potential and actual incidents by following a risk based approach. We will prioritise our work to ensure that we secure the highest benefit for the environment, the people, and the economy of Wales. This will deliver an effective and consistent response to the potential for and consequences of environmental incidents, such as pollution events, flooding, and disease outbreaks.

Our key drivers were to develop:

- A new, streamlined, and integrated approach to defining and categorising incidents (and non-incidents). This will inform how we focus and prioritise our resources, in both our incident management role and day-to-day work.
- A new, efficient, and consistent approach to how we respond to all types of incident and the associated levels of service required to achieve this.
- A new, efficient, and consistent approach to how our day job addresses those environmental impacts which are not classed as an incident.
- A competency-based training framework to enable our incident responders to carry out their duties with confidence and to a high standard.

How we responded in the past

Previously, Incident Officers used the Common Incident Classification Scheme (CICS), which separated our resourcing of incidents into two tiers. The first, for resourcing and the second, for the environmental impact. We recognised there was not enough integration with our wider remit, and little reference to how we respond and identify our priorities.

How we plan to respond in the future

Our new Incident Categorisation Guidance (ICG) raises our risk appetite and threshold, but identifies the types of incident that we should respond to as NRW.

The principal, generic criteria considered when we assess any incident are:

- Risk to public health, including impacts to air quality, odour, noise, radioactivity, and impact upon amenity;
- Risk relating to one of our assets, the land or water bodies we manage;
- Serious impact to the natural resources of Wales (including impacts to air, land, water, fisheries, and biodiversity) and the effect on conservation and economy;
- Actual or potential flooding of property or infrastructure;
- Our involvement in a multi-agency incident response; and,
- Media interest and/or risk to our reputation.

We will assess an incident as either:

- **High Level Impact Incident:** an incident whose impact requires an immediate response on a 24 hour basis, in order to mitigate the impact of the incident; or,
- **Low Level Impact Incident:** an incident whose impact does not require an immediate response, within normal office hours or if received outside office hours,

the response can be delayed to normal office hours and dealt with as normal operational work ('day job' i.e. business-as-usual and within normal office hours) or the gathering of environmental data.

Within the ICG's appendix, detailing the incident sectors, we have included legal descriptors linked to our environment sentencing guidelines, and statutory duties to assess the final impact to the environment.

Table showing differences in terminology (updated 1 Oct 17)			
Pre April 2017 Description	Post April 2017 Description	Legal definitions for final impact categorisation	External Description
1	High level Incidents	Major, Persistent, Extensive, Significant	Major
2			Significant
3	Low level Incidents	Minor	Minor
4	Event	-	No Environmental Impact/Routine operational work
-	Unsubstantiated	-	No evidence of event having occurred
-	Not of Interest	-	Not something we are interested in

Our role and responsibilities

Our incident management role is underpinned by a range of statutory duties and powers including the Forestry Act 1967, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Environment Permitting Regulations 2010, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, amongst others.

We are a Category 1 Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, giving us an important legal responsibility to respond directly to incidents, and to support the incident management roles of other organisations, such as the emergency services, health boards and local authorities, by providing advice and information.

At times, we may be the lead responder, however it is the Police or Fire and Rescue Service who usually lead the coordination of the overall response to a major incident, when the incident has the potential to impact public safety. Local Authorities usually lead on the recovery phase. Our role is to guide an environmentally protective response through third parties, with follow up enforcement action, as appropriate. Our Incident Categorisation Guidance provides a formal recognition of our role, even though we may work remotely, in relation to the incident, to influence the protective response and subsequent action.

Our service is funded by the Welsh Government and we have taken steps to assess the needs to ensure a focussed, efficient, and effective delivery and value for money. We need to ensure efficient use of our resources and have enhanced our response definition to recognise the work we do behind-the-scenes as well as on the ground.

- As a **regulator and advisor**, we work to minimise the frequency and impact of incidents.
- As an **advisor**, we provide specialist technical advice and data on a wide range of topics to allow our professional partners to make informed decisions which assist in how they undertake their incident management roles, and start the recovery work early to minimise environment impacts.
- As an **operator**, we minimise the likelihood of incidents occurring on the land we manage, and maintain our specific incident management assets, such as flood defences. At all times we will deal with any incident in its entirety, considering its direct and indirect consequences including the measures used to manage it.

For more information contact: incidentpolicy@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Jeremy Parr
Pennaeth Rheoli Perygl Llifogydd a Gweithrediadol
Head of Flood and Incident Risk Management

Cyfarwyddiaeth Tystiolaeth, Polisi a Thrwyddedu
Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate